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ANGRY YOUTH:
PATRIOTIC EDUCATION AND THE NEW CHINESE NATIONALISM

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1989 pro-democracy movement, which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) crushed so violently at Tiananmen Square, most organized Chinese political movements have been severely repressed. Particularly frightening to the CCP is student activism: the leaders of the Tiananmen Square incident, and indeed the majority of those involved in Chinese political movements throughout its tumultuous twentieth century, have been university students.¹ In the past 20 years, nationalism has emerged as the only exception to this virtual statewide ban on popular political expression. In fact, the CCP has encouraged nationalism among its university elites since the Cultural Revolution, and the Party has increasingly relied on patriotic sentiment for political support in the Post-Tiananmen era. However, over the past few decades, Chinese students have often expressed an alarming degree of nationalism, leading to large, and sometimes violent, demonstrations that threaten the Party's ability to maintain order.² Since the 1990s, a new student nationalism has emerged, one that is louder, more demanding, and more spontaneous than its predecessors. The new nationalists are angry—so much so that the Chinese description for those that display a high degree of nationalism, *fengqing*, literally means “angry youth.”³

The angry youth are members of the “fourth generation”—that is, they have grown up in the relative material prosperity and ease of China's reform and opening, under Deng Xiaoping.⁴ Unlike the first generation that fought and won the civil war, the second generation that suffered under the Great Leap Forward, or the third generation of Red Guards that experienced the Cultural Revolution, this generation has no real revolutionary history. They are nostalgic for their own “good old, bad old days”⁵ and seek an opportunity to make their mark as a cohort. Many in the fourth generation are attracted to a narrative of victimization and suffering at the hands of foreign imperialists precisely because they alone, unlike older Chinese, did not experience China's century of humiliation. Nationalism has therefore become an attractive solution for those in the fourth generation who do not wish to “perish in silence.”⁶ These angry youth deliberately set themselves against the backdrop of the liberal 80s, which they dismiss as

¹ Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 278

² Osnos, 2008

³ Lewis, 2010, p. 12

⁴ Gries, 2004, p.4

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid, p. 5

romantic and naïve, painting themselves as realistic and pragmatic in contrast.⁷ Apart from these generational features, however, it is difficult to convey the exact differences that make this current wave of nationalism “new.” The distinctiveness is more in the spirit and character of the movement than any particular programmatic feature. Nowhere are these changes more evident than in the Belgrade protests of 1999, widely considered a high point of 1990s nationalist fervor.

In the early hours of May 8th, 1999, an American B-2 bomber, participating in a NATO strike against Yugoslavia during the Kosovo War, dropped five missiles over Belgrade on what their outdated maps indicated was a Serbian weapons depot.⁸ In actuality, it was the Chinese embassy; three Chinese were killed, and twenty-three others were injured. Despite frantic apologies from the US government, which claimed the bombing had been a tragic accident, the Chinese public was outraged. Chinese head of State Jiang Zemin repeatedly ignored calls from US President Clinton, while other officials in Beijing denounced US apologies as insufficient. Tens of thousands of protestors—mainly students and youth—took to the streets in what later became known as the “May 8th” protests, throwing bricks, rocks, garbage, and Molotov cocktails. The rioters kept US Ambassador Jim Sasser and his staff trapped in the American embassy for days, shouting slogans like “Blood for blood!” and burning American flags.⁹ Students organized boycotts of American goods, targeting American-owned businesses like McDonalds by calling for the government to “Kick American hamburgers out of China!”¹⁰ The Party at first implicitly encouraged protestors, constructing web pages devoted to protesting the Belgrade bombing and publishing confrontational articles, like this op-ed from *The People’s Daily*:

“This is 1999, not 1989...China is a China that has stood up; it is a China that defeated the Japanese fascists; it is a China that had a trial of strength and won victory over the United States on the Korean battleground. These Chinese people are not to be bullied, and China’s sovereignty and dignity are not to be violated. The hot blood of people of ideas and integrity who opposed imperialism for over 150 years flows in the veins of the Chinese people. U.S.-led NATO had better remember this.”¹¹

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Gries, 2004, p. 13

⁹ Ibid, pp. 14-15

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 14

¹¹ Han, 1999 (as cited in Gries, 2004, p. 11)

Despite this initial show of support, the CCP quickly determined that the protesters had spun outside the realm of Party control, their independent expressions of anger undermining the Party's political hegemony. The demonstrations only continued for four days until the Party called for a halt, and Jiang and Clinton were back on speaking terms within the week.

It is worth considering that the CCP itself has had a hand in the creation of the angry youth that it finds so unnerving. Beginning in the 1990s, the Chinese state has systematically encouraged patriotism and nationalist sentiment in its student population with a campaign of "patriotic education" (*aiguozhuyi jiayu*). Initiated in response to the perceived weakness of political education, thought by the ruling conservative faction to be responsible for the protests at Tiananmen, the Patriotic Education Campaign represents the largest attempt at political indoctrination in communist China since the Mao era. The purpose of the campaign was to educate youths in Chinese tradition and history, national conditions, and the nationalist legacy of the CCP in order to inculcate nationalist resentment against foreign pressures, past and present, simultaneously emphasizing the Party's role as the ultimate protector of Chinese national interests. Although the majority of the educational reforms associated with the campaign took place between 1991 and 1996, the policies enacted during patriotic education are still largely in effect today. Likewise, the key themes established by patriotic education still dominate the curriculum in Chinese schools. While there is no way to prove direct causality, it seems plausible that there is a connection between official propaganda and the simultaneous emergence of a more aggressive popular nationalist movement. The central question of this paper then is what role, if any, has "patriotic education" played in encouraging the rise of popular nationalism since the 1990s?

I argue that the policies and historical narratives introduced by the Patriotic Education Campaign of the 1990s, while not a sufficient explanation, are directly related to the rise of a popular student nationalism. The move towards a deeper engagement with Chinese history that the campaign began during this period, paying special attention to a narrative of victimization, has led to a heightened awareness of the trauma of China's past. The result has been an exacerbation of popular feelings of external siege and persecution from the Western world. These passionate feelings of anger serve as the "psychic fuel"¹² behind the more virulent forms of popular nationalism. The Patriotic Education Campaign has thus created an environment

¹² Gries, 2004, p. 11

supportive of strongly patriotic and nationalist sentiment: while the student nationalist movement in China today may be rightly seen as having spun out of Party control—the “wild card” of Chinese politics—the framework for the emergence of a new popular nationalism was provided by patriotic education.

I begin this paper with a discussion of the various scholarly perspectives on Chinese nationalism, its unique characteristics, and the particular problems it presents. Next, I will provide an overview of the crisis of legitimacy that confronted the CCP during the late 1970s and early 1980s, its origins, and the challenges it represented for continued Party control. I will then discuss how in this context nationalism emerged as the perceived solution to these problems, as well as the Party rationale for enacting a campaign of patriotic education. Finally, I will outline the Patriotic Education Campaign itself, examining its founding assumptions and intellectual contents, identifying key moments in its implementation, and drawing connections between the propaganda campaign and the sentiments of the angry youth. I will then close with an evaluation of the unforeseen consequences facing the CCP as a result of the campaign.

IS THERE A CHINESE NATIONALISM?

There is a great deal of scholarship on Chinese nationalism and national identity. From the time of China’s reform and opening under Deng Xiaoping, beginning in the 1970s, nationalism has become an increasingly important pillar of Party legitimacy. Since then, scholars have come to treat nationalism as one of the major political forces in modern China. The emergence of a popular nationalist movement since the 1990s and the challenges this poses to the Party and, in its more xenophobic forms, to continued globalization has attracted increased scholarly interest in recent years as well. However, despite the attention given to and, in some cases, alarm over the rise of Chinese nationalism since the 1990s, there is still a fairly vigorous academic debate over whether “nationalism” is the appropriate term to describe the movement we currently see developing.

Part of this difficulty is the complexity of nationalism itself as a concept, which doesn’t lend itself to ready definition. Nationalism is usually understood as the strong identification of a group of individuals with a political entity in the form of a nation-state. According to Suisheng Zhao, “nationalism combines the political notion of territorial self-determination, the cultural notion of national identity, and the moral notion of national self-defense in an anarchical

world.”¹³ Of these three traits, national identity is both the most important and the most difficult to unpack. Hutchinson and Smith state that a “people” must be both autonomous and united, as well as share a single national culture.¹⁴ Where the disagreement begins to emerge is over how this national culture is to be constructed.

There are many different understandings of how membership in a nation should be determined; one of the most obvious is organization along the lines of a single ethnic or cultural group, and indeed, distinct cultural identities were an important factor in the formation of the original nation-states of nineteenth century Europe. The term “nation-state” implies a marriage between nation, a cultural or ethnic entity, and state, a political and geopolitical entity.¹⁵ However, there is a growing body of literature suggesting that since national identity is socially constructed, it may be oriented towards imagined communities instead of ethnic ones, and that organization along lines other than a single language, race, or religion is possible.¹⁶ This perspective is often described as “civic nationalism,” and defines the nation in terms of purely political, rather than ethnic identities. According to the principles of civic nationalism, national identity is shared by those who identify themselves as belonging to a particular nation (rather than a specific cultural tradition), share equal political rights with other members, and feel an allegiance to a particular type of political procedures.¹⁷

The issue here is that these two understandings of national identity are typically considered as mutually exclusive, when the reality is that both strands contain a part of the truth. Culture is an important part of the articulation of nationhood, uniting a group of individuals in an awareness of themselves as a distinct and special people. However, nationalism is a sense of collective identity that is oriented towards a particular state, not a cultural tradition. Nationalism is thus distinct from culturalism, tribalism, or shared ethnicity, which are basic, primordial, non-political sources of collective identity. Lucian Pye argues that nationalism need not be such a fuzzy concept, and has become so only because we have confused “nationalism” with these other kinds of primordial identities. Although primordial identities can sharpen feelings of group identity, the sense of “we” versus “they” that are indeed basic to nationalism, nationalism goes

¹³ S. Zhao, 2000, p. 3

¹⁴ Hutchinson & Smith, 1994, pp. 4–5

¹⁵ Croucher, 2003, p. 85

¹⁶ Anderson, 1991, pp. 37–46

¹⁷ Nash & Scott, 2001, p. 391

beyond this to articulate a distinctive set of national ideals, myths, symbols and values.¹⁸ Nationalism therefore has an additional dimension of identity that celebrates the uniqueness of a particular nation-state, beyond that of a particular cultural tradition.

Within this context, China presents a particularly difficult challenge: for how, after over two millennia of history, do you disentangle Chinese civilization from the modern Chinese nation? While most scholars take a cautious approach to this problem, we can, with equal caution, break the literature into two major camps: those who view the CCP as having taken a state-led solution, though they may question the ability of the CCP to provide substantive content for a modern nationalism, and those who see a spontaneous and less predictable Chinese nationalism as having emerged, despite the challenges.

The position of this first camp is best represented by Suisheng Zhao, who identifies three distinct strands of nationalism in China: nativism, anti-traditionalism, and pragmatism. Zhao argues that pragmatism, an instrumental and state-led approach, became the dominant strain of nationalism in the reform and opening period. Pragmatism is typically associated with the goals of economic development, the Party's substitution for performance legitimacy in exchange for ideology, and the program of "building socialism with Chinese characteristics."¹⁹ Pye agrees with this evaluation, but goes on to suggest that this particular iteration of nationalism is relatively shallow and contentless due to its orientation around CCP partisan policies.²⁰ Pye argues that there is simply no counterpart in Chinese political culture to the mythos surrounding the American Declaration of Independence or the Bill of Rights, or to British feelings regarding Parliament or the Magna Carta. While Deng and his successors have attempted to engineer equivalent political ideals and symbols with official policies, these attempts have fallen flat. Pye notes that those Chinese scholars who support Deng's proposal to build socialism with Chinese characteristics call for a socialism that "promotes productivity as the main task, strengthens a socialist planned commodity economy, sticks to public ownership as the leading force but promotes alternative forms of ownership, and the *other features of current official policies*."²¹ The reduction of nationalism to a list of partisan preferences and policy objectives rob the nationalist movement of the content required to become effective, capable of articulating and

¹⁸ Pye, 1993, p. 108

¹⁹ S. Zhao, 2000, p. 10

²⁰ Pye, 1993, p. 126

²¹ Ibid, p. 128 (emphasis added)

realizing national goals. State-led nationalism therefore remains limited by the lack of coherent purpose beyond that of official policy.

Alternatively, scholars in the second camp reject this interpretation, usually in favor of a more complicated Chinese nationalism. Jefferey N. Wasserstrom prefers the idea of Chinese “nationalisms” to express the sheer range of actions typically grouped under the term “nationalism,” often outside of state preferences.²² While the first camp of scholars tend to imagine the Chinese nationalism as a single, discreet phenomenon, Wasserstrom argues that the many different ways scholars have attempted to divide the movement over time—irrational versus progressive, xenophobic versus cosmopolitan, authentic versus controlled—suggest that it is actually quite decentralized.²³ Orion A. Lewis points to nationalism’s malleability, arguing that, as concept, nationalism is constantly open to renegotiation.²⁴ While state-led nationalism may be oriented around policy and little else, repeated and complex interactions between state elites and the public add content to what was relatively contentless. Contestation between the state and the citizen over the articulation of nationalist goals means that Chinese nationalism is, at the very least, evolutionary. Peter Hays Gries further suggests that the party-state is gradually losing its hegemonic ability to control Chinese nationalism, as the emergence of popular reactions since the 1990s become increasingly important perspectives in the nationalist discourse.²⁵

So, is there a Chinese nationalism? The answer is yes, though perhaps Wasserstrom is correct in arguing for an understanding of nationalism in China as a range. As for the split over whether or not the dominant strain is state-led or spontaneous, I argue that it is both. There has certainly been a concerted effort on behalf of the CCP to emphasize certain nationalist themes and to channel patriotic feelings into the accomplishment of Party goals, such as economic development and growth. This form of nationalism is state-led and, as Pye has observed, low on actual ideological content. However, we also see the rise of a more virulent popular nationalism in the 1990s. While the Party has attempted to stay one step ahead of this movement, anticipating its demands and responding or redirecting accordingly, it cannot be said to actually exercise control over it. Thus the arguments of Wasserstrom, Lewis, and Gries for growing

²² Wasserstrom, 2010, p. 6

²³ Ibid, p. 7

²⁴ Lewis, 2010, p. 9

²⁵ Gries, 2004, p. 121

unpredictability ring true as well. However, the fact that the rise of the new nationalism in the 1990s coincides so handily with the implementation of “patriotic education” suggests that these two camps may actually be related. It is possible that the new nationalism, while not entirely “state-led,” is at least in part “state-prompted.” The Patriotic Education Campaign of the 1990s is one piece of evidence to this end, and this paper will view this particular moment in CCP history as a possible turning point in the nationalist movement. By examining the policy goals of patriotic education and weighing its results, we can evaluate how the particular way in which nationalism was invoked by the state during this period may have led to the divergence of a popular nationalism from the state-led prescription.

POLITICS OF LEGITIMACY: THE NATIONALIST SOLUTION

Legitimacy is another essentially contested concept that becomes difficult to define satisfactorily. In general though, it can be understood as the popular acceptance of a system of government and its recognition as worthy of obedience. Legitimate systems enjoy a perception of justified authority that endows the regime with the right to exercise force over the state and its citizens. Typically, it is identified with the consent of the governed, either explicit or implicit. German sociologist Max Weber famously links legitimacy with the willingness to comply with a system of rule or obey commands, where obedience rests on the assumption or belief in the legitimacy of the system.²⁶ Even within a totalitarian system, power holders cannot rule by coercion alone and must, at minimum, construct a justification for their political order. Rodney Barker emphasizes this reciprocity, arguing that legitimacy “...is both a belief held by subjects, or by some subjects, and a claim made by rulers.”²⁷ By promoting compliance and cooperation, political legitimacy enhances political stability, order, and the efficacy of the regime itself.²⁸

Weber identifies three classic sources of legitimate authority: *rational-legal authority*, derived from the popular perception of the legality of institutions or normative rules; *traditional authority*, derived from tradition and longevity of custom; and *charismatic authority*, derived from the personal charisma or exemplary character of a particular leader.²⁹ Of the three, charismatic legitimacy is the weakest. Despite its power during the lifetime of a particular leader,

²⁶ Weber, Henderson, & Parsons, 1947, p. 325

²⁷ Barker, 1990, p. 59

²⁸ Beetham, 1991, p. 35

²⁹ Weber, Henderson, & Parsons, 1947, p. 328

it is also the source with the shortest lifespan—a human one. Since faith in a regime based in charismatic legitimacy is tied to the specific traits and powerful personality of a single individual, it becomes difficult for a regime to survive a transition in leadership intact. Post-Mao China remains an exception to this rule, partly due to the political exhaustion of many Chinese in the wake of the Cultural Revolution and partly due to the tremendous political sensitivity and pragmatism of Mao's successor, the savvy Deng Xiaoping.

Nevertheless, the CCP has not escaped Mao entirely unscathed. Charismatic legitimacy collapsed with the death of the illustrious Chairman. Similarly, the loss of faith in official communist ideology has undermined traditional legitimacy while the authoritarian nature of the party-state makes appeals to rational-legal legitimacy unrealistic. Lacking any traditional claim to legitimate authority, Party leaders have had to scramble for new sources on which to base political legitimacy. Observers generally agree that economic performance has become of central importance to this effort, so much so that the Chinese strategy has earned popular recognition as “performance legitimacy.”³⁰ However, many in political science question the long-term consequences of the increasing reliance on economic performance. Looking back to Weber, scholars like David Beetham and Seymour Martin Lipset³¹ draw a line between classic forms of legitimacy and support. While regimes may be able to garner temporary support based on their performance or effectiveness, there is a high probability for instability when conditions change without the more enduring confidence inspired by political legitimacy.³²

In the absence of a more permanent source of legitimacy, the CCP remains vulnerable to political instability that could dislodge its base of support. However, the inherent social dislocation that accompanies economic reform presents numerous threats to political stability. The most significant of these challenges have been increasing globalization and the decline of ideology. As global integration progresses, China becomes more vulnerable to the shifting winds of the international market and to cultural infiltration. Likewise, the proliferation of free market reforms has caused appeals to the Party's Marxist heritage to ring increasingly hollow. These twin pressures reached a boiling point in 1989 with the pro-democracy movement and the confrontation between state and society at Tiananmen Square. Though a more permanent crisis

³⁰ D. Zhao, 2009, p. 416

³¹ Lipset, 1981, p. 64

³² Ansell, 2001, p. 8705

was averted, the political legacy of Tiananmen forced the Party to consider new strategies to restore faith in the regime.

Nationalism seemed to be an obvious solution to this problem; already an important vein in Chinese politics, its promotion would not prove overly difficult. Furthermore, nationalism promised to effectively counteract many of the social pressures of reform. The creation of an appropriately skeptical population, attuned to the manipulations of exploitative foreigners and proud of their own “Chineseness,” could protect against the importation of dangerous Western ideas while allowing for continued technical development. The articulation of a new nationalist “ideology” could fill the void left by the decline of Marxism, as well as promote political support for the Party’s new pragmatic policies. Finally, by shoring up its legitimacy in the form of nationalist support, the Party hoped to reeducate the new generation of youth in the appropriate form of patriotism—love of the Party as well as the state. Nationalism was presented to students and other young Chinese as an acceptable substitute for democracy, a form of political expression that would allow youths to participate in politics on terms acceptable to the ruling Party. Additionally, by actively articulating and promoting a state-led nationalism, the Party hoped to set a nationalist agenda in which they would be crucial participants. By identifying the Party with the nation, emphasizing its critical role in the protection of national interests, the CCP sought to color itself indispensable. Nationalism thus became the instrument by which the CCP hoped to forestall regime crises in a system where legitimacy is otherwise subject to changing circumstances.

Nationalism as the solution to globalization

In the wake of reform and opening, the period of economic liberalization and market reforms under Deng Xiaoping following Mao’s death, Chinese nationalism has become increasingly conditioned by themes of globalization. While “globalization” as a term has many of the same definitional difficulties as nationalism, it can be generally understood as a process of international integration that can apply to economic, political, and social systems. While these systems can be treated separately on a theoretical level, practically they are intertwined. Consequently, while reform and opening represents the Chinese effort to integrate China economically into the international community, it is difficult to separate this economic globalization from the accompanying social and political concomitants. However, the expansion

of Western political ideas presents a challenge to Party authority, and raises the question of the extent to which the CCP can comfortably incorporate Western ideals and innovations without threatening its legitimacy.

Reform and opening is not the only time that China's leaders have faced this challenge. The problem of how to reconcile foreign knowledge with Chinese orthodoxy goes back to China's first encounters with the West. Chinese responses to the West are historically characterized by a fundamental belief in the universal superiority of Chinese culture, even to the point of disdain for Western innovation. The opinion expressed by the Qianlong emperor in a letter to the British sovereign captures the attitude that dictated the Chinese valuation of the West, even to recent times:

“The Celestial Empire, ruling all within the four seas, simply concentrates on carrying out the affairs of government properly, and does not value rare and precious things...we have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your country's manufactures.”³³

Even when repeated encounters with the West made it necessary to adapt to new technology, this often took the form of the absolute minimum response possible at a given time.³⁴ Christopher Hughes argues the Chinese approach to this Western-style modernization is expressed in a series of dichotomies: “‘self sufficiency as essence, promote sincerity as function,’ ‘defense as essence, war as function,’ ‘rely on industry for essence, rely on commerce for function,’ and ‘metaphysics for essence, economics for function.’”³⁵ The solution that emerged from these divisions, to protect the “Chinese essence” (*ti*) while absorbing Western technical expertise (*yong*), became known as the *ti-yong* system. First articulated in 1898 by Zhang Zhidong, governor general of Hubei and Hunan during the late Qing dynasty, in his *Exhortation to Study*, the *ti-yong* system began as a calculated strategy to “use the barbarians to control the barbarians.”³⁶

These challenges continued into the twentieth century, with the importation of China's most illustrious foreign acquisition: communism. Part of the appeal of Marx's ideas was its seemingly modern basis in scientific fact. Dialectical materialism represented a “scientific” and methodical analysis of history, based on the concrete evidence. The Chinese legacy of these

³³ Lieberthal, 2003, p. 6

³⁴ Ibid, p. 22

³⁵ Hughes, 2006, p. 5

³⁶ Ibid

scientific pretensions was a willingness to observe, experiment, and learn from the example of other nations. However, these experiments took place within the careful context of *ti-yong*, as Chinese communists were forced to reconcile their Chinese identities with Soviet internationalism. Mao himself warned,

“We should not gulp any of this foreign material down uncritically, but must treat it as we do our food—first chewing it, then submitting it to the working of the stomach and intestines with their juices and secretions, and separating it into nutriment to be absorbed and waste matter to be discarded—before it can nourish us.”³⁷

After the Sino-Soviet split, the CCP claimed to be the sole intellectual heir of Marxism-Leninism (*yong*), and called for the adaptation of the ideology to “Chinese conditions” (*ti*). Mao’s own interpretation of these conditions became known as Mao Zedong Thought, and his so-called cultural compromise was attributed with the successful “sinification of Marxism.”³⁸

The dilemma of balancing foreign innovation with Chinese culture became even more pronounced under reform and opening. It is interesting to note that Chinese nationalism became increasingly visible and demanding at a time when China was the most open to the outside world, both economically and culturally. While the average Chinese is not necessarily hostile to Western culture on an individual level, there is a tremendous amount of cultural fear of Western cultural imperialism. As China becomes increasingly exposed to First World developments and enamored by its “ingenious articles,” the absolute superiority of Chinese culture is exposed as myth. Wounded national pride has therefore led to a full-scale revival of the discourse of *ti-yong*. The current Party orientation in regards to socialism is the strategy articulated by Deng in his famous call to “build socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Here, the introduction of a Western “commodity economy” under the leadership of the Party is identified as the most important developmental goal. However, the ultimate objective of such free market reforms (*yong*) is the eventual realization of socialism (*ti*).³⁹ Thus, while foreigners often mistake China’s turn to pragmatism under Deng to indicate the whole-hearted acceptance of Western political and economic models, this move has been engineered by the Party partially as a protective measure in the face of the pressures of global integrationism.

³⁷Mao, 1967, p. 380

³⁸ Hughes, 2006, p. 6

³⁹ Pye, 1986, p. 211

The promotion of nationalism thus becomes a critical part of the Party's response to the pressures of globalization. The CCP is able to co-opt the cultural humiliation of Chinese society to keep out Western political developments, all in the name of national pride. If Chinese essence is to remain as the spiritual content of the nation, logically Western development must be tempered by knowledge of and adaptation to Chinese conditions.⁴⁰ Disagreements with the West about the ideal course of national development therefore must simply reflect foreigners' ignorance of Chinese conditions. Likewise, those Chinese who embrace Western democracy and unfettered freedom of expression, ideals completely unsuited to current Chinese conditions, are the victims of Western spiritual pollution, guilty of "worshiping things foreign, or fawning on foreigners."⁴¹ The CCP is consequently able to further legitimize its political power as the ultimate authority of the reality of Chinese conditions and the protector of the national spirit from Western attempts at incursion.

Nationalism as the solution to spiritual crisis and Tiananmen

Reform and opening and the decline of communist ideology

Economic reform was introduced at the end of the Mao era primarily out of necessity; after the madness of the Cultural Revolution, "Deng saw the need to deliver material rewards to a population that had become bitterly disillusioned by ideological hyperbole."⁴² Reform and opening thus marked the beginning of a marked shift towards more pragmatic policies which, when taken together, have been termed Deng Xiaoping Theory, or "Dengism." While traditional Marxist theory defines all economic relations in terms of class struggle and identifies the construction of socialism as the foremost developmental goal, Dengism emphasizes modernization, economic development, and a less ideological approach to how these goals are best achieved. Deng's philosophy was to fuse aspects of a market economy with a socialist political system in the pursuit of economic growth and social stability. This pragmatism is

⁴⁰ Pye identifies a fundamental flaw in the *ti-yong* component of the current nationalist discourse: it is exceptionally problematic that the current political orthodoxy in need of defense is itself based on a foreign import, Russian communism. While the Chinese have certainly modified Marxism-Leninism to suit their own purposes, "what remains is hardly something appropriately protected from foreign contamination" (Pye, 1986, p. 229). The problem inherent in the new national goal of "building socialism with Chinese characteristics" is the confusion over what is now to be considered "socialism" and what characteristics exactly are "Chinese." The articulation of even a comprehensive state-nationalism is thus limited by the uncertainty over what long-term state goals should be.

⁴¹ Deng, 1984b, p. 320

⁴² Lieberthal, 2003, p. 246

encapsulated in Deng's famous declaration that "color of the cat" does not matter so long as it "catches mice."⁴³

In theory, Dengism is not an outright rejection of Mao Zedong Thought but instead seeks its adaption to Chinese socio-economic realities. Dengism argues for a return to Mao's exhortation to "seek truth from facts" rather than blind imitation.⁴⁴ However, truly seeking truth from facts, as well as the flexibility necessary for pragmatic policy making, is incompatible with strong ideological commitments. Ideology dictates a comprehensive vision or worldview for its adherents. Pragmatism, on the other hand, demands flexibility, gradualism, and constant adjustment. It was for this reason that, in the midst of reform, Deng launched an official campaign to "reassess" Maoism in the late 1970s and the early 1980s.⁴⁵ The intent of this measure was to remove all ideological and psychological obstacles to economic reform; the result, however, was the collapse of the official communist ideology as a whole. What followed was a profound spiritual crisis, known as the "three belief crisis" (*sanxin weiji*): crisis of faith in socialism (*xinxin weiji*), crisis of belief in Marxism (*xinyang weiji*), and crisis of trust in the Party (*xinren weiji*).⁴⁶

This spiritual crisis can be largely attributed to the social dislocation that accompanied reform and opening. As economic reforms became progressively market-oriented, the official ideology began to lose its credibility. So too did the Party, which had an increasingly difficult time enlisting popular support for its policies. The strength of Maoist ideology and the egalitarian discourse of socialism were such that people had been willing to sacrifice, even suffer, during the Maoist period. However, the mantra of reform, "to get rich is glorious," rang hollow in comparison to the high-minded idealism of socialism, especially since the country was not getting rich together. While Deng's economic reforms did indeed raise millions out of poverty, this growth was not evenly distributed across the country. Foreign investment tended to be concentrated around the eastern coast, in enclaves such as Shanghai and Shenzhen. The sudden increase in inequality in a society well-schooled in the rhetoric of Marxism made the economic divide between the urban coast and rural interior appear especially pronounced. In addition to this sense of relative deprivation, was the withdrawal of many of the social services

⁴³ Pye, 1986, p. 208

⁴⁴ Deng, 1984a, p. 57

⁴⁵ Zhao, 1998, p. 288

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 246

the Party had historically provided all citizens. The iron rice bowl, the system of state-guaranteed lifetime employment and access to basic social services, was one of the first programs to go as a part of a series of labor reforms.⁴⁷ Symbolically, the breaking of the iron rice bowl was a serious act; the promise of cradle-to-grave employment had been made by Mao himself and had served as one of the fundamental appeals of the communists since the early revolutionary period.

As a result of the departure from the Marxist political discourse and the growing awareness of economic inequality, Chinese society became increasingly disillusioned in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The substance of the old, familiar ideology had been replaced with slogans, and no matter how effective pragmatism or the policies of reform and opening proved to be, they had no spiritual content. With the link between the Party and the official communist ideology essentially severed and the lack of a substantive replacement, spiritual crisis left the Party facing the growing possibility of regime crisis.

Patriotism and the Tiananmen Square movement

It was against this backdrop that the pro-democracy movement, and ultimately the “Tiananmen Incident,” of 1989 occurred. Students first took to the streets in April of that year, following the death of the former Party Chairman and CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang. Hu had been purged from the Party in 1987 following a series of sustained student protests that called for, among other things, political liberalization. During his lifetime, Hu had been a leading proponent of reform, and Party elders held him responsible for the movement, specifically, for “filling students’ heads with incorrect ideas.”⁴⁸ Although Hu himself never issued any public statements in support of the student protestors, socialist hardliners believed that his sympathies toward China’s liberal intelligentsia created the “unhealthy ideological atmosphere” that allowed the protests to occur.⁴⁹

Hu had not been a particularly popular figure among students in life; however, his death symbolized the death of last hope for political democracy in China.⁵⁰ In the days after his death, students began holding small scale demonstrations calling for a reassessment of Hu’s legacy and the rehabilitation of his reputation. Although popular pressure forced officials to mark Hu’s

⁴⁷ “China’s communist revolution,” 1999

⁴⁸ Wasserstrom, 1991, p, 304

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Pye, 1990, p. 333

death with a state funeral and official eulogy, in which Hu was praised as “a great proletarian revolutionist and statesman,”⁵¹ the Party stopped short of his formal rehabilitation. As a result, demonstrations continued, and public mourning on the streets of Beijing increasingly became an outlet for general political dissatisfaction, particularly among students. The demonstrations thus gradually became a protest against high-level government corruption and nepotism, and in favor of greater political liberalization.

The result of this escalation to a full-fledged mass movement was social chaos. A particularly problematic aspect of this process for Party leadership was the way in which the students at Tiananmen appropriated and subverted patriotic discourse in their demonstrations to create social sympathy for their cause. Student leaders defined their struggle against the government as a patriotic one, their only goal to “save the nation” (*jiuguo*) from the abuses of corrupt officials.⁵² Even the methods used by the protestors, particularly the hunger strike that began on 13 May, were chosen specifically by the student leaders to lend an air of moral superiority to their actions. Their demand for official recognition as a “patriotic” as well as “democratic” movement also represents an attempt to out-moralize the ruling Party.⁵³

Wasserstrom suggests that the youth movement’s true source of power is this ability of students to usurp the roles, rituals, and modes of discourse typically reserved for officials.⁵⁴ By taking on these forms, students thus imply that the official authorities do not truly represent the political center and challenge their right to power to speak from this center.⁵⁵ The implications of this defiance in China are especially serious, when set in the context of a political culture where authority is sensitive to matters of “face.”⁵⁶ With the CCP’s increasing reliance on old ceremonies and new catechisms for legitimacy, this usurpation becomes an overt act of aggression and a tangible threat to Party authority.⁵⁷

While the CCP ultimately regained control over Tiananmen Square in a brutal act of state repression, it paid a high political price for doing so. The massacre resulted in a new suspicion of

⁵¹ “Glorious life of Hu Yaobang marked,” 2005

⁵² Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 314

⁵³ Hughes, 2006, p. 53

⁵⁴ Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 283

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 285

⁵⁶ Pye 1990, p. 331.

Face (*mian*) is an expression without an exact equivalent in English, referring idiomatically to one’s sense of dignity or prestige. It is considered to be an ostensible display of one’s social standing to the public, and therefore particularly important for socially prominent persons to maintain.

⁵⁷ Wasserstrom, 1991, p. 285

the Party leadership, adding social distrust to the canon of challenges facing the regime. The patriotic appeals of the student protestors had been effective; the students had captured the moral high ground and usurped the Party's claim to the sole representation of nationalist aspiration. As a result, Hughes argues that, "the need for the Party leadership to reclaim the nationalist mantle became central to the politics of legitimacy that emerged in the 1990s."⁵⁸ However, Tiananmen had demonstrated that the inherent contradictions between the Party call for self-sacrifice in support of national greatness and the growing materialism of Chinese society posed serious challenges to the reassertion of communism, even in a rejuvenated form, as a cohesive state ideology. As old strategies proved ineffective in addressing the problems of spiritual crisis and the negative legacy of Tiananmen, Party leadership increasingly looked to the reassertion of nationalism as a possible solution. Nationalism could provide the spiritual content to fill the void left by the decline of Communism, alleviating the sense of spiritual crisis and soothing the social dislocations caused by economic reform. Likewise, a state-led nationalism would serve to wrench back the articulation of nationalist goals from the students at Tiananmen, and reorient all nationalist discourse around the CCP itself.

PATRIOTIC EDUCATION: A STATE-LED NATIONALISM

Tiananmen had taught the Party the importance of student support. As the new "fourth generation" began to replace the "scarred generation" of the Cultural Revolution, communist elites increasingly understood that the youth population was the critical audience to reach in their rebranding efforts.⁵⁹ However, it was the overt challenge to the Party presented by the student demonstrators at Tiananmen that made this an urgent need. Not only did patriotic expression need to be reclaimed as the sole property of the ruling Party, but students had to be reeducated in acceptable displays of patriotic feeling. Demonstrators at Tiananmen had incorrectly equated political reform with patriotism; the Party therefore had the responsibility to correct this perception.

Both Deng and the conservative faction that came to power in the post-Tiananmen era attributed the appeal of the pro-democracy movement to the bankruptcy of the current system of

⁵⁸ Hughes, 2006, p. 53

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 50

political education.⁶⁰ Instruction in the basic ideological principles of the regime had been an important feature of the party-state since revolution; however the difficulties of identifying a clear ideological agenda within reform and opening had rendered the traditional approaches ineffective. The CCP had tried before to articulate the new Party line without much success. The resuscitation of ideology alone would thus be insufficient to restore Party legitimacy, though it would certainly play a role. Instead, the Party leadership sought to completely transform Chinese political attitudes and a completely new basis for popular support. In the process, nationalism was gradually rediscovered.

While communism had become stale in the face of growing materialism and ideological disillusionment, nationalism remained deeply engrained in the Chinese political consciousness throughout reform and opening. The former greatness of imperial China and its humiliation at the hand of Western imperialists is such an important national myth to the modern Chinese state that it has become cliché. Most Chinese, even the most vehement anti-traditionalists,⁶¹ desperately yearned for the re-emergence of China as a world power. By redefining reform and opening as a nationalistic campaign for Chinese greatness, the CCP could more easily justify its departure from socialist goals like equality. While the population was unwilling to sacrifice social welfare programs or tolerate growing inequality for the sake of pragmatism, national pride was a banner under which all Chinese would willingly rally.

It is important, however, to first understand how the Party chooses to understand nationalism. As noted above, this term is often used incorrectly, further complicating an already difficult concept. While nationalism could be a powerfully unifying force, it contained the potential for division in the context of a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual state; because of this, the Party had to be careful about its invocation in the Patriotic Education Campaign. The CCP has thus never officially endorsed “nationalism” (*minzuzhuyi*),⁶² the strong political identification with a nation, because the modern Chinese state is not technically a single “nation.” Instead, the Party prefers to use the word patriotism (*aiguozhuyi*), which translates from Chinese to mean literally “love of country.” While nationalism is rejected as a parochial, reactionary sentiment,

⁶⁰ Wang, 2008, p. 788

⁶¹ Anti-traditionalism is a school of Chinese intellectual thought that sees traditional Chinese culture as the major source of Chinese backwardness and therefore the reason for China’s repeated failures to modernize. The anti-traditionalists reject traditional Confucian culture, values, and norms and seek for their eradication in favor of Western technical knowledge, whose adoption will make China strong (S. Zhao, 2000, p. 7-9).

⁶² S. Zhao, 1998, p. 290

patriotism is promoted as the display of one's love and support for the Chinese state and the Communist Party.⁶³

This distinction is further evidenced by the CCP's adoption of a "state-led nationalism," that is, nationalism tied to the state itself as opposed to a particular nationality. Under state-led nationalism, "rulers who spoke in a nation's name successfully demanded that citizens identify themselves with the nation and subordinate other interests to those of the state."⁶⁴ The Party's state-led nationalism asserts the membership of all PRC citizens in the Chinese nation, regardless of their ethnic identities.⁶⁵ As an added bonus of this formulation of nationalism, the Party itself becomes "the nation," and consequently the object of patriotic feeling. Michael Hunt makes the argument that "by professing *aiguo*, Chinese usually express loyalty and a desire to serve the state, either as it was or as it would be in its renovated form."⁶⁶ Chinese state-led nationalism portrays the Party as the embodiment of the national will, and therefore worthy of the same respect and support as the state itself.⁶⁷ Under this construction, criticism of the Party becomes an unpatriotic act, and opposition to the regime a betrayal of the nation.

Patriotism (*aiguozhuyi*) was thus made the new central subject of political education, to be instilled through a nation-wide campaign of patriotic education. While the CCP had initiated other ideological reeducation campaigns throughout its history, "patriotic education" was notable for its scope and ambition.⁶⁸ Announced in 1991 and fully functioning by 1994, the Patriotic Education Campaign represented a full-scale mobilization of the CCP propaganda machine in an attempt to fundamentally readjust the political attitudes of Chinese youth, both towards the West and to Party leadership. Patriotic education was to define the legitimacy of the CCP in the post-Tiananmen era in a way that would allow the Party to rule on the basis of a non-communist ideology, as well as restore political support and social stability to a system that was otherwise brimming with domestic discontent.

Contents of patriotic education

⁶³ Ibid, p. 290

⁶⁴ Tilly, 1994, p. 133

⁶⁵ S. Zhao, 1998, p. 291

⁶⁶ Hunt, 1994, p. 63

⁶⁷ S. Zhao, 1998, p. 29

⁶⁸ Wang, 2008, p. 784

The content of patriotic education was formulated as a response to the challenges posed by globalization, spiritual crisis, and Tiananmen. First, by emphasizing China's repeated victimization at the hands of the imperialists during its "century of humiliation," the Party sought to encourage a more critical view of the West, hoping to neutralize the political threat posed by increased globalization. The portrayal of a Western siege of China and the formation of an "anti-China club," headed by politicians in Washington, would also serve to divert protest away from the Party and towards external sources. Second, by blurring the boundary between socialism and patriotism, the Party hoped to smooth the ideological contradictions that had led to spiritual crisis. Also, education on the national conditions that made such a contradiction necessary to continued economic growth would dispel the illusion among Chinese youth that Western material civilization could be imported overnight.⁶⁹ Finally, by establishing the Party as the historical inheritor of patriotism, mainly due to its victory over the Japanese in the Second Sino-Japanese War, the CCP sought to assert its ownership of nationalist discourse, wrenching it back from the upstart youths at Tiananmen.

One of the most crucial components of patriotic education was increasing the familiarity of Chinese youth with China's "century of humiliation" (*bainian guochi*). The century of humiliation refers to the period of subjugation China suffered under foreign imperialists, both Western and Japanese.⁷⁰ Its genesis is typically dated to the First Opium War between Great Britain and the Qing Dynasty in the mid-nineteenth century, during which Great Britain smuggled opium illegally into the country in hopes that the resulting addiction would forcibly pry open the formerly exclusive Chinese market.⁷¹ The war ended with the 1842 Treaty of Nanking, which granted an indemnity to Britain, opened five "treaty ports" to foreign trade, guaranteed extraterritoriality to foreign residents of the treaty parts, and gave over control of Hong Kong to the British.⁷² The Treaty of Nanking represented a deep humiliation for China. The first in a century-long series of foreign humiliations, it was followed by the Taiping Rebellion, the Second Opium War and the sacking of the Old Summer Palace, the Sino-French War, the First Sino-Japanese War, and the British invasion of Tibet. China's humiliation

⁶⁹ Hughes, 2006, p. 57

⁷⁰ Wang, 2008, p. 784

⁷¹ Lieberthal, 2003, p. 22

⁷² Pye, 1993, p. 113-121

continued into the twentieth century with the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Japanese occupation.

Throughout this period, China came out the loser in every major conflict, often resulting in major concessions given to foreign powers. The Chinese considered the treaties that led to these concessions to be unequal “because they were not negotiated by nations treating each other as equals but were imposed on China after a war, and because they encroached upon China's sovereign rights ... which reduced her to semicolonial status.”⁷³ This long century of humiliation is generally agreed to have ended with the expulsion of foreign powers from China after World War II and the establishment of the PRC in 1949, although some Chinese commentators argue that the “century” will not have truly ended until the return of Taiwan and national reunification.⁷⁴

Although these traumatic experiences were already well-known themes in Chinese history by the time of patriotic education, the CCP took special care to emphasize this victimization narrative of history, to the point where it in many ways the core concept of the campaign. As result, sovereignty and territorial integrity became major themes in Chinese state-led nationalism, as well as the popular varieties. China's foreign relations with other nations, past and present, became an important component of patriotic education as the CCP took every opportunity to draw attention to the historical incursions of foreigners in China and point to examples of interference in their domestic affairs. In the context of this new narrative, international condemnation of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown could be portrayed to the public as a Western attack on the Chinese political system, China's failed bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games an anti-China plot constructed by the West, the campaign for international human rights as lies meant to disgrace China internationally, the promotion of intellectual property rights an attempt to halt Chinese economic development.⁷⁵ While patriotic education was not necessarily intended to create animosity towards the West, it was intended to raise suspicion of Western “universal values,” such as democracy and free speech, and the supposed benefit of such principles for China. By portraying foreign powers as self-interested and even antagonistic towards China, the CCP is able to assert an official interpretation of international conflicts and events to which many Chinese are willing to give the benefit of the doubt.

⁷³ Hsü, 1970, p. 239

⁷⁴ Alagappa, 2001, p. 33

⁷⁵ S. Zhao, 1998, p. 297

The campaign also deliberately blurred the line between patriotism and socialism, intending for patriotism to replace the missing “spiritual pillar” left by the decline of communist ideology, the “powerful spiritual force that supports the Chinese people.”⁷⁶ One of the goals for patriotic education was therefore to clarify the theoretical bases of reform and opening in a way that could justify this ideological blending. Party leaders sought to explain the contradictory mix of market reforms and socialism through youth education about the national condition, namely its backwardness. Deng argued that China was still in the “primary stage of socialism,” having achieved “socialism” in the 1950s but unable to reach true “socialist modernization” without the expansion of a commodity economy. This explanation sought to redefine the objectives of reform and opening in familiar, communist terms.⁷⁷ Notably, with the articulation of Chinese conditions and the concept of the “primary stage” came the formal abandonment of the socialist principles of equality and social welfare, as Deng and other Party leaders pleaded with the population to let some “get rich first”⁷⁸ in order to lift the nation as a whole:

“According to Marxism, communist society is based on material abundance. Only when there is material abundance can the principle of a communist society – that is, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need” – be applied. Socialism is the first stage of communism... The main task in the socialist stage is to develop the productive forces, keep increasing the material wealth of society, steadily improve the life of the people and create material conditions for the advent of a communist society.”⁷⁹

The compromise of a “socialist planned commodity economy” to navigate the period of transition has been generally well received, at least since the enactment of patriotic education. In the established context of Chinese siege mentality, Western criticisms of the contradictory nature of this system are either rejected as ignorant of “Chinese conditions” or denounced as sabotage from the Washington led anti-China club. The suspicion of Western intervention thus further serves to smooth over ideological contradictions through the creation of a more defensive public, sensitive to potential shame and attempted incursions.

At its core, however, patriotic education was a campaign of historical reeducation, designed to establish the Party as the sole inheritor of Chinese patriotism. Patriotic education

⁷⁶“Hold high the banner of patriotism,” 1993

⁷⁷ Hughes, 2006, p. 44

⁷⁸ Deng, 1983

⁷⁹ Deng, 1986

emphasized the Party's role as the historical standard bearer of the national struggle against Western imperialism. By identifying the Party with the struggle for independence and as the only viable opposition to foreign plots to prevent China's rise, the Party sought to make itself central to the nationalist discourse and establish its continued rule as a precondition to the future success of the nation.

The construction of an "official" account of history is a central project of building political legitimacy for all regimes, "essential in both de-legitimizing previous regimes and grounding new claims to political legitimacy."⁸⁰ This is particularly true of revolutionary regimes, which typically feel themselves under enormous pressures to establish themselves as the solution to the ills of the previous system. By constructing a coherent narrative of the past, the state is able to fulfill needs in the present: through the identification a "chosen trauma" and a "chosen glory," these narratives define membership within a group, what this membership means, and, most importantly, the group's enemies.⁸¹ During the Mao era, CCP historiography emphasized socialist narratives such as class struggle, using their defeat of the exploitative capitalists as their moral claim to rule. As reform and opening had made this narrative increasingly ineffective, patriotic education sought to recast the revolution as a nationalist project, praising the Party for ending China's humiliation at the hands of foreign powers.

The CCP was able to establish itself as a nationalistic movement because of its participation in the Second Sino-Japanese War in the mid-twentieth century. Here, the Party's commitment to fighting the Japanese served to expand its appeal in the vacuum created by broken Kuomintang promises to route the invaders.⁸² Starting in the 1990s, Communist historiography began to emphasize the Party's contributions to national independence, the defeat of the Japanese invasion, and the expulsion of foreign imperialists.⁸³ While China's "century of humiliation" is a central theme in patriotic education, so too is the Party's role in ending it. In this nationalist retelling of Party history, the CCP thus becomes the inheritor of the nationalist cause, the direct descendent of the father of Chinese nationalism, Sun Yat-Sen. Then-President and CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin expresses this sense of historical mission in a speech to the 14th CCP National Congress:

⁸⁰ Wang, 2008, p. 787

⁸¹ Volkan, 1997, p. 48

⁸² Lieberthal, 2003, p. 48

⁸³ Wang, 2008, p. 789

“Our party has inherited and carried forward the Chinese nation’s outstanding tradition, and has made the biggest sacrifice and the biggest contribution in the struggle of national independence and safeguarding of national sovereignty. We have therefore won the heartfelt love and support from people of all nationalities in China. The Chinese Communist is the firmest, the most thoroughgoing patriot. CCPs patriotism is the highest model of conduct for the Chinese nation and the Chinese people.”⁸⁴

Patriotic education thus served to establish the “chosen trauma” and the “chosen glory” that was to inform nationalist sentiment: the trauma, foreign humiliation; the glory, the Party’s defeat of the imperialists. By identifying a singular national enemy, a faceless imperialism, to which continued CCP leadership was the only possible solution, patriotic education articulated a nationalist discourse in which opposition to the ruling Party would be an inherently unpatriotic act. Through its portrayal of patriotism as its historical inheritance, the CCP also sought to shut out other actors from participating in a dynamic nationalism. In this way, patriotic education discredited other actors attempting to invoke patriotism for unauthorized causes, particularly the youth at Tiananmen.

Implementing patriotic education

Patriotic education as a specific campaign was first suggested in a plenary session of the Central Committee from June 23-24 of 1989, closely following the end of protests at Tiananmen. It was here that Jiang began to express his opinions on the political role of education; ideological education.⁸⁵ Elaborating on the importance that youths be made aware of China’s “national conditions,” Jiang advocated that a new effort be made in the realm of political and moral education, particularly in regards to history.

Zhao notes that Party leadership was initially split over the ideal emphasis of the campaign.⁸⁶ The conservative faction, led by Director of the Central Propaganda Department Din Guangeng and former Director Deng Liquin sought to fabricate the West as the central Chinese enemy. The reformists, on the other hand, led by Deng Xiaoping, were wary of the potential complications such an aggressive stance could create for relations with the West and for continued economic reform, wanted to limit the campaign to education on patriotism and

⁸⁴ Jiang, 1996 (as cited in Wang, 2008, pp. 793)

⁸⁵ Hughes, 2006, p. 57

⁸⁶ S. Zhao, 1998, p. 292

traditional culture.⁸⁷ The result was a compromise, although the reformist gained more influence after Deng's famous southern tour in 1992.⁸⁸ The major prongs of the campaign thus came to be patriotic indoctrination and "state of the nation education" (*guoqing jiaoyu*) that, while society-wide was aimed particularly at youth and intellectuals.

The first official document of the campaign was released in August of 1991, entitled "Notice about Conducting Education of Patriotism and Revolutionary Tradition by Exploiting Extensively Cultural Relics." It was closely followed by the "General Outline on Strengthening Education on Chinese Modern and Contemporary History and National Conditions."⁸⁹ Both circulars were prompted by a letter written by Jiang to the Minister of Education and his deputy, exhorting news workers of their responsibility to "stimulate a spirit of nationalist pride, self-confidence and activism, and to educate society in patriotism, socialism, collectivism, self-reliance, hard struggle, and nation-building."⁹⁰ Patriotism, according to Jiang, was to permeate all Chinese curriculum, from kindergarten to university.⁹¹ While this of course included the creation of special "patriotism" courses, it also applied to regular subject education, like history, language, and geography.⁹² Hughes notes that, while "'communism' was still to be taught...[it] was reduced to the stories of revolutionaries who illustrated the virtues of self-sacrifice for the interests of the collective and the need to always put the state before the individual."⁹³

The campaign continued outside of the classroom as well. The national media was also co-opted to promote patriotism throughout the 1990s. In November of 1993, the CCP Central Propaganda Department, the State Education Commission, the Ministry of Broadcast, Film, and Television, and the Ministry of Culture issued a joint "Circular on Carrying out Education in Patriotism in Primary and Secondary Schools Throughout the Country by Films and Television," which called for the organization of students to watch patriotic films together outside of class.⁹⁴ By May 1994, more than 95% of Beijing students participated in screening of patriotic films recommended by the Party.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ S. Zhao, 1998, p. 292

⁸⁹ Wang, 2008, p. 789

⁹⁰ Hughes, 2006, p. 57

⁹¹ Jiang, 1991 (as cited in Wang, 2008, pp. 789)

⁹² Hughes, 2006, p. 57

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ S. Zhao 1998, p. 292

⁹⁵ Ibid

In June 1994, a national education conference adopted and implemented the “Guidelines for the Patriotic Education,” which articulated patriotic themes to be taught in all Chinese schools at all levels of education. One of the most significant changes wrought by the Guidelines was the abolition of the notorious Marxist political science exam, a requirement for university admissions since the 1970s. The exam was widely resented by students, a visible symbol of Party control, and its removal soothed at least one major source of tensions between students and state.⁹⁶ However, Zhao notes that this change was not a sign of the Party softening towards students, but reorienting its strategy to political education in a more sophisticated way.⁹⁷ Mandatory courses in socialism were replaced by mandatory courses in patriotism; the “I am Chinese” program in universities, which focused on the major achievements of the Party and of Chinese civilization, sought to win student’s respect through greater knowledge of the Party’s contributions to China.⁹⁸ Here, we can see a strategic Party shift from attempts to forcibly control the student population through dogma to attempts to garner voluntary support through their claim to moral authority.

Patriotic education reached a head in 1994 with the release of what is inarguably the most important document of the campaign, “The Outline for Conducting Patriotic Education.” The Outline confidently proclaimed the goals of patriotic education, “to inspire the national spirit; promote national cohesion; foster national pride and dignity; consolidate and develop the broadest patriotic united front; guide and concentrate the patriotic sentiment of the masses toward the great cause of developing socialism Chinese characteristics.”⁹⁹ Although patriotic education was to be for every Chinese, the Outline singled out youth as the target audience of the new education reforms.

The Outline called for a series of very specific changes to the curriculum: Chinese history (especially contemporary and Party history); Chinese characteristics and conditions and their incompatibility with Western values; education on the basic Party line and the fundamental principles of the CCP; education in socialist democracy and the rule of law in China, in comparison to the West; education in national defense and security with the goal of challenging “peaceful evolution theory”; education in national unity among all Chinese ethnicities; and

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 293

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ “Action Plan for Patriotic Education,” 2006, p. 8

education in the policy of “one country two systems.”¹⁰⁰ The overall emphasis of the document, however, was the national condition—where China was strong and where it remained weak—which was necessary both in order to enforce a sense of historical responsibility among youth and to justify the delay in pursuing political reform.¹⁰¹

The publication of the Outline coincided with the 45th anniversary of the PRC; the *People’s Daily* thus released an editorial on the day of its publication calling on all Party and government agencies to publicize and implement the Outline as a part of anniversary celebrations.¹⁰² As a part of this effort, the CCP Central Propaganda Department published an anthology of patriotic speeches, articles, and expositions, *The Selected Works for Studying Patriotic Education*.¹⁰³ With contributions by Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Jiang Zemin, as well as the Ministry of Education and other key agencies, *The Selected Works* served to provide continuity between the various policies adopted and statements made by Party officials through the years under the umbrella of “patriotic education.” By identifying a formal “canon” of patriotism, the Party was able to standardize the implementation of the Outline across the country, as well as lend the campaign a more official air overall.

In addition to students, patriotic education sought to instill patriotism in society at large. Soon after the Outline was published, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) General Political Department issued a circular making plans for the implementation of the Outline among the armed forces, complete with patriotic sing-alongs.¹⁰⁴ In an attempt to create a receptive social atmosphere, all tourist spots across the nation were ordered to highlight their patriotic heritage. One hundred patriotic movies were nominated and distributed across the nation, one hundred great Chinese heroes were named, one hundred great achievements of the Party identified.¹⁰⁵ Plans were made for a patriotic theme park in the capital.¹⁰⁶ From 1992 to 1996, more than ten million yuan were invested in the protection of sites marking the Japanese invasion of China in the north, and museums commemorating these sites were founded.¹⁰⁷ Groups of students were organized to visit these and other important historical sites as patriotic field trips, however they

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 8-11

¹⁰¹ S. Zhao, 1998, p. 293

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 294

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 295

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ S. Zhao, 1998, p. 295

were joined by tourists from across the country. Patriotic education then represented a nation-wide mobilization of the Party apparatus at every level. While students were the main target of the campaign, society as a whole was coopted and included in efforts at political reeducation.

Effectiveness of patriotic education

Scholars dispute the ultimate effectiveness of patriotic education in affecting student attitudes. In a 2003 study on the effects of political education on shaping political attitudes of Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese university students, Gregory P. Fairbrother concludes that patriotic education was ultimately effective in changing student attitudes toward the state.¹⁰⁸ Fairbrother's study attempts to measure the outcome of state efforts to inculcate particular political attitudes in students, assuming that the Mainland CCP government would prefer students to hold strong feelings of patriotism and the colonial government of Hong Kong would prefer students to hold more neutral attitudes. Fairbrother finds that, in both systems, student political attitudes closely aligned with the desired attitudes of the respective regime. Overall, Fairbrother determines that, while resistance to state-led political education is possible, most students eventually come to hold attitudes in line with the educational policy promoted by the state. Specifically, he concludes that patriotic education was effective in instilling nationalist sentiment in Mainland Chinese youth.¹⁰⁹

Conversely, Che-po Chan argues that student attitudes have changed little since 1989. In his 1999 study, Chan compares the political attitudes of Chinese students before and after 1989, concluding that the revival of nationalism can be explained by the restructuring of political relationships on the university campus in the wake of patriotic education, as opposed to a fundamental change in political attitudes.¹¹⁰ By making patriotism a part of the official party-line, the CCP created an acceptable outlet for student participation in the political discussion. The nationalist resurgence is therefore a pragmatic reaction from students to a changing political environment; if one wishes to become politically involved in the post-Tiananmen era, it must be under the banner the nationalism. The study further suggests that contemporary Chinese students are still in favor of reform and still opposed to CCP corruption and collectivism, despite the

¹⁰⁸ Fairbrother, 2003, p. 606

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 618

¹¹⁰ Chan, 1999, p. 381

levels of nationalist sentiment they may seem to express. Chan thus concludes that patriotic education was ultimately ineffective.¹¹¹

So, are the angry youth pragmatic opportunists, parroting inflammatory nationalist rhetoric to take advantage of the political climate? Or are they merely puppets of the regime, individuals whose entire understanding of the world is shaped by the official articulation of patriotism and Party propaganda? Evan Osnos rejects this second interpretation, pointing to a common bad caricature of the Chinese student: that they know virtually nothing about the Tiananmen protests and crackdown that followed and have been brainwashed by Party censorship and misinformation.¹¹² However, the reality is not so simple, since new technology has made the Great Firewall of China relatively porous in recent years.¹¹³ Anyone interested can access all the information about Tiananmen they wish to know using the Internet and a proxy server. The fourth generation nationalists know about the pro-democracy movement of 1989, they simply view the students who participated as idealistic and misguided. While the angry youth may not be entirely satisfied with the CCP and may even acknowledge certain faults, in general they are unwilling to sacrifice continued development or the realization of Chinese national glory for abstract political freedoms. Osnos points to a conversation with a Chinese student as evidence:

“Do you live on democracy? ... You eat bread, you drink coffee. All of these are not brought by democracy. Indian guys have democracy, and some African countries have democracy, but they can't feed their own people. Chinese people have begun to think, one part is the good life, another part is democracy... If democracy can really give you the good life, that's good. But, without democracy, if we can still have the good life why should we choose democracy?”¹¹⁴

The reality is that the truth lies between both extremes. While it would be a mistake to misconstrue the new nationalists as ignorant consumers of Party propaganda, it is also wrong to dismiss them as merely opportunistic. Their anger is real and their patriotic fervor is unlikely to be a passing phase, the result of pure political pragmatism. However, while there may be a certain amount of disagreement over how students' individual attitudes have been affected by

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 203

¹¹² Osnos, 2008

¹¹³ Ibid

The Great Firewall refers to the collective web of Internet censorship and surveillance in China, operated by the Ministry of Public Security division of the government.

¹¹⁴ Ibid

patriotic education, there can be little doubt that the Patriotic Education Campaign was instrumental in shaping the tone of the new nationalist movement as a whole. The fourth generation has no direct engagement with the traumas of China's past that would result in such an aggressive international stance. Although these angry youth have been raised in a period of material abundance, they are haunted by memories of deprivation and oppression. Despite the ever improving status and increasing power of China, they still feel the sting of a century of humiliation. The fact that their feelings are not widely shared across Chinese society also indicates that their nationalist sentiment is something peculiar to their generational circumstances. The emphasis given to historical trauma by the Patriotic Education Campaign, if nothing else, has certainly helped supply the content of student nationalist grievances with the West. True, some may view the ultranationalistic social environment engineered by the campaign in pragmatic terms, as an excuse to re-enter politics and organize once more. However, even the strategic approach described by Chan only becomes possible within an environment supportive of patriotic expression. Either way, the patriotic education has led to both the revival and radicalization of nationalist discourse. By creating a dichotomy between China and the West, emphasizing the humiliations of history and the modern "siege" China faces from the Western world, the CCP has created an environment supportive of radical nationalist expression.

CONCLUSION

The state revival of nationalism in the 1990s through the Patriotic Education Campaign ultimately created the environment of heightened patriotism that allowed the angry youth to emerge and gain social traction. As a result, the hypernationalist rhetoric of the fourth generation nationalists has been directly informed by the concerns raised by the state-led campaign. The campaign's emphasis on a historical narrative of victimization resulted in the deeper engagement of young people with China's traumatic past. Likewise, education about the national condition has made Chinese youth more skeptical of Western political models, which they generally view as inappropriate for Chinese conditions and unsupportive of continued economic growth. Overall, the campaign's reinforcement of cultural myths of humiliation and oppression has profoundly impacted the collective imagination of the fourth generation. The result has been the

simultaneous emergence of a virulent popular nationalism alongside the more tractable state-led variety.

The Party's attempt to portray itself as the heir of Chinese nationalism has also been relatively effective: most of the angry youth are generally supportive of the Party. However, this does not mean that patriotic education has bought the Party the blind obedience for which it had hoped. The invocation of nationalism saved the CCP, but at a cost. The angry youth of the fourth generation have become an uncontrollable force. Patriotic education created the space for student political participation, and once such space is given over it becomes difficult for the state to take back. It not easy to set bounds on political expression: you can allow it, or you can restrict it, but you cannot allow it half-way. The Party's attempt to walk the line of compromise is made particularly problematic by the nature of nationalist discourse itself. Nationalism, especially the externally oriented Chinese model, is inexorably linked with foreign policy issues. The angry youth care very much about relations with Japan, Taiwan, Tibet, and the United States and their belligerent attitude towards these issues makes diplomatic negotiations difficult for the Party. Since the Party has based its legitimacy on its nationalist inheritance and its role as the protector of the national interest, it must be responsive to nationalist feeling within the country. This can complicate foreign relations, perhaps forcing the CCP to take a more aggressive stance on issues than it may otherwise like, or at least to take precautions against appearing overly conciliatory towards Japan or the United States. Compromise with foreign powers thus comes at the risk of the Party appearing unpatriotic, a perception that undermines the nationalist legitimacy it has worked so long to develop.

Ultimately, the CCP has had a hand in creating what will become perhaps the most important challenge to Party authority, a popular nationalist movement. The CCP has so far been able to stay ahead of this movement, anticipating some of its concerns and acting preemptively to avoid a repeat of the regime crises of 1980s. However, as China becomes increasingly tied to the outside world, opportunities for conflict can only increase. The most significant question then, as a generational phenomenon, is what effect the angry youth will have on future politics. As these rabid nationalists age and become the majority power holders, their radicalism will become the political mainstream. How the CCP then engages with the new nationalism and addresses the problems it presents will therefore have grave consequences, not only for the future of China but for the international system as a whole.

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