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# The Origins of Chinese Nationalism in Twenty-First Century

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## Abstract

Chinese nationalism began to rise when the Cold War ended in 1989. During the first two decades of twenty-first century, Chinese nationalism as strong force has impacted Chinese public opinion as well as government decisions to a large extent. In the eyes of Chinese political elites, nationalism is a force for unity that can keep China together as the communism has lost its appeal. This study explores factors which best explain the origins of Chinese nationalism in our era. For this purpose, I utilize qualitative analysis of nationalist discourse and deeds to gauge nationalist sentiment among the contemporary Chinese people and its political elites. The evidence suggests that nationalism in China mainly comes from Chinese great pride in its major economic achievements in recent decades, the perceived injustice and insults done to China when it was dismembered by the imperialist powers in nineteenth and the first half of twentieth centuries, the current provocative moves against the rising China, and the Chinese government's propaganda campaign.

**Keywords:** Century of Humiliation, China, Chinese Nationalism, Communism, Nationalism, Nationalist Sentiment

Nationalism is relatively a contemporary discourse in China. Liang Qichao, arguably modern China's most formidable intellectual, was the first to use the term nationalism in 1901 while living in exile in Japan during the dying days of the Qing Dynasty. From Chinese Communist regime's perspective, nationalism turned to be a new force for unity (Zhao 2000, 28). It is not an exaggeration to say that Chinese communist movement in the first half of the twentieth century was a nationalist movement and the victory of the CCP in 1949 has been described as much a victory for nationalism as it was for communism (Weatherley 2014, 23). The CCP was able to defeat the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) largely due to its ability to appeal to the sentiment of public nationalism. During the first three decades of communist rule, Marxism went side by side with nationalism (Zhao 2014, 3).

A series of actions in the last quarter of twentieth century made nationalism much more attractive force for Chinese politicians. On the one hand, in 1978, China moved away from the ideological rigidities of communism when Deng Xiaoping famously pleaded for a pragmatic approach by saying, "[i]t does not matter whether a cat is black

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or white, if it catches mice, it is a good cat.” (Mahbubani 2008, 75). On the other hand, one decade later, the communism lost its appeal across the world and communist regime collapsed like dominos in the Eastern Europe including the Soviet Union itself. Given the death of communism, nationalism has become the only ideological pillar on which the Communist Party could rely for legitimating purpose and it has been using nationalism as the glue that keeps China together (Zakaria 2008, 122). After Tiananmen square incident, the Party paid significant attention to nationalism and attempted to inculcate nationalist sentiment in Chinese people through specific programs such as “Patriotic Education Campaign.”

Chinese nationalism is a two-way street. To say, Chinese nationalism should not be confined to Party’s propaganda campaigns; it includes popular nationalism as well. Popular nationalism usually feed on the dark pages of Chinese history that has been phrased as “Century of National Humiliation”, the era in which China was disintegrated by imperialist powers and the Chinese people suffered untold sorrows at the hand of foreigners. The bitter memories of the past coupled with the economic achievement of China which has improved the living standards of its people significantly plays a crucial role in inciting nationalist sentiment. Today Chinese masses openly excoriated many foreign countries, particularly Japan and Western states, for considering China as competitor rather than a partner, constantly spying on China’s territories, promoting prejudice against the Chinese, demonizing China, promoting Tibetan independence, putting economic pressure on China, interfering with China’s internal affairs in the name of human rights and so on. Each of these factors has been able to take Chinese to the streets, in the form of demonstration, both inside China and abroad. Chinese nationalism as a current topic which may have different implications for both China and rest of the world has aroused increasing academic interest and numerous books and articles have been published on the subject in recent years. This study explores which factors best explain the origins of Chinese nationalism in twenty first century.

## 1. Literature Review

Nationalism has hardly been quiescent during the twentieth century. At times, it functioned to free nations from alien rule, to create a state of its own, and to contribute to the process of modernization. The end of the cold war precipitated an epidemic of nationalist conflict in many parts of the world such as the tragic ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia and the Balkans (Zhao 2000, 1). Nationalism in China has been living side by side with communism after the Mao’s revolution in 1949. As communism lost its appeal after China’s economic take-off, nationalism exceeded communism and became the only official ideology of China since the last decade of twentieth century. Nationalism has been feeding on different sources in different countries. In China alongside other factors, economic success in the past four decades, has played a major role in construction of nationalism (Moore 2010, 302; Zakaria 2008, 32; Xu 2012, 118-20). As Fareed Zakaria puts forth, Chinese nationalism is on the rise as a by-product of its economic rise. Others on the other hand, emphasized the importance of Chinese nationalism as source of legitimacy for the communist regime (Zhao 2000, 29; Gries et al 2015, 5). In Zhao’s view, after the rapid decay of communist ideology, the communist state used nationalism, as a state-led tool, to shore up its waning legitimacy. It therefore repeatedly claims to the Chinese people that it will make China rich and strong again and restore China’s respect within the international community (Gries et al 2015, 12).

Gries believes that the top-down nationalism view is incomplete. Nationalist politics is never a one-way street. Popular nationalism plays a central role in Chinese nationalist politics today (Gries,4; Gries et al, 13). Callahan has looked at humiliation discourse as the basis of both state-led and popular nationalism and examined how an overlong century of national humiliation has been an integral part of the construction of Chinese nationalism. In his view, China’s Communist Party (CCP) has turned to the past humiliation as a strategy to keep reminding the people what happened to their ancestors when China was weak and disintegrated by imperialist powers and continuously fuels nationalist sentiment in this way (Callahan 2004, 199-218; Moore 2010, 302). The humiliating memories of the past has been able to incite popular nationalism in so many cases. As Moore indicated, even today an overwhelming majority of Chinese people (90%) cited the history issue as the reason why they did not feel close to Japan. The matter of history is not in the past, but rather is very much alive in the minds of the Chinese (Moore 2010, 290).

Some argues, beside other factors, Western governments' policies toward Beijing and Western media's bias against the Chinese are also strong sources of Chinese nationalism. Xu as an example maintains that nationalist sentiment, particularly anti-Western, reached a high point in 1990s following NATO air force allegedly wrongly bombed China's embassy in Belgrade in May 1999 (Xu 2012, 110). It is safe to say that Chinese nationalism is not the product of one force; all the above-noted factors interconnectedly pour fuel to nationalist sentiment in China. None of the abovementioned works has discussed all main origins of Chinese nationalism thoroughly. Each work has focused on one factor and ignored the other. For example, Zhao claims that nationalism is utilized by CCP as legitimizing instrument as communism has lost its momentum in the world as whole and in China in particular, while Callahan emphasized the role history plays in the construction of nationalism. I am intended to look after all main sources of Chinese nationalism altogether here.

Although there is almost a consensus among scholars who have conducted researches on Chinese nationalism that nationalism is a rising force in current China, it has not been unchallenged (Johnston 2017, 7-43; Zhang et al 2018, 758-783). In a prominent article, Iain Johnston refutes the common assertion that Chinese nationalism has been rising continuously. In his view, by some measure nationalism has declined after 2009. Moreover, Johnston concludes that younger Chinese are actually less nationalistic than older ones (Johnston 2017, 10). Jessica based on five surveys in her article *How Hawkish Is the Chinese Public? Another Look at "Rising Nationalism" and Chinese Foreign Policy* indicates that Chinese attitudes are generally hawkish and hawkish views were more common among younger citizen. Jessica concluded that it is premature to say that Chinese youth are less 'nationalistic' than their elders, at least in their foreign policy preferences (Weiss 2019, 3). Furthermore, P.H. Gries et al. concluded that nationalism is strong force in China. It expressed both online and in street demonstrations played a crucial role in CCP's response with others in recent years (Gries et al 2015, 12).

Gregory J. Moore, in *History, Nationalism and Face in Sino-Japanese Relations* very briefly only counts the sources of Chinese nationalism as follows: China's economic growth, the century of humiliation, Chinese exceptionalism, external provocation and Chinese employment of nationalism due to the insecurity of the regime (Moore 2010, 302-03). This paper agrees with Moore's to large extent and tries to discuss different origins of Chinese nationalism in twenty first century in details.

## 2. Methodology

This paper is to discuss the factors that best explain the origins of Chinese Nationalism in the twenty-first century. The central hypothesis is that China's Economic Success, Century of Humiliation in the past, Foreigner's Provocative Acts against today-China and the CCP's Promotion of Nationalistic Sentiment are four different but interlinked sources that feed nationalism in twenty first century in China.

This study's dependent variable is nationalism in China. For the purpose of this study, nationalism is defined as "loyalty and devotion to a nation, especially a sense of national consciousness," and "exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations or supranational group." (Nationalism, n.d.)

This study explores four independent variables: (1) Economic Success, (2) China's Century of Humiliation, (3) Foreigner's Provocative Acts against today-China, and (4) the CCP's promotion of nationalistic sentiment.

China's economic success, for the purpose of this research includes both China's economic growth and economic development, is assessed since its reforms in 1978. Economic growth is measured by the annual percent change of gross domestic product (GDP), increase in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and dedication of a considerable amount of GDP on Research and Development (R&D) programs. Economic development is measured using the Human Development Index, which is an economic model that considers intrinsic personal factors: health, education and standards of living. The health dimension is assessed by life expectancy at birth, the education dimension is measured by literacy rates and standards of living is measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per

capita. The data used come from World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and United Nation's Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

With regard to the second variable, China's Century of Humiliation is a common and recurring theme in Chinese public culture that started with Opium War in 1840 and lasted until China's revolution in 1949. This era contains a series of heart-breaking incidents such as the Humiliating Treaty of Nanjing, Sino-Japanese wars and many others. here, I only discuss the incidents that the Chinese people including the government officials after years still remember and motivate the people to get to the streets and chant slogans against those who inflicted them on China.

Provocative Acts might be defined as decisions or action that incites the reaction of other state or the reaction of its people. In this part I will discuss some foreigner's provocative acts, after Cold War ended, that have led to one or more than one type of the following reactions: (1) government's condemnation, (2) government's move beyond condemnation (such as retaliation, economic sanction or expelling diplomats), (3) and reaction by the Chinese people in the form demonstration or condemnation through social media. I categorize provocative acts in three categories: partly provocative, provocative and very provocative. A foreign act that has led to only one kind of the abovementioned reactions is considered partly provocative. A foreign act that has led to two kind of reactions (e.g. government's condemnation + public protest) is categorized as provocative. A foreign act that has led to all three types of reactions is regarded as very provocative.

Lastly, since the victory of the CCP in 1949 was as much a victory for nationalism as it was for communism (Weatherley 2014, 23), during the first three decades of communist rule, Marxism went side by side with nationalism (Zhao 2014, 3). Given that Marxism was replaced with pragmatism in 1978, I analyse whether the CCP has abandoned nationalism as well or the nationalist discourse of the regime has been intensified for legitimation. For this purpose, I discuss those CCP's decisions and actions, after its reform, that could have impacted nationalistic sentiment among the public.

### **3. Sources of Chinese Nationalism**

Chinese nationalism mainly comes from four sources: China's Economic Success in recent decades, China's Century of Humiliation, Foreigner's Provocative Acts against today-China, and the CCP's promotion of nationalistic sentiment.

#### **3.1 Economic Success**

China's Economic growth since its reform and opening-up in 1978 has been a miracle and unprecedented in history. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong Chinese population suffered the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. When Chairman Mao died in 1976, sixty per cent of China's population were below the poverty line of one US dollar per day. Agricultural and industrial products were either stagnant or declining (Weatherley 2014, 9). Before its transition from a planned to a market economy, China was one of the poorest countries on the planet. Its per capita gross domestic product (GDP) in 1978 was just US\$156—less than one-third of the average for sub-Saharan African countries, which was US\$490 in the same year. However, since then, extraordinary success has been achieved by the Chinese reformists and many people believe that the 21<sup>st</sup> century belongs to China (Lin & Shen 2018, 117).

The annual GDP growth rate averaged approximately 9.5 per cent from 1978 to 2019. This has meant that on average China has been able to double the size its economy in real terms every eight years (Morrison 2019, 5). China is now an upper-middle-income country, with a per capita of US\$9,608 in 2018 measured by the market exchange rates (Morrison 2019, 9). In 1978, China accounted for only 4.9 per cent of the global economy—measured by purchasing power parity (PPP)—while this number has increased to 18.6 per cent in 2016. Moreover, China has made a remarkable contribution to the global fight against poverty. According to the World Bank, China has lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty in the past four decades (World Bank, 2017). If the number

of people lifted out of poverty in China were subtracted from the world total, the number of poor people in the world increased rather than decreased. (Lin & Shen 2018, 118).

China's reform and opening up led to a surge in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the early 1990s. FDI flows have played a major role in China's productivity gains and rapid economic and trade growth. There were reportedly 445,244 foreign-invested enterprises (FIEs) registered in China in 2010, employing 55.2 million workers or 15.9 per cent of the urban workforce (Morrison 2019, 14). FIEs accounted for a significant share of China's industrial output. That level rose from 2.3 per cent in 1990 to a high of 35.9 per cent in 2003 but fell to 25.9 per cent in 2011. According to UNCTAD, China has become a major recipient of FDI as well as a major provider of FDI outflows. China's inflows in 2019 were \$130 billion, making it the world's second-largest recipient of FDI after the United States (UNCTAD, 2020). China's FDI outflows reached a historic peak of \$196.1 billion in 2016 (Borsuk, 2016).

China's economic integration into the world economy has increased significantly. Before 1979, about 90 per cent of Chinese GDP was not related to the global economy. However, from 1978 to 2016, the average annual growth rate of trade was 14.8 percent. China's trade dependency ratio (trade to GDP) reached 32.7 per cent in 2016. With such wonderful growth performance, in 2009, China overtook Japan to become the second-largest economy in the world. Only one year later, it overtook Germany to become the largest exporting country in the world. (Lin & Shen 2018, 118). Today China is the world's top exporter in all three types of industries: low-skilled labor intensive, medium-skilled, and high skilled innovators. (World Bank, May 2019). In 2014, it overtook the United States to become the largest trading country in the world (Lin & Shen 2018, 118), by being the largest trading partner for 130 countries. More importantly, in 2014, International Monetary Fund (IMF) explicitly stated that China overtook the United States as the world's largest economy on a PPP<sup>1</sup> basis (Duncan & Martosko, 2014). China's share of global GDP measured by PPP rose from 2.3 per cent in 1980 to an estimated 18.3 per cent in 2017, while that of the United States fell from 24.3 per cent to an estimated 15.3 per cent (Morrison 2019, 14).

Since participation in international trade and innovation are closely linked, China has devoted large amount of budget for Research and Development (R&D). By the year 2001 China spent less than 1 per cent of GDP on R&D, but the figure has been climbing steadily in recent years and in 2015 China spent more than 2 per cent. Developed economies generally spend between 2 and 3 per cent of GDP on R&D, and China has joined that club. It's worth mentioning that India spends only about half a per cent of GDP on R&D (WTO, 2019). Since China sounds to lose its wage competitiveness due to increase in average monthly wage, China is rapidly automating production through robotization to sustain its momentum (WTO, 2019). Moreover, China's development is likely to be influenced by its "Made in China 2025" program. This plan, from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), aims to transfer China into a hi-tech powerhouse.<sup>2</sup>

The household savings rate in China has risen steadily from 9.9 per cent of disposable income in 1988 to 29.7 per cent in 2018. It's regarded as one of the world's highest savings rates, exceeding by a wide margin that of Germany, the country with the highest household savings rate among the OECD economies. (World Bank, December 2019). Economic success has improved the wellbeing of people significantly and risen living standard. Life expectancy at birth rose from 66 years in 1978 (World Bank, December 2019) to 76.96 in 2020 ("China Life Expectancy 1950-2020", 2020). In 1982, more than one in five Chinese were illiterate and only 6.78 per cent had received education to senior high school or middle special school level and above. By 2010, China's illiteracy rate was reduced to 4.08 per cent and more than 14 per cent of citizen had been educated to senior high or middle special school level and above (Lin and Shen 2018, 118)

China's economic miracle has contributed to Chinese satisfaction and pride. China's economic leap forward motivated the Beijing government and Chinese elites to make an effort to show the world in general and many

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<sup>1</sup> Purchasing Power Parities (PPP) are a method used to measure and compare the economic data of other countries expressed in U.S. dollars. It reflects differences in prices across countries.

<sup>2</sup> Made in China 2025 program focuses on ten industries: Artificial intelligence and quantum computing, Automated machine tools and robotics, Aerospace, Maritime equipment, Modern rail transport equipment, Self-driving and new energy vehicles, Power equipment, Agricultural equipment, New materials, Biopharma and advanced medicine.

Asian and African countries in particular that China's political and economic system is "blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization ... to speed up their development while preserving their independence" instead of western model (Hofman, 53-4). Nowadays, Chinese are proud of their progress, ridiculing the decline of the west, especially its financial and economic crisis. Many Chinese believe that the west needs China, especially its financial resources to solve the Western financial crisis. Chinese people think that they are reclaiming their rightful place as an international powerhouse in the world, a position they had lost decades earlier and they have been denied for many years (Xu 2001, 151-62). "As a result, the Chinese people are becoming more nationalist at home and more vocal abroad." (Xu 2012, 119).

Fareed Zakaria, in his *The Post-American World* maintains that "[t]he rise of pride and confidence among other nations, particularly the largest and most successful ones, is readily apparent." Then he remembers his talks with a young Chinese executive in Shanghai who was filled with pride over Chinese extraordinary growth. Fareed added, "when we began talking about Taiwan, Japan, and the United States, his responses were filled with bile." For example, he explained in furious tones that the United States deliberately bombed the Chinese embassy in the Kosovo war in 1999 to terrify the Chinese people with its military might. He said that were Taiwan to dare to declare independence, China should instantly invade it. And so on. Fareed concluded, "I felt as if I were in Berlin in 1910, speaking to a young German professional, who in those days would have also been thoroughly modern and thoroughly nationalist." In a nutshell, "[a]s economic fortunes rise, so does nationalism." (Fareed 2008, 32)

### **3.2 A Century of National Humiliation**

The second source of China's nationalism, related to the first, is historical chip on its shoulder—a "Century of National Humiliation." (Moore 2010, 302) Before the Western invasion of China, its people looked on its country as the world, and regarded the rest as barbarians (Levenson 1959, 112). China was the "middle kingdom", the center of all civilization to whom all other nations and cultures were subordinate and were required to pay tribute (Weatherley 2014, 21). Tribute-paying neighbors like Burma, Nepal, Vietnam, Java and Japan upheld Beijing's solipsistic view that the Chinese emperor, presiding over the central kingdom of the world, had the right to rule all under heaven (Mishra 2012, 137; Moore 2010, 284). In fifteenth century, the Chinese massive fleets still were much superior to the greatest European naval power: Spain (Fareed 2008, 40-50). China was the richest country in the world for several centuries. It had higher average living standard than Europe until seventeenth century (Roland 2016, 21). However, as China went in touch with the advancing West, soon came to understand its weakness compared to the others. The first crushing blow which shattered the façade of the middle kingdom was the first opium war in 1840 (Yuan 2008, 214). This incident marked the beginning of a century of national humiliation that finally ended with Chinese revolution in 1949. The century of humiliation forms the master narrative of modern Chinese history and is still remembered as the most egregious insult the country suffered at the hands of Western and Japanese imperialism. (Callahan 2004, 202-04).

In the eighteenth century, China exported much more to Europe and America than they imported, created a severe balance-of-payments problem for the West which found its precious silver disappearing into Chinese hands. To reduce Britain's trade deficit with China, the British East India Company shipped opium to southern China and sold through middlemen at Canton to the Chinese masses. In 1800, the Chinese forbade the import and production of opium, but the British kept doing its business. As enraged people blockaded the British factories and flushed their opium stocks into the sea, in 1840, the British ships blockaded Canton and sailed up China's north coast, finally threatening the city of Tianjin and beyond it the seat of the emperor himself in Beijing. Aware of their weak military, the Qing sued for peace, ceding Hong Kong to the British and agreeing to pay an indemnity of £6 million and to reopen Canton to the British traders. However, this was not enough for the British government and prime minister Lord Palmerston, an aggressive imperialist, dispatched another fleet in 1841. After suffering more reverses, the Chinese signed the "humiliating Treaty of Nanjing" in 1842, which opened five trade ports, including Shanghai, to foreigners and granted Hong Kong to the British in perpetuity. Moreover, the British government demanded compensation for the opium destroyed and asked ransom for those cities, such as Hangzhou, that had not been occupied. Other Western countries followed the suit and were given especial concessions as well (Mishra 2012, 26-30).

In 1854, as the Qing dynasty faced the growing Taiping rebellion, British, French and American representatives called for the revision to the humiliating Treaty of Nanjing facilitating free access to all parts of China. Aware of Western's military might, the emperor agreed for granting full access to the Yangtze, unimpeded travel inside China for those with passports, six more treaty ports, and immunity from Chinese jurisdiction for foreigners. Despite all concessions, the Western armies moved on Beijing and torched the Summer Palace (Yuan Ming Yuan) (Mishra 2012, 30-31), which was commonly described as the most fabulous royal garden in the world (Callahan 2004, 208). The Summer Palace burnt for two days covering Beijing with thick black smoke and its valuable antiques were looted by French and British imperialist troops (Weatherley 2014, 162).

China received the third blow from the West by the rise of Boxer in 1900. As Westerners were attacked by Boxer, troops of the Eight Allied Powers—Germany, Britain, Russia, France, the United States, Italy, Australia and Japan marched to China: killed, burned and looted, razing Tanggu, a town of 50,000 residents to utter ruins, reducing Tianjin's population from one million to 100,000, (Weatherley 2014, 162). In Beijing countless people were killed; "river waters had become a cocktail of blood, flesh, bones and fat." Some soldiers tortured their victims purely for fun (Thampi, 160). An Indian soldier from the British contingent, Gadhadar Singh, wrote, by seeing those mass killings, arson and rape inflicted on the Chinese, "even hearts of stone would have melted and felt compassion." At the end, another agreement was signed with Western powers that, among other penalties, imposed an indemnity almost twice the size of the government's annual revenues (Mishra 2012, 162).

At the turn of the twentieth century with the Sino-Japanese War, the main enemy shifted from Western imperialism to Japanese imperialism (Callahan 2004, 205). By 1895 Japan had become powerful enough to impose its will on China. In that year, Japan, which most Chinese saw as inferior, trounced China in a battle; under duress China was forced to pay a huge indemnity, to open riverside towns deep in the hinterland as treaty ports, and ceded Taiwan to Japan as a territory which became a Japanese colony until the end of World War Two in 1945 (Moore 2010, 294). Imperialists elsewhere were further emboldened by China's defeat and expanded their insatiable demands. Britain forced China to lease it Weihaiwei and the New Territories north of the island of Hong Kong. France established a base on Hainan Island and mining rights across China's southern provinces. Germany occupied part of Shandong Province. Even Italy demanded territory. In fact, the Japanese triumph precipitated dismemberment of the Middle Kingdom, the slicing of the Chinese melon as it came to be called (Mishra 2012, 140-1).

The Chinese suffered the greatest pain at Japanese hands between 1931 and 1945. Japan occupied large swaths of Chinese territory and Japanese authorities and soldiers committed grievous crime against the Chinese people. Besides the crime of invasion and occupation of China itself and all the attendant casualties, Japan's rape of China's capital at Nanjing in 1937 has few equals in the wartime history (Moore 2010, 289). Some contend that the Rape of Nanjing was worse than the Holocaust (Callahan 2004, 206). Authors such as Iris Chang put forth that the Chinese dead was 300,000 civilians. More disturbing, Chang claims that 20,000 to 80,000 Chinese women were raped in the course of the invasion and occupation of Nanjing (Moore 2010, 289). Another yet lesser-known horror were the activities of Japan's Unit 731 in the Harbin region of northeast China. There Japanese scientists and troops kept Chinese prisoners and performed horrifying experiments on them, from the study of the Bubonic Plague to vivisections, to the study of the freezing of human flesh wherein Chinese civilians were tied to posts outside in winter conditions and left to freeze to death so the process of frostbite and eventual death by freezing could be studied (Moore 2010, 289). Estimates ranging from 3,000 to 10,000 Chinese lives were lost at the Unit 731 camp. In addition to this was the "comfort women" issue, in which thousands of Chinese women were taken captive to be used as sex slave for Japanese troops during the war (Moore 2010, 289-90). And so many other humiliating incidents. Successive humiliation by foreigners shaped Chinese nationalism. One of the entrances to the parklands of the Summer Palace still displays a sign saying: "Do not forget the national shame, rebuild the Chinese nations." (Mishra 2012, 287-288) Zheng Wang wrote a book entitled, "Never Forget National Humiliation" published in 2012 (Wang 2012). Schoolchildren still learn about western vandalism. The memories of those events even today disturb Chinese hearts and minds and stimulate nationalist sentiments vehemently.

Chinese were Mr. nothing either in China or abroad. Reports indicates that even Chinese diplomats were not given deserved respect. At the turn of twentieth century, a Chinese consular official in San Francisco, California, committed suicide after being insulted by the US police. (Mishra 2012, 173). According to Indian sociologist

Benoy Kumar Sarkar, “[t]he ballot was forbidden to Chinese living in America. Schools were closed against them. They were not allowed to give evidence on the witness stand even in the cases affecting their own property.” (Mishra 2012, 173).

Huang Zunxian, the Chinese consul-general in San Francisco from 1882 to 1885 and a fine poet, who witnessed China’s journey from being the center of the world to be the Sick Man of Asia bitterly wrote:

Alas! What crimes have our people committed,  
That they suffer this calamity in our nation’s fortunes?  
Five thousand years since the Yellow Emperor,  
Our country today is exceedingly weak.  
Great China and the race of Han  
Have now become a joke to other races.  
Even if we emptied the water of four oceans,  
It would be hard to wash this shame clean. (Arkush & Lee, 61-2)

History and precedent are always important in East Asian societies, for Confucian-based societies place great emphasis on tradition, ancestors and precedent. East Asian people tend to move into the future while looking to the past for guidance, so they tend also to be very cognizant of history. In a study, when Chinese were asked why they did not feel close to Japan, 90 per cent of Chinese respondents cited the history issue as the reason (Moore 2010, 289-90).

Chinese humiliation has been an integral part of the construction of Chinese nationalism. (Callahan 2004, 200). Indeed, one cannot understand Chinese nationalism today without engaging evolving Chinese narrative of the “Century of Humiliation” and its impact on Chinese collective self-esteem in the present (The Authors 2016, 432). National humiliation is a common and recurring theme in Chinese public culture. The discourse takes many forms: public histories, textbooks, museums, mass movement, romance novel, popular songs, prose poems, feature films, national holiday and atlases (Callahan 2004, 214).

### ***3.3 Provocative Approach Toward China***

The third factor which contribute to the nationalist sentiments might be called external provocations. The Chinese masses believe that after the Cold War, the West plus Japan are still regarding China as a competitor instead of a partner and taking hostile approach toward it. The memories of US-led NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999, US spy-plane collision in 2001, the Yasukuni Shrine visits by Japanese officials and many others are still fresh in Chinese minds and a variety of issues such freedom of South China Sea, Tibet, China’s human rights, biased reports by western media... have been able to stimulate nationalist sentiment in recent years. Many of the Chinese did not regard such antagonistic stances as routines in international relations, but as the latest in a long series of foreigner’s derogatory acts against the Chinese since the Opium War of 1940 (Xu 2012, 120).

Grass-roots nationalism in China was growing in the 1990s and reached a peak in May 1999 (Zhang et al 2018, 761) when a NATO bomber targeted the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese journalists and wounding twenty others. Although the Clinton administration insisted the bombing was accidental, this was rejected by the CCP and state television denounced the bombing as a “barbarian act.” As a result, several days of fierce anti-US demonstration in Beijing and elsewhere in China took place (Weiss 2013, 16-8). Protestors conflicted with police at the American embassy in Beijing, destroying cars and windows. In Chengdu, more than 170,000 people gathered in front of the US consulate for several days and set fire to the US consul’s residence. Police in Guangzhou warned Western residents to stay indoors. The US and British governments issued travel advisories for their citizens in China, urging them to remain in their hotels or homes. Protests in front of the US and British embassies were the biggest anti-West demonstrations in China since the Cultural Revolution in 1960s (Xu 2012, 110-11).

Another frequently cited example of violation of Chinese territorial integrity is the collision between a Chinese F-8 fighter jet and a US EP-3 spy plane in 2001, which was flying in Chinese airspace (Gries 2004, 98-115). As a

result, the Chinese plane split in half and crashed, but the US plane was able to make an emergency landing on Hainan Island in Chinese territory. The Chinese pilot parachuted out but was never seen again. The US plane's crew, however, was released after Washington issued a formal apology. (Xu 2012, 120). Some people in China accused the party of being weak on the issue, but there was no fierce anti-US demonstration on the streets. Many Chinese took it as conclusive evidence of America's continued disdain for China's right to national sovereignty (Weatherley 2014, 163).

Human rights have been another source of conflict between China and the West. For example, the Western governments have long been critic of China's Tibet policy and in favour of Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader. In October 2007, President Bush and the leaders of US Congress bestowed the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation's highest civilian honour, upon Dalai Lama, calling him a "warrior of peace." The tension between Beijing and the West over Tibet increased in March 2008. On March 14, rioters in Tibet assaulted ethnic Han Chinese as well as Chinese Muslims. As the Chinese army began to crack down on rioter and preserve order, the US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi met the Dalai Lama in India on March 21. At the meeting Pelosi called for an international investigation into the situation in Tibet and criticized China's handling of the unrest in Tibet. While addressing a crowd of thousands of Tibetans in Dharamsala, India, Pelosi called the crisis "a challenge to the conscience of the World" and called upon "freedom-loving people" to denounce China. In April, the US House of Representative passed House Resolution 1077 overwhelmingly by a vote of 413 to 1 criticizing China over repression in Tibet and called on China to end its crackdown in Tibet and initiate a results-based dialogue.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy touted he could boycott the opening ceremony of Olympic Games in August 2008 when he arrived in the United Kingdom for a two-day state visit. He also urged the then British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to take the same position toward China. German Chancellor Angela Merkel also said she would not attend. Nancy Pelosi even said that the International Olympic Committee had made a mistake in awarding the 2008 Summer Olympics to China (Xu 2012, 121-23). These Western government's moves on the Tibet riot infuriated the People and roused China's defensive nationalism to accuse the West of gross hypocrisy, particularly on human rights issues. Using the emotive language of national humiliation by harking back to the so-called "Century of Humiliation", China reminded the Western nations of their shameful human rights record as imperialist powers, especially when they were dividing up the spoils in China. Through the education system and government propaganda, Chinese people are constantly reminded of the cruel Western invasion of China in the nineteenth century: how the British and American companies made their fortunes through the opium trade, and how the French, British and other European powers violently suppressed the Boxer Rebellion which resisted Western religious indoctrination. Such historical memory inevitably fuels nationalism, resentment, and a sense of hypocrisy among the Chinese people when they listen to the same countries that used to bully their ancestors more than 100 years ago to tell them what to do today (Zhao 2014, 13-14). They condemned the double-standard of the Western powers on the question of human rights. The Chinese delegation responded directly to the US by asserting that "you should reflect on your record of massive violation of human rights in Iraq and other places in the world. One may ask what other country in the world dares to violate human right so blatantly." (Weatherley 2014, 163). Chinese believe that although the US has declared to support democratic movements, when democrats in Gulf States, particularly, Saudi Arabia are silenced, the United States kept quiet. In the Chinese eyes, the United States preach one thing and practice another and this is hypocrisy (Fareed 2008, 239). With regard to Sarkozy's remarks about Chinese human rights, which caused large demonstrations in France to disrupt the 2008 Olympics, the CCP quickly recalled how French imperialist troops burnt down the Old Summer Palace in Beijing back in 1860 having looted the palace of its valuable antiques. "People's Daily" wrote, "if France wants to talk to China about human rights, they first need to apologise for what they did to the Old Summer Palace and then return the great quantity of Chinese relics that they stole (Weatherley 2014, 162). In major cities in China, angry protestors organized demonstration in front of French supermarket chain stores Carrefour to encourage people to impose embargo on French products after protests in Paris (Xu 2012, 122-23).

Besides the West, China's relations with Japan is have so many ups and downs today mostly influence by the past. A recurring problem for Japan's relations with China has been that the Japanese authorities have approved textbooks that effectively whitewash Japan's responsibilities for WW2 and fail to raise issues like the Rape of Nanjing, Comfort Women, and Unit 731, but rather glorify Japan's war effort and rationalize its decision to go to

war. It was an important source of the 2004-2005 tensions, which led to the massive anti-Japanese demonstrations in China and will continue to be a thorn in the side of positive Sino-Japanese relations (Moore 2010, 292-93). Moreover, the controversial annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine<sup>3</sup> by Japanese politicians, most notably former Prime Minister Koizumi, further irritate Chinese people and alienate Beijing. Koizumi regardless of Chinese protests went to the Yasukuni Shrine six times during his tenure, with the last one deliberately on 15 August 2006, the date that Japan surrendered in the Second World War (Yuan 2008, 223). The Chinese views this enshrinement as honouring the war criminals that were responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent and, this is why they protested continuously (Moore 2010, 293). What makes the situation worse from the Chinese perspective is the apology problem. China and some other Asian Countries believe that Japan has not addressed their historical sins, confessed their crimes, sought the forgiveness of their victims, nor done real penance as well as Germany has (Moore 2010, 290).

Another side of the history problem are the territorial disputes over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and Taiwan's issues. Since vanquished China ceded Taiwan to Japan in 1895, many Chinese blame Japan for separating Taiwan from China in the first place and see it responsible in Taiwan's independence movement today. This Chinese indignation intensified in February 2005 when the US and Japan renewed their security commitments but redefined Japan's role to possibly include the defense of Taiwan. This went beyond even the 1997 US-Japan Defense Guidelines statements that US-Japan defense arrangement include "areas around Japan", without referring specifically to Taiwan. In their joint announcement in 2005, Taiwan and environs were defined specifically as an area "of concern" to the security interest of Japan. The Diaoyu Islands are another territorial issue that still causes divisions between the two powers. A series of eight uninhabited islands northeast of Taiwan were not highly valued by either party. They were used by the US Navy for bombing practice after the war. Soon after oil and natural gas deposits were discovered in the waters around the island in 1969, Beijing announced that Chinese had first charted the island in 1534 and that they in fact belonged to China; Japan had claimed them along with their acquisition of Taiwan in 1895. In 1978 a Japanese right-wing group built a lighthouse there and visited it regularly for maintenance, so as to solidify Japan's claim to the isles (Moore 2010, 293-94).

In 2012, right-wing Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara proposed that Tokyo prefecture purchase three of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands from their private Japanese owner. Chinese nationalists were outraged and responded by protesting not just online, but outside the Japanese embassy in Beijing, in Shenzhen, and in other major Chinese cities. As a result, the Chinese government then took the unprecedented step of sending armed naval warship to the disputed islands. In December, a People's Liberation Army (PLA) patrol plane flew over the area, and Japan scrambled jet fighter. In January 2013, Chinese and Japanese jets appear to have played chicken near the islands, and a Chinese frigate locked its weapons-targeting radar onto a Japanese helicopter and a destroyer. (Gries et al 2015, 1-2). According to our measurement for this paper, the last event can be regarded as "very provocative" act, because it led to CCP's condemnation, action beyond condemnation and popular reaction in the form of huge demonstration in different Chinese cities.

In addition, Western mainstream media also help contribute to nationalistic sentiments among Chinese both at home and abroad. Many of the Chinese people contend that Western media have shown not only anti-Beijing tendency but also a bias and prejudice against the Chinese people which has spread wider since 2000. (Xu 2012, 124). Some Sinologist contend that mainstream Western media, by following the foreign policy goals of the West, has singed up to America's goal containing and demonizing China. For instance, independent media watchdog organization Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) in 2020 released a report which set out that despite a plethora of protest movements around the world in 2019, Western mainstream media focused extensively and excessively on events in Hong Kong. Using articles published in the New York Times and CNN as a selective sample, the organization evaluated how each outlet covered protest events in the Chinese city compared to similar event in Ecuador, Chile and Haiti in the respective timeframe to when these protests began up to November 2019. The results of the study found that the Hong Kong protests had been subject to over 737 articles by the respective outlets, whereas Chile had only been covered 36 times, Haiti 28 and Ecuador 12. (Fowdy, 2020). According to

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<sup>3</sup> Yasukuni Shrine is spiritual home to 14 of 28 Class-A (the most serious categorization) war criminals, including former Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, who was executed along with seven other Class-A war criminals on December 23, 1948. The Chinese and others view this enshrinement as honouring the war criminals that were responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocents.

article published in *China Daily*, when a demonstration erupts in the West that disturbs public order, the police moves are described as doing their jobs requiring them to do. When a similar incident happened in the Hong Kong, it is transformed into “fight for freedom” and the police actions are “brutality.” (Zhouxiang, 2019).

On February 3, 2020 Wall Street Journal published an opinion essay by Walter Russell Mead on economic repercussion of the coronavirus outbreak titled “China Is the Real Sick Man of Asia”, which irritated Chinese across the globe (Mead, 2020). The problem did not lie with Mead’s critical evaluation of China, but with the article’s title. China was sometimes described as the “sick man of Asia” at the end of the 1800s, in the depths of what we now call China’s Century of Humiliation (Tracy, 2020). Given the derogatory burden of that title, on February 19, China revoked the press credential of three journalists with the Wall Street Journal after the newspaper declined to apologize for heading (Gong, 2020). For many Chinese, such biased reports not only delegitimize the Western media; it also stirs up their patriotic passion (Xu 2012, 124).

### 3.4 Insecurity of the Regime

The fourth, and perhaps the most important factor on which nationalism in China feed is the insecurity of the regime (Moore 2010, 302-03). Many believe that the emergence of nationalism in post-Mao China was in response to a legitimacy crisis of the communist regime in the late 1970s, when the regime was deeply troubled by popularly-called “three spiritual crises”, namely, a crisis of trust in socialism, a crisis of confidence in the future of the country, and a crisis of trust in the party. To restore legitimacy, the instrumentality of nationalism was discovered by the post-Tiananmen leadership. In 1992, a group of young intellectuals in Beijing published a widely circulated article titled *Realistic Responses and Strategic Choices for China after the Disintegration of the Soviet Union*. (Zhao 2000, 17). The article argued that Marxism-Leninism was no longer effective in mobilizing loyalty and legitimating the state, and the CCP should base itself firmly on Chinese nationalism. Xiao Gongqin, a prominent scholar, warned in 1996 article that the possible disintegration of Chinese society might result from the decline of the official ideology. He saw no solution in Western nostrums or in communism but only in nationalism, which, according to him, could play “the function of political integration and cohesion” in the post-cold war era (Zhao 2000, 18).

Nationalism was not a new force in China that time. Many believe that the victory of the CCP in 1949 was as much a victory for nationalism as it was for communism, finally ending the century of humiliation and uniting China behind as single, centralized state (Weatherley 2014, 23). When Mao publicly announced the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on 1 October 1949, he did not make reference to Marxist dialectics or the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, but instead proclaimed that the Chinese people had finally “stood up” after repeated foreign invasions. The desire to remain free from imperialist subjugation continue to inform Chinese nationalism after 1949. (Weatherley 2014, 23). The Chinese Communist party was able to defeat the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) largely due to its ability to appeal to the sentiment of public nationalism. During the first three decades of communist rule, Marxist ideology went side by side with nationalism.

With the renewed discovery of the power of nationalism, Deng Xiaoping and his successor, Jiang Zemin, began to wrap themselves in the banner of nationalism, a reliable force to win the Chinese people’s loyalty and the only important value that was shared by both the regime and its critics. (Zhao 2000, 18). In 1994-95, the CCP launched a nationwide patriotic education campaign to renew domestic pride in the nation’s achievement and the CCP for helping China overcome a century of national humiliation (Weiss 2019, 3). Local party leaders were instructed on how to propagate the new campaign at the local level through public meeting and study sessions. The campaign was also propagated in schools where primary children learned patriotic songs and were taught at length about the century of humiliation, after which they were encouraged to articulate their feelings of disgust towards Western nations. First year university students were required to take a course in modern Chinese history highlighting the suffering imposed by the imperialists. (Wang 2008, 795-6). In October 2004, ten ministers of the central government and the Chinese Communist Party, such as Ministry of Education and the Propaganda Department, jointly issued a statement, “suggestions to Reinforce and Advance the patriotic Education.” This official paper encouraged government offices and educations units to use a variety of educational methods, as a means to promote patriotic education campaign. They encouraged the Chinese to watch 100 chosen red films, read 100 chosen red

books, and sing 100 chosen red songs, all of which focused on Chinese national humiliation in contemporary China. (Xu 2012, 115). Some of the 100-red books like *Never forget State Humiliation* (2002), *The China That Can Say No* (1996) have been best sellers (Yuan 2008, 216).

The education campaign is still strongly supported and enforced by the CCP. In 2019, amid pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, China's Communist regime was accelerating the campaign to impart nationalist fervour through indoctrination, starting from a very young age. For example, in late October 2019, kids wearing Red Army uniform were shouting patriotic slogans, like, "A red heart faces the sun and follows the Party" in a Jiangxi kindergarten during an activity called "Military-Civil Production." Similar activities are compulsory in kindergartens, private of public, throughout China. The official media outlet claim that through such events, children are taught how hard the heroes of the proletarian revolution fought "for the beautiful life they enjoy today, pass down the excellent traditions, and devote themselves the endless struggle of building a stronger, more prosperous and beautiful motherland." There is no doubt that the campaign has great impacts on the hearts and minds of Chinese children. "I'll kill Japanese with a pistol," said a little boy holding a wooden toy pistol in hand during a parent-child education activity organized by Jinshan kindergarten in Jiangxi on November 1 (Yong, 2019). The 1945 Education Law made clear that teachers are supposed to produce personnel who can both contribute to economic development and "uphold the guidance of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong's thought and the theory of building socialism with Chinese characteristics." (Hughes 2006, 55).

The Chinese government has also taken efforts to build many museums and public monuments to promote patriotic education. The central government and local governments began to establish patriotic education bases for ideological re-education. More than 10,000 memory sites were built and visiting these memory sites is becoming a normal part of student and the public. To urge more people to visit those patriotic education bases, the CCP central committee and the State Council started a red tourism campaign, a program to sponsor people to visit the former revolutionary bases and landmarks. In 2004, over 20 million tourists visited more than 150 major red tourism sites in thirteen provinces and municipalities. From 2004 to 2007, more than 400 million Chinese people participated in the red tourism program. On the importance of red tourism, president Xi Jinping expressed in a 2016 speech, "only by experiencing the hardship of revolutionary era can people truly receive education." The government earmarked US\$370 million to develop red tourism between 2016 and 2020. In 2019 the State media estimated that red tourism sites get 800 million visits a year (China Stirs Up Patriotism, 2019). As the number of participants in red tourism rises significantly, from 20 million in 2004 to 800 million in 2018, so does nationalist sentiment.

China's media censorship is another factor in stirring nationalist sentiments, especially anti-Western sentiment, among the Chinese. Media in China always gives a one-sided view of the West in international reporting, by means of Choosy inclusion and exclusion, the press in China is very aggressive in promoting anti-Western theme, which increases the suspicious of the Chinese towards the West. Stanley Rosen wrote that the media censorship has helped cultivate "increasing suspicion and distrust" of the Western countries, the United States in particular, and justify the motivation for the Beijing government's self-serving policy (Xu 2012, 117). In addition, more recently, the CCP propaganda apparatus has been involved in the production of countless movies and TV series about the brutality and bestiality of Japanese and Western troops in China during the century of humiliation.<sup>4</sup> (Gries et al 2015, 2).

Given the CCP's effort to inculcate nationalist sentiment in Chinese people, the CCP was a proximal cause of the many anti-Japanese and anti-Western demonstrations. (Gries et al 2015, 3). But the top-down state nationalism view is incomplete. Nationalist politics is never a one-way street. With the emergence of the internet, cell phones, and text messaging, popular nationalists in China are increasingly able to act independently of the state. The popular nationalists—not the Communist Party—initiated and organized the April 2005 anti-Japanese protests (Gries 2005, 153-254). On 11 September 2012, another street demonstration broke out across China over the proposal made by Tokyo Governor that Tokyo Prefecture purchase three of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The

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<sup>4</sup> A series of movies called "IP Man" can be a very clear example. This series features those dark eras in which China was under control of foreigners and its people were subject to untold tortures and sorrows.

demonstrators who carried portraits of Mao and chanted slogans like “Declare war!” and “Kill all Japanese!” were not organized by the party. More importantly, the protests even pressured the Chinese government to take the unprecedented step of sending armed naval warships to the disputed islands (Gries et al 2015, 2).

The nationalism that the CCP is employing is famously called pragmatic nationalism, which is instrumental, state-led and reactive (Zhao 2000, 2). The CCP allows or forbid domestic protests primarily on the basis of its strategic interests (Gries et al 2015, 5). In economic development, social stability and the projection of its image as a peaceful rising power, Beijing has strong incentives in carefully monitoring the expression of nationalism, because unchecked xenophobia and anti-foreign behavior may harm its fundamental economic and hence strategic interests. This sets a clear limitation on Chinese nationalism. (Yuan 2008, 229-30).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Nationalism has been an attractive phenomenon in China since the dawn of Qing Dynasty. Since then, it has been employed by different movements to build the Chinese nation and restore China’s respect on the international stage. The effective use of nationalism helped Mao to defeat China’s Nationalist Party and assume power in China. the victory of the CCP in 1949 has been described as much a victory for nationalism as it was for communism. Following Mao’s revolution, communism went side by side with nationalism. Since the late 1970s, however, communism has been replaced by economic pragmatism, and nationalism has served exclusively as the ideological instrument for political mobilization. This was especially true after the 1989 government crackdown on protests in Tiananmen Square and elsewhere.

Today, Chinese nationalism feeds on various interconnected sources. Firstly, Chinese miraculous economic success has brought respectability to Chinese and improved their living standards significantly. In light of economic achievement, the Chinese people have become very confident in the country’s future in embracing and meeting the challenges of globalization and rising as a great power. In Chinese perspective, China was a great empire with rich civilization in the past and it is going to occupy its deserved position on international stage in a foreseeable future. Secondly, the century of national humiliation still weighs upon Chinese minds after years. During eighteenth and first of half twentieth centuries, as discussed in detail, China was disintegrated, and its people suffered greatly at the hand of colonizers. Bitter memories of those dark era still pain Chinese public and vehemently pour fuel on nationalist sentiment of Chinese people either inside China or abroad. Thirdly, another factor that has stimulated nationalist sentiments in recent years is external provocations. The Chinese masses believe, since China is rising peacefully as responsible member of international community, some foreign countries are regarding China as a competitor instead of a partner and taking hostile approach toward China. A variety of issues such freedom of South China Sea, Tibet, China’s human rights, biased reports by western media and many others have been able to fuel nationalism in recent years. Many Chinese did not regard such antagonistic stances as routines in international relations, but as the latest in a long series of foreigner’s derogatory acts against China since the opium war in 1840.

Last but not least, as Communism lost its appeal in the last half of twentieth century, nationalism became the only ideological pillar on which the Communist Party could rely for legitimating purpose and it has been using nationalism as the glue that keeps China together (Fareed, 122). After Tiananmen square incident, the Party paid significant attention to nationalism and attempted to inculcate nationalist sentiment in Chinese people through specific programs such as “Patriotic Education Campaign.” Beijing, however, has strong incentives in carefully monitoring the expression of nationalism, because unchecked nationalism an uncontrolled public behavior can damage its relations with outside world and will have unpleasant implications for its galloping economy and its strategic interests. The nationalism that the CCP is employing is famously called pragmatic nationalism, which is instrumental, state-led and reactive. The CCP allows or forbid domestic protests primarily on the basis of its strategic calculations.

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