Understanding Separatism in Chinese Political Culture

1 Introduction

In existing English language literature, terrorism is disproportionately studied from a Western state perspective which articulate Western experiences (Silke, 2004; Jackson et al., 2011), whereas the understanding of terrorism in China is distinct from those experiences with international terrorist organisations, for example, Al-Qaeda, and more recently, the ISIS. Likewise, the causes of China’s terrorist threat would not be the same as, for instance, the retaliations against the West and second generation Muslim migrations who had experienced institutional discrimination. Terrorism in China is neither a representation of Huntington’s “clash of civilisations” theory, as the “Sino-Islamic connection” seemed to have failed to explain the tensions between the external supports from Muslims – mainly from Turkey – for Uyghur separation. In Chinese domestic political discourse, “terrorism that challenges China’s security” is a concept used interchangeably in many occasions with separatism, in particular, the Uyghur separatist movement. Although there are other separatist claims from Tibet and Taiwan, they have not shown propensity to indiscriminately employ violent means to attack civilians. In addition, the Uyghur separatist group Eastern Turkistan Islamic movement is the only terrorist groups recognised by the United Nations (United Nations, 2016), making it different from the situations in Tibet and Taiwan. The international agreement in the nature of this group provides ground for cooperation in counter-terrorism operations. This said, the mindset underlying the government’s response to separatism is to some extent generalisable, as they are all related to the two the collective memory of the “century of humiliation” and collective dream of “the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”.

This section articulates the underpinning framework embedded within Chinese political culture wherein separatism is viewed as a national taboo. The discourse of separatism evokes a sense of humiliation at the hand of imperialist invasion in the nineteenth century, a sense of trauma and incapability to save the nation, and thus a sense of anxiety to realise the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Separatism, in Chinese eyes, is thus not merely attempts and actions to demand more political autonomy. The discourse of separatism is highly emotional in Chinese politics. The mixed feelings are linked to the survival of the Chinese state, making is a sensitive issue, in other words, a “taboo” in Chinese politics. In 2001, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, officially named separatism as one of the “three evils” (Organisation, 2001) – a term that is frequently used in Chinese policy documents, regular press conference of the Foreign Ministry, news reports, scholarly works regarding China’s counter-terrorism policy. It can be seen that the Chinese government has constantly conflated these concepts
and replaced it with one another for the convenience of political communication. Due to the plasticity of Chinese political language, separatism cannot be taken by its literal sense, but requires a further enquiry into the political culture wherein the discourse of separatism is framed to suit the political interests of the central authority.

This section starts with a clarification of the collective mentality in Chinese political culture and the way it justifies the prioritisation of “state security” over “civil liberty”. A detailed analysis of nationalism in relation to shifting self-identification is then provided to explore the cultural, historical and social context in which separation is related to national humiliation. This is followed by a discussion of the impact of the ideal “Grand Union” on current political elites in terms of a sense of obligation to strive for unity. Then further questions regarding democracy and its deviant form in China is examined, before reaching a concluding note on whether the differences in Chinese political culture would qualify a Chinese school in International Relations.

2 Collective mentality

A major feature of Chinese political culture, compared with liberal democracies, is the adherence to collectivism (see also Chung and Mallery, 1999). It is not to say that this characteristic is fixed and unchanging throughout history and regardless of different circumstances. It is certain that Chinese government may display individualism in some social settings, for example in the heyday of Chinese liberalism during the New Culture movement and the May Fourth movement when “individuality” became relatively more important than “state” and “society” (Zhao, 2000 p. 124). However, in comparison to liberal democracies more generally, China tends to be associated with collectivism. This is inherent from the Confucian understanding of China as a “culturally defined community”, rather than an “ethnically/politically defined nation-state” (Zhao, 2004 p. 12). Given this feature, China is seen as by nature authoritarian, because “[c]ollectivist ideologies are inherently authoritarian, for when the collectivity is seen in unitary terms, it tends to assume the character of a collective individual possessed of a single will, and someone is bound to be its interpreter” (Greenfeld, 2000 p. 11).

Collective mentality is important to understand China’s security policies related to the survival of the whole state, requiring collective decisions. It is, on the other hand, contentious with the individual freedom when such policies potentially limited personal access to civil rights. From the state’s perspective, the survival of the “party-state” is the most significant collective concern. A good example is the overwhelming slogan “harmonious society” which reflects a burning anxiety to achieve uniformity in policy discourses (Zheng and Tok, 2007) at state level, without satisfyingly addressing emerging social challenges at individual level. The way collective mentality is applied in policies is helpful to understand how the decisions in favour of collective interests but potentially limit individual right are negotiated to the public through official discourse.
There are two concepts in Chinese political culture that require further clarification in order to make sense of its security concerns. The direct translation of “right” (quanli) and “democracy” (minquan) is confusing and did not help understand the collective mentality, particularly when the Chinese nation is seen under serious security threat, or at a “juncture of national survival” (minzu cunwang guantou). A second fundamental concept which requires clarification is stability. The main focus of the politics of stability has shifted from external intervention to internal contradictions, and the concept has been appropriated for stronger social control in other policy areas.

2.1 Quan (right) and minquan (democracy)

“Chinese rights discourse is not merely an imperfect attempt to mirror Western ideals”, despite the convergence of right discourse in the 1920s between the East and West (Angle, 2002 p. 206). The term “right” in English can be used to refer to two ideas according to contexts: sovereign rights (zhuquan), and democracy, or popular rights (minzhu or minquan). More specifically, it implies freedom, equality and the autonomy of the individual. The word “quan”, however, was first introduced to refer to national rights and sovereignty and “remained the dominant use for the next two generations” (Wang, 1980 p. 3).

In contrast to Western usage, Chinese rights discourse began in the late eighteenth century, at the collapse of the feudalist empire and the dawn of a republic. The notion of right was introduced mainly in the context of a national crisis. Since the First Opium War, the lost of sovereign right and the acute sense of humiliation brought by it has greatly traumatised the nation. This painful experience of territorial cession had unified the nation psychologically in the face of a common enemy – external imperialist invaders. At that time, it does not matter whose “right” it is, state or people, because none of them enjoyed “right”, whereas the notion of “right” was raised to challenge state’s right if the ruler went against natural law and failed to protect people’s life, liberty and property (Locke, 1965). In a very short period of time before 1911, Sun Yat-sen had promoted people’s right against the Qing rulers (Chen, 2005 p. 39). But this had soon turned to a double loss of right when the ruling government began to accept unequal treaties.

When Sun Yat-sen sought to promote “Three Principles of the People” (nationalism, democracy, and the livelihood of the people), there was no clear boundary between sovereignty rights and democracy. In his article in Minbao (Sun, 1905), minquan (democracy) is actually used in the sense of sovereign rights, not in the individual sense. The priority of minquanzhuyi (democracy ideology), according to him, is “creating Republic of China the” (Guangdong Local Chorography Editorial Committee, 2004), not to grant freedom and equality for at individual level. The notion of freedom, from Sun Yat-sen’s perspective, is firstly the freedom of the nation and of the state, and the basic unit should be the society as an organic whole. This idea was solidified by the CCP when it made the commitment to transfer the right from the hand of the state to the hand of “the class of the labouring masses”.
Furthermore, other early reformists such as Yan Fu, and Liang Qichao “spoke of rights and liberties very much in terms of what would best serve collective goals” (Wang, 1980 p. 16). Although Liang Qichao did recognise the liberal notion of individuality, the main concern at his time was to revive China and resist foreign aggression, making the survival of the nation the priority over individual rights (Zhao, 2000 p. 123). According to early reformists, individual freedom is limited and subject to restrictions when it is for the best interests of the nation. This means only those who are fighting against the correct enemy (imperialism and warlords) are entitled to enjoy freedom. Furthermore, unlimited freedom can potentially lead to complete anarchy, therefore, in early revolutionary collective mentality, “to ensure the success of revolution”, individual freedom should be limited (Guangdong Local Chorography Editorial Committee, 2004).

The surrender of individual freedoms and submission to the authority in exchange for protection of their rights reflect a Confucianist approach to social contract theory. From a Confucianist perspective, social hierarchy, and the strict, obligatory roles of different social actors are the mechanism to maintain social stability. In this context, individual rights are seen as a radical notion because they pose challenge to existing social order (Wang, 1980 p. 4).

In the eyes of Chinese political elites, collective mentality fits well with the majority rule principle of democracy, because theoretically the majority will choose what is for the best of the majority. What makes this controversial, however, is how much individual right can be satisfied and the issue of transparency of policy-making process. Democracy principle in China therefore implies the rights of “the people” as a holistic entity, the autonomy of “the masses” as opposed to imperialism and feudalism, but seldom refers to individual liberty (see also She, 2004 p. 223). In a word, democracy in China is the “democracy without individualism”.

Related to current counter-terrorism policy, criticisms on human rights violations indicate that the trade-off between the sacrifice of individual rights in exchange for national security is still the dominating mentality among political elites. Chinese official documents, including the 2000 White Paper has been quite clear about the priority of socioeconomic considerations over human rights (Perry, 2008 p. 38). Human rights in China place emphasis on firstly the survival and development of individuals, while this discourse in the West concerns with civil rights and political participation (Chang, 2012 p. 12).

2.2 Stability-oriented mentality

Stability is one of the major security concerns for the CCP, the meaning of which has gone through several changes throughout history. During the transition from the China under colonisation to an independent state, the major social challenge had changed from the conflict between Chinese nation and external imperialism to internal ones. In this context, the state need the power to “clean away the corruption and anarchy and bring China back to unity and stability”, and “without that unity and order,
all else would come to nought” (Wang, 1980 p. 17). A stable environment is thus regarded as the precondition of any forms of development, without which what has been achieved will eventually be lost (Zhang and Lv, 2013 p. 35).

The politics of stability after 1989 was not targeted at its own people, but the people suspected to be affiliated with the US. In the aftermath of 1989 Tian’an men Square protest, Deng Xiaoping repeatedly reminded people of the importance of stability, and three integral parts of socialist modernisation: stability is the precondition, reform the motivation, and development the goal (Zhang and Lv, 2013 p. 35). A prevailing interpretation in China is that the 1989 protest was a plotted conspiracy seeking “to slit China, subvert the regime, cause chaos and end China’s rise” (Friedman, 1997 p. 13), as happened in the wave of separation movements in East Europe and the collapse of Soviet Union in the name of democratisation. In the early years of patriotic education campaign, the conservative took the West as an enemy, and the campaign as a tool to frustrate its subversive attempt in line with the “peaceful evolution” strategy (heping yanbian) (Zhao, 1998 p. 292). Drawing upon this observation, the anti-West sentiments can also be seen frequently in official terrorism discourse, diverting the attention from domestic Han-ethnic conflicts to a contradiction between China and the West.

On 5 May 1994, in his inspection tour to Shanghai, Jiang Zemin rescoped the stability discourse to accommodate to internal social contradictions (Rong and Chen, 2011 p. 89). He highlighted the need to “correctly deal with the relationship between reform, development and stability”, drawing upon Deng’s three integral part of socialist modernisation (Chen, 2011). His shifted the focus from external intervention to the relationship with the masses (Xinhuanet, 1999).

Despite the changes in its objective, the politics of stability persists. The reform era has opened up the space for the globalisation of social norms including individual rights. Yet the proclamations of individual rights, legal rights, and human rights had not directed CCP’s attention away from the concerns for social stability. Xi Jinping’s China’s dream highlights “the unity and coalescence of public sentiment as a part of the great revival of the Chinese nation/race” indicating that regime stability is still the party’s abiding focus (Leibold, 2013 p. xiii). Today stability is still the most enduring and salient theme in political communication (Hassid and Sun, 2015 p. 9), in a subtler form of “social management” (shehui guanli) or “social governance” (shehui zhili), though (Steinhardt and Zhao, 2015 p. 193).

However, the change of the name does not mean that it has adapted well with current China. At operational level, the extension of the concept of “stability” has resulted in stronger control in a broad range of issues, including security governance, migration control, the control over public opinions and other emergencies (Rong and Chen, 2011 p. 90). Distortion and oversimplified interpretation in
implementation has led to a decrease in effectiveness and an increase in the stability maintenance cost (Zhang, 2011).

3 Nationalism

The following section introduces what nationalism means to the Chinese people and to the CCP respectively, as well as its origins in history, and the ways in which it has been constructed as a master narrative of politics. For analytical convenience nationalism is divided into state-led nationalism and ethnic nationalism in this section.

State-led nationalism is unique in China, different from American pride in Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, Japanese feelings about monarchy and the British pride in the parliament (Zhao, 1998 p. 301). Zhao (2004 p. 50) points out that whereas European nationalism stems from an “indigenous process driven by the combined force of mercantilism and liberalism, nationalist consciousness in China was triggered by external stimulus” in response to external threats. Unlike the American nationalism that is proud of their independent and liberal identity, Chinese nationalism is empowered by a profound sense of humiliation. As a multiethnic state, Chinese political leaders are always in desperate search of a motivating force to unite the whole nation as a community. The background of it being diverse, there are generally two kinds of influence that facilitated the rise of state-led nationalism. Externally, nationalism can be seen as the glue which keeps the nation from falling apart in an era of vibrant separatist movements across the globe, and in particular, an era when the Uyghur separatism has been encouraged in the name of the right to national self-determination (Amnesty International UK, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2011). Internally, in the eyes of Chinese leadership, the rise of Chinese nationalism (state-led nationalism) is generally seen as helpful to maintain political legitimacy at a time when the belief in Marxism and Maoism declines (Zheng, 1999 p. 2).

Chinese nationalism has gone through several distinctive stages as the following table shows. It is not to say that history can be neatly divided according to different characteristics of nationalism across different time periods. The dynamics of the ways in which the imagined community of “us” has been shaped would be helpful to understand the political functions of nationalism throughout history.

| “civilised us” vs. “barbarian them” | “weak us” vs. “strong others” | “reviving us” vs. “peripheral others” |

Table 1 Three stage of nationalism in China
3.1 First stage of nationalism

Early nationalism in ancient China came from the dichotomy between “civilised us” and the “barbarian them” through making salient the distinction between “huaxia” (China) and “yidi” (Barbarians) (Feng, 1985 pp. 211–2; Chen, 2005). According to a contemporary Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan, such distinction is made based on cultural criteria rather than radical differences. As such, the creation of the notion is China as a “nation” is constructed through deliberately reinforcing the cultural differences between “huaxia” and “yidi”.

This distinction, however, was not strong enough to qualify China as a “nation” in the sense of nation-state until the collapse of Qing dynasty. James Harrison (1969 p. 2) points out that the traditional Chinese self image has not been defined as nationalism based on the Westphalian nation-state, but as “culturalism” based on the historical heritage and acceptance of shared values (Chen, 2005 p. 36).

Another key difference of nationalism in this stage is that China did not see itself in relation with a world with multiple great powers. As early reformist Liang Qichao puts it, “the reason Chinese do not know patriotism is because they do not know that China is a state” (Zhao, 2014 p. 59). The usage of modern concept of “nation” was imported since the “dongxue xijian” (East Transmission of Western Sciences)\(^1\), the use of “nation” in the sense of clan and as opposed to “barbarians” had existed throughout history, though (Chen, 2005).

3.2 Second stage of nationalism

The second stage of nationalism emerged since the First Opium War. China had confronted new “others” which fundamentally challenged the huaxia-yidi dichotomy. The distinction which is used to consolidate the identity of a “Chinese”, had been changed from “civilised us” verses “barbarian others” to “weak us” (a traumatised people) versus “strong others” (imperialist invaders).

Before the founding of the Republic of China in 1911, Sun Yat-sen’s notion of “nation” was a Han Chinese nationalism, which called on all the Han Chinese to “recover the state for our nation” (Chen, 2005 p. 39). At this point the conflict was still between the Han Chinese and the feudalist Manchu rulers who came within Chinese territory. At the end of the First Opium War, China was forced to open the door to foreign forces. Collective sentiments had been generated from the same experience with the suffering at the hand of imperialist invaders. At this point, Sun realised that the major threat to the survival of Chinese nation was no longer Manchu rulers and the whole nation confronted with a more serious threat at the hand of the foreign “strong others”. This is when Sun Yat-sen reconstructed “us” by calling for a unification of all Chinese people including five ethnic groups: Han, Manchus, Mongols, Hui, Miao and Tibetans (Zhao, 2014 p. 59), and the “others” became the imperialists, the

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\(^1\) “East Transmission of Western Sciences” is the process when Western thoughts are gradually accepted within China in the late Qing dynasty and the Republican China period.
repressing nationalist government, warlords, bureaucratic capitalists and feudal landlords (Chen, 2005 p. 40).

Political parties were quick to grasp this dichotomy of “weak us” and “strong others” in order to obtain legitimacy. Speaking in the name of the survival of the nation allows a party to demand that citizens identify themselves with that nation and subordinate other interests to those of the state (Tilly, 1995 p. 190). During the period when the contradiction between the KMT (Kuomintang, or the Chinese Nationalist Party) and the CCP (the Chinese Communist Party) was more intense, they were competing in terms of the ability to achieve the nationalist goal of protecting “us” from imperialist “them”. In 1929 the KMT claimed that “our party’s foreign policy is always to abolish unequal treaties” (KMT, 1929; cited in Xiong, 2013 p. 173). KMT was able to reduce the extraterritorial privileges enjoyed by foreign powers under the banner of nationalist anti-imperialism prior to 1931. However, its legitimacy was eroded when KMT “failed to stand up to the Japanese occupation of China’s Northeast provinces (Manchuria) in 1931” (Chen, 2005 p. 40). While the KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek was preoccupied with combating warlords and communist party, the CCP reasserted its position against the “correct enemies”, thus winning the hearts and minds of the masses and gained support from those who were disappointed as KMT’s non-resistance after Japanese army had taken over three North-eastern provinces\(^2\). Mao Zedong’s (1935) proclamation of “turning China into a free and independent country with full territorial integrity” thus became more appealing to the Chinese people because it stressed the relationship between “weak us” (a traumatised people) and “strong others” (imperialist invaders), which was the major security threat to the Chinese nation at that time.

Other than competitions, there was also cooperation between two parties for the purpose of translating the identity dichotomy into legitimacy. The transient and recurrent cooperation between the KMT and the CCP – the anti-Japanese nationalist united front – contributed to the reinforcement of Chinese national identity by putting aside contradictions between Chinese people and working together to combat the same “others”: feudalism, imperialism and Japanese invaders. However, conflict between two parties exacerbated again when international situation was in favour of anti-Fascist forces. Both sides publish articles and books to demonise the other, and more importantly, to align itself with the nationalist “us” to gain legitimacy. *The fate of China* (Tao, 1943) published on behalf of Chiang Kai-shek detailed the relationship between national humiliation (guochi) and the origins of their revolution. Chiang Kai-shek had also clearly stated:

> “[w]e, the Chinese nation, after fifty years’ of sanguinary revolutions and five and a half years’ of sacrifice in the War of Resistance, have finally transformed the history of a hundred years of Unequal Treaties of sorrow into a glorious record of the termination of the Unequal Treaties” (Kai-shek, 1943, cited in Wang, 2003 p. 400).

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\(^2\) Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang
At the eve of the victory of anti-Japanese war, the Nationalist government consciously convert the sense of humiliation to national pride, highlighting the traditional value and morality of the Chinese nation (Xiong, 2013 p. 173).

In this stage, the reconstruction of the concept of “nation” is accompanied with a cognitive transition from China as “tianxia” (all under heaven) to China as a “nation-state”, and a parallel transition of the vision of “tianxia” as all territory in China to “tianxia” as international community (Luo, 2007). Until then China’s vision of itself has started to be synchronised with other members of international community. Due to the defensive nature of the nationalism born out of outrage against foreign suppressions, it has contained a strong anti-Western mentality (Zhao, 1998 p. 290). The following cascade of a series nationalist books in the 1990s – such as The China That Can Say No – is a continuum of nationalism in modern China, because they still reflect a major dichotomy between the “Chinese us” and the “foreign them” (particularly the US and Japan) (Zhao, 1998 p. 287).

### 3.3 Third stage of nationalism

The third stage of nationalism is characterised by an increasingly multi-polar tendency at the end of the Cold War. Nationalism was no longer desperately needed for state-building, and the nationalist “fever” has generally softened since the early 1980s (Chen, 2005 p. 36). The third stage of nationalism is an epitome of the international context “of a global rising tide of the revolutionary struggle” (Hall, 2013 p. 168; Zheng, 2013 p. 125).

From the late 1950s to the early 1970s, official political discourse had prioritised Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought over nationalism (Zhao, 1998 p. 288). According to Zhao Suisheng, Deng’s reassess of Maoism in the reforming era in the following decade was initially targeted at eradicating ideological and psychological obstacles to economic reform. However, this has resulted in an unexpected demise of the official ideology and a profound crisis in political legitimacy (Chen, 1995). The crisis of faith in socialism, Marxism and the Communist Party has evolved into a pro-democracy movement and the subsequent full-blow Tian’anmen protest in 1989 (Zhao, 1998 p. 288).

At the same time, ethnic nationalism in border areas has also evolved. The rise of ethnic/peripheral nationalism has come to confront the single CCP interpretation of nationalism which is used to maintain legitimacy by forging the image that the CCP is the only party that successfully saved the “weak us” from the hand of the “strong others”. The reassertion of ethnic identities is largely influenced by an increasing awareness and the willingness to exercise civil rights and the right to national self-determination, and this has been increasingly entangled with territorial claims (Ma, 2013 p. 3) with the help and support from outside. For example, many pro-Uyghur separation organisations such as Free Asia Radio, Uyghur American Association and World Uyghur Congress have publicly support Uyghurs to exercise their right to national self-determination.
Internationally, the globalisation of liberal ideas and norms has accelerated the process in which formerly less informed ethnic groups pursue more political/civil rights. Domestically, China’s economic booming has generated aspirations for localism, such as peripheral nationalism in Guangdong province (Wang, 2001). The ability of nationalism to consolidate the CCP legitimacy is less effective in the economic advanced areas along the East coast. Regionally, the disintegration of Soviet Union and the independence of Central Asian countries have reified the ethnic nationalism as part of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism (Zhang, 2003; Yuemin and Lifang, 2004; Fan, 2013). Surrounded by “five nations whose populations are predominantly Muslim”, domestic situation in China for its Muslims and inter-ethnic relations have changed dramatically (Gladney, 1996).

At this stage, the leadership had to change their revolutionary mindset and “sustain and consolidate its political legitimacy” by meeting people’s needs in terms of “economic development, political stability and national unity” (Chen, 2005 p. 49).

Against this backdrop, State-led nationalism is promoted again to balance growing awareness of ethnic nationalism. The latest “Chinese dream” narrative by Xi Jinping reflect CCP’s attempt to translate nationalism into a bounding force, one that is stronger than the ways in which socialism bond working classes together (see Nye, 1993 p. 61).

### 3.4 Three stages in comparison

The first two stages of nationalism can be seen as a top-down construction. Although the reason that state-orchestrated nationalism was able to take root is that it reflected, at least to some extent, the mindset of the masses, the political process whereby it is framed, reified, and used to serve as a political apparatus to mobilise the masses is centralised (Chen, 2005 p. 50). In comparison, the third stage projects the decentralisation of the concept of nationalism, a bottom-up construction whereby ethnic/peripheral nationalism has been increasingly prevailing and has distracted people’s attention away from state-orchestrated nationalism, challenging the official discourse of patriotism (Chen, 2005 p. 50). In response to the de-centralisation of nationalism, the central authority has encouraged “a narrower brand of ultra-nationalism that could herald a revival of ‘leftist’ xenophobic sentiments tined with a resurrection of some ‘victim complex’ remnants” (Chan, 2010 p. 43). A comparison of three stages of nationalism also shows that identities are formed “only in relation or contradiction to other identities” (Newby, 1996 p. 67). The understanding of “us” is constructed when the “other” becomes salient through conflict.

### 3.5 The century of humiliation and unequal treaties

Separatism is regarded as a cultural taboo in China. To understand current anti-separatism policy, it would be appropriate to trace back to Chinese modern history when separation has been a major part of national trauma from the “century of humiliation”. As Wang (2013) argues, key historical events are crucial in defining and shaping a group’s identity.
The history of national humiliation begins when Britain sent gunboats up the Yangzi River, compelling Qing rulers to open ports and markets to the opium trade (Kaufman, 2011 p. 2). One of the most significant symbols of humiliation history is the authority’s acceptance of unequal treaties. Simply put, these treaties are called “unequal” because a) they were not signed on a reciprocal basis; b) the terms in the treaties were imposed by force upon China under duress; and c) under the “most-favoured-nation” clause China had to “extend ipso facto to all other powers the concessions granted to one” (Fung, 1987 pp. 795–6; Wang, 2003 p. 401).

A sense of humiliation is constructed by the talk of unequal treaties, making it an effective propaganda apparatus to “conceptualise the contours of China’s encounters with foreign nations” (Wang, 2003 p. 400). By signing the unequal treaties, China not only lost territory, sovereignty, control over its internal and external environment, but more importantly, it also lost the dignity and confidence which psychologically injured the Chinese society (see also Kaufman, 2011 p. 4). The legacy of “unequal treaties” combined with the obligation of national unification suggest that conflicts over territory should be highly salient for China’s political elites and basically non-negotiable (Fravel, 2005 p. 47).

Not only did unequal treaties directly result in a sense of humiliation and inferiority, but also changed the Chinese understanding of itself politically. Unequal treaties shaped the Chinese identity because by signing the treaties, the concept of Westphalian sovereignty is imposed on China by forcing it to recognise the principle of legal equality between nation states, “shattering the fictive remnants of sinocentrism” (Zhao, 2004 p. 48). Therefore the globalisation of the Westphalian system of state was a catalyst for the rise of Chinese nationalism (Zhao, 2004 p. 50).

“Trauma” and “humiliation” are two keywords defining modern Chinese identity. The selected traumas of a group reflect “this group’s deepest threats and fears through feelings of hopelessness and victimisation” (Volkan, 1997 p. 48). The consequent feelings of incapacity to reverse the injury to the group’s self-esteem and humiliation (Wang, 2014 p. 3) continued to fuel nationalism in current Chinese politics. A sense of victimisation comes from not only from external humiliations caused by the cession of territory, the loss of jurisdiction on its own land, huge reparations, extraterritoriality and foreign settlements and concessions in the treaty ports, but also from the deep anxiety about China’s own “political decay, technological backwardness, and economic weakness” (Zhao, 2000 p. 9). Chiang Kai-shek’s attempt to attribute national humiliation (guochi) solely to unequal treaties (bupingdeng tiaoyue) (Tao, 1943) aroused intense criticism – mainly from the CCP – that he was trying to convince the Chinese people of their “intrinsic morality” (guyou de dexing) and distract people from their political failure (Chen, 1949; Pu, 2009).

A sense of humiliation does not exist on its own. Modern Chinese history is viewed as a particular dark era because it stood as a sharp contrast with the glorious past. The pre-modern greatness invokes
a sense of obligation to restore great-power status, if not the outmoded understanding of China as the “centre of the world”. The humiliation is incomparable not only in comparison with the politically stable, economically advanced, and culturally rich past with “ascendancy in comprehensive power” (Deng, 2008 p. 9). It is also recognised as unprecedented even comparing to other humiliation moments throughout history, for example, marrying princess to “barbarian” tribe leaders in order to please political alliance and maintain border security (*heqin*), massacres by tyrants, cannibalism caused by famines, turbulent times during dynastic changes, and the abuse and overkill of the royal family after dynastic change.

In a word, the “century of humiliations” after the Opium War is deemed as the worst moment the nation had experienced in its international history (Zhang 2000, cited in Deng 2008, p.9). There is no other historical period that has been officially summarised as “humiliation history” as it is in history education (Peng, 1991). It is the master narrative of modern Chinese history (Callahan, 2004). Despite some diplomatic call for China to move forward (Schell and Delury, 2013), the century of humiliation is still serving as a strong motivating narrative. For countries of China’s “ex-colonial aggressors”, “the notion that time heals all wounds is often taken for granted” (Wang, 2012 p. 32). It is not that easy to create a new national story to replace it, one that could bound the whole nation together as much as the “century of humiliations” (Wang, 2014 p. 3). It is more unlikely if Edward Friedman (1997 p. 13) is correct that the state-centric nationalism created in the post-Deng era was to replace Communism as the new source of legitimacy.

The trauma and humiliation of the past make it politically significant that the Chinese ruling party would be capable of bringing an end to the “overlong century of humiliation and subordination to the West and Japan that began with British imposition of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842” (Samuel, 1996 p. 229).

### 3.6 Legacies of the century of humiliation

One of the legacies of the century of humiliation is the political aspiration for a “grater Chinese nation” which had its roots in the official Qing view of China and violently frustrated by the century of humiliation. This notion has been widely disseminated through education system and political propaganda, which effectively replaced Han nationalism with a wider concept of state nationalism (Zhao, 2006 pp. 21–3).

Although in recent two decades humiliation appears less frequently in today’s political discourse, it is still a key element in the framework whereby the Chinese people view its place in the world. As Callahan posits (2004 p. 200), “humiliation has been an integral part of the construction of Chinese nationalism”. It has been effectively used for mass mobilisation (Wang, 2014 p. 4; Callahan, 2004 p. 200). The ambition to blot out humiliation is a motivating factor for Chinese political elites and a recurring theme in contemporary Chinese history (Zhao, 2004 p. 12). The discourse of humiliation
runs through generations of leadership. The notion of “Rejuvenation of China” (zhengxing zhonghua) was raised by Sun Yat-sen and inherited by Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. The normalisation of the use of humiliation discourse means that its implication has changed from a morbid, irrational sentiment that requires treatment, to a social practice that needs to be understood in terms of political and historical narratives (Callahan, 2004 p. 201).

Humiliation politics can be both stabilising and destabilising. It highlights the similarity among in-group members and resists globalisation which tends to remove differences between different groups. Humiliation discourse is also understood as an indirect cause for military actions. The 1995 and 1996 military manoeuvres in the West Pacific Ocean region are often explained as a response of patriots to blot out humiliations that imperialism imposed (Friedman, 1997 p. 7).

The Chinese government seek legitimacy from humiliation politics as much as it is confined by it. As Wang (2014 p. 4) argues, humiliation discourse is a key element in the construction of the Chinese national identity. Promising a prospect to lift the whole nation out of the past misery is always one of important starting sentences in many official political speech and documents. While legitimacy can be gained from making such commitments, the government cannot afford to despise popular patriotic sentiments. Taking the anti-Japanese sentiment as an example, rational response to Japanese leaders’ visits to the Yasukuni war shrine can be seen as a sign of weak state from the eyes of chauvinists, which will in turn damage the legitimacy. Grassroots, or “fenqing” (angry youth) (Zheng, 2013 p. 127) nationalism had been another destabilising factor in this context.

Therefore, the Chinese government has to maintain a delicate balance when it seeks to take advantage of its political function. The official writings on memorising national humiliation always end with a clarifying note that the mourning of the dead is not a revision of hatred, but a vision for peace. “Only those who respect their own history deserve respect from international community” (people.cn, 2014a).

However, the use of humiliation politics is not always proper. With the spread use of internet, personalised experiences have been popularised to construct an example (shuli dianxing) for the convenience of patriotic education in China. The cascade of ridiculous anti-Japanese drama approved by the State Administration of Radio Film and Television reflects a process of nationalisation of individual encounters with humiliation, as well as a reconstruction of nationalism through popular culture. Soon after the absurd story plot became a laughing stock, Xinhua News Agency (2015) condemned the distortion of and disrespect to the painful history, “showing a morbid view of history and values”.

The commemoration of humiliation has become officialised throughout history. In response to Japanese modification of invasion history in text book, Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders was built. During the 20 years since its opening, it has received over
10 million visitors, among which 750 thousand youngsters received patriotic education here (Duan, 2005). The Memorial Hall provides the venue for many party related activities, such as the ritual of taking the oath to become party members, making a typical case for patriotic education (Duan, 2005). Through selection, recognition and emotional resonance, the archives have been used to reconstruct the social memory (L. Wang, 2013 p. 28).

On 25 February 2014, National People’s Congress has passed a draft bill of The National public Memorial Day of Nanjing Massacre, the first official national day of mourning. An editorial of People’s Daily writes:

*Chinese people did not yield in front of the atrocity of unparalleled savagery. The entire nation, no matter he is from south or north, old or young, share a bitter hatred of the enemy, fighting together against national humiliation at the hand of foreign imperialism. People has built a new Great Wall with their blood and flesh, and gained a great victory of anti-Japanese war* (people.cn, 2014b).

The setting up of the Memorial Day by law is explicitly to “strengthen national memory and the spiritual belief of ‘never forget national humiliation, rejuvenate the Chinese nation’. “Forgetting history is a betrayal, and denying crime is committing the crime again” (Xinhuanet, 2014). As history is always reconstructed for political purpose in China, this move can be seen as an effort to shape the collective memory to the extent that it is suitable for political mobilisation. Setting up Memorial Day may result in a shift from the “contradiction between state and ethnic nationalism” back to one between the Chinese nation and foreign forces.

### 3.7 Humiliation and patriotic education

One reason for creating official interpretation of humiliation for patriotic education is that a sense of humiliation does not necessarily convert to patriotism. The literal engagement with humiliation was instigating and radicalising, sometimes insulting, for example, the use of “slave” in mobilisation: “…thus China has become not only the colony of one country, but many countries; Chinese people have become slaves of not only one country, but many countries” (Xiong, 2013 p. 173). Humiliation is more than patriotism, “all rights lost, our state is no longer a state. How painful it is! How can the people of Chinese nation exist in society with such burning shame? … our flesh will die, our wills will not” (Luo, 2001 p. 75).

In attempting to direct this intense feeling towards a positive output, the CCP had, like in other atrocities and natural disasters, employed a tactic to reverse the negative emotion into a praising and constructive one.

*What is impressive, in those sanguinary days, our people helped each other, supported each other. Many international friends also risked their life to protect Nanjing citizens and record the savage act of Japanese invaders… The atrocity did not destroy the Chinese people, in contrast it united our
nation to fight against invaders….Under the leadership of the CCP, with the efforts of all the ethnics, all sons and daughters of the Chinese nation was able to fight the same enemy, face death unflinchingly (Xinhuanet, 2014).

In current official discourse, “nationalism” and “chauvinism” imply the parochial and reactionary attachments to nationalities, whereas “patriotism” has a positive connotation, always blurring the love for the Chinese state and the Communist Party (Zhao, 1998 p. 290).

The second reason is that people would not spontaneously translate the experience of humiliation to patriotism. There has been a persistent sense of anxiety over many intellectuals as China’s obliviousness to such humiliation (Cohen, 2002 p. 1). Lu Xun, one of the early radical nationalist writers sarcastically depicted a society which was so traumatised that only “obliviousness” can relieve the pain from the trauma-related cues (Lu, 1973 p. 148). He has been famous for his trenchant criticism on the obliviousness as one of “inherent weaknesses” of the nature of Chinese people. Despite current skeptics that his works are in fact challenging the CCP’s rule, two of his former residents (in Shanghai and Zhejiang) have been listed in the Bases for Patriotic education.

The anxiety of forgetting national humiliations has been reflected in the commemorations of national humiliations days. In a study based on achieves in late Qing dynasty, Xiong Bin examines the tendency to extend the notion of national humiliation. Previous researchers list out twenty different national humiliation days on the signing of unequal treaties, Opium war, invasions of the Eight-Power Allied Forces, territorial occupations and massacres respectively. Xiong cites the sarcasm that “the number of China’s national humiliation days has broken world record” (Xiong, 2013 p. 173). He argues that too many commemoration activities have in fact blurred the actual time of a particular act of humiliation, which indicates that it is not the date per se, but mobilising effect that makes commemoration necessary.

A third reason is the century of humiliation is too remote for current generation. Pre-occupied by socio-economic development and the well-being of themselves, ordinary people would not be willing to be bothered to put on this self-imposed hardship.

In this context, patriotic education was introduced to intervene in the otherwise discursive sense of humiliation. As Americans are expected to learn the preamble of the Declaration of Independence, every Chinese high-school students will be assessed on their knowledge of the official narrative of the Chinese modern history neatly apart with pre-modern China by the Opium War.

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3 The construction of the Bases for Patriotic education is under the leadership of State Education Committee, Ministry of Civil Affairs, State Cultural Relics Bureau, the Central Committee of the Communist Young League, General Political Department of People’s Liberation Army, and Propaganda Department. The aim of this programme is to popularise patriotic education among primary and middle school students. Among the first 100 locations for patriotic education, 9 reflect the humiliation history and the struggle at the hand of imperialist invasions.
Patriotic education regarding to humiliation is based upon s sense of shame that is greatly valued as fundamental virtue of being a human in Chinese culture. Early philosopher Mencius developed the idea that “a sense of shame is the start of rightouseness” (xiu e zhi xin, yi zhi duan ye) (Yang, 2013 p. 73). Another well-known historical narrative of national humiliation (Sima, 1959) entrenched the value of having a sense of shame. The story of “woxin changdan” (enduring self-imposed hardships to remember humiliations) is frequently taught in children’s book and educational TV programmes on “traditional Chinese values”. The King of Yue, Goujian was defeated by his opponent the King of Wu, Fuchai, and his attempt to make peace with the latter was frustrated. Goujian left his country and acted as a servant at Fuchai’s court until Fuchai believed that Goujian had genuinely subjected to him. Two years later Goujian was released and went back to his country. To ensure that he would not forget the humiliation he had experienced after being defeated, Goujian hung a gall bladder from the ceiling, tasted it before every meal. He worked hard to revive the nation from the suffering after war. Several years later Goujian waged another war against Fuchai and eventually had his revenge. Fuchai was exiled and committed suicide in deep regret.4

In modern China, Chiang Kai-shek is said to be the first politician to use humiliation education to maintain a positive image of the KMT (Xiong, 2013 p. 173). It is also used to arouse a sense of crisis, a sense of urgency, a sense of responsibility for the rejuvenation of Chinese nation (Shi, 2009 p. 34). In the aftermath of 1989 movement, the state-led patriotic education redefined the legitimacy of the post-Tian’anmen leadership, so that the CCP could continue on the basis of a non-Communist ideology (Zhao, 1998 p. 288).

3.8 State-led nationalism vs. ethnic nationalism

There are always certain prefixes for nationalism for the purpose of analytical convenience. In China, the competition between two types of nationalism – state-led nationalism and ethnic nationalism – is increasingly salient. Before digging into the contradiction between the state and society, it is necessary to clarify what the state-led nationalism means in different contexts.

It is not accurate to equate state-promoted nationalism with Han nationalism. Chinese nationalism has clearly gone beyond from Sun Ya-sen’s initial definition of Han nationalism in opposition with Manchu imperialism, and the Chinese nationalism with five ethnic groups. China’s state nationalism was propagated, popularised, and passed on to the following generations through an ongoing patriotic education that transcends a narrow nationalism based on ethnicity (Jiang, 1996).

When seen as a holistic idea, Chinese nationalism is studied mostly out of realist concerns for the rise of an “antagonist” China. Since the seemingly provocative book China Can Say No (Zhao, 2004; Zheng, 2013), it is the notion that the rise Chinese nationalism might challenge the US hegemony that

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4 This story is recorded in Chinese classics The Commentary of Zuo (Zuozhuang), Discourses of the States (Guoyu), Records of the Grand Historican (Shiji), Spring and Autumn of Wu and Yue (Wu Yue Chunqiu)
generates a booming in academic interests in English language literature. In Western discourse, the “rise” of China becomes increasingly disturbing due to the “worrisome nature of recent expressions of Chinese nationalism” (Chen, 2005 p. 35). Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro (1997) worry that the yearning to redeem the humiliations of the past can be transformed to an attempt to replace the US as a regional hegemon in Asia.

In response, Chinese scholars understand it as a defensive reaction to realist Western policies. According to Zheng Yongnian, state-orchestrated nationalism is used to mobilise national resources to resist the American containment policy \(^5\) (1999 p. 142), and resist the influence of Western countries more generally (Zheng, 2013 p. 126). This is evident from a nationwide patriotic education campaign has been employed to oppose the West’s strategy of “peaceful evolution” (Zheng, 2013 p. 126) which had previously led to pro-democracy movements and regime change in East Europe (Welsh, 1994; Hill, 1993) and Central Asian countries (Way and Levitsky, 2005).

However, international impact is only part of Chinese nationalism. Domestically state-led nationalism clashed with the growing self-awareness of ethnic identity among the Uyghurs. It is not to say that there are clearly two parties in conflict.

Firstly, Uyghur identity is not necessarily a spontaneous ethnic group. Current categorisation of ethnic groups inherits the understanding of differences among ethnic groups the from anthropological and ethnographical research and ensuing identification since the 1950s (Schwarz, 1979 p. 141; Fei, 1992). According to Gladney’s (1990) investigation into the ethnogenesis of the Uyghur identity, the creation of Uyghur ethnic identity when the Chinese government implemented a Soviet-style ethnicity identification policy is clearly a discursive process where the distinctions between groups are made clear for administrative management. Ethnic issues are understood in a theoretical framework based upon Marxist, Leninist, Stalinist, Maoist and Deng’s theories (Zhu and Blachford, 2006). Political leaders and intellectuals have increasingly recognised that the “divide and rule” tactics borrowed from the USSR model had been out of date, and ethnicity problems cannot be “resolved”, but can only be “managed” (Zhu and Blachford, 2006; Leibold, 2013).

Secondly, not all Uyghurs favour the same political goal. Reed and Raschke (2010) identify four ways of Uyghur ethno-political thoughts: apathist, assimilationist, autonomist and separatist. It is true that the political goal of the Uyghur is no longer congruent with national unit (Gellner and Breuilly, 2008), but this did not immediately mean that all Uyghurs have a same level of aspirations for independence.

\(^5\) Yet, Edward Friedman (see 1997 pp. 14–5) argues that American containment policy in Asia only targeted the Korean peninsula at the DMZ, and the reason its policy is portrayed as one of containment is that “chauvinists” try to “defeat their domestic opponents by depicting reformers who preach meeting America half-way as traitors”. In addition, “ezhi” (throttling) is not the precise translation. However, the American support for Taiwan and Tibet separation is seen as strong evidence for a combination of “soft” and “hard” containment policy (Wang, 2009; Li and Zhang, 2005).
While NGOs are accusing China of the repression of religion (Human Rights Watch, 2005), Uyghur dissidents’ claims are actually more secular, related to environmental degradation, anti-nuclear testing, religious freedom, over-taxation, and family planning policy etc (Gladney, 2003 p. 19). The goal of the Washington-based East Turkestan Government-in-Exile (ETGE) can be seen from its name. The fact that the ETGE recruit people from different ethnic background indicates that its vision is in fact aiming at territory rather than establishing an single-ethnic state (Hoshino, 2011 pp. 148–71). By contrast, the Would Uyghur Congress did not consider it “the right time to push a statehood agenda” (Chen, 2013 p. 22).

There are several ways to describe the difference between nationalism with a state label and that with an ethnic label. In terms of state-building and the growing self-awareness of ethnic groups, nationalism can be divided into constructive and destructive (Zhao, 2004 p. 5). In terms of the direction a particular type of nationalism is spreading and its political influence unfolding, the “inward-directed” sentiments “hold a nation together”, and the “out-directed emotions … heap hostility upon others” (Comaroff and Stern, 1994 p. 38). According to Comaroff and Stern (1994 p. 40), elites in power seek to impose ideologies, images, and social knowledge on the rest of the population as the collective culture of the nation-state, and remove differences within the political community and replace it “with a common, hegemonic order of signs, symbols, and values”. From a Weberian perspective, what constitute ethnicity is a set of selected ethnic indicators – such as physical appearance, customs, common memories, language, and religion – that create “affinities” with insiders and “disaffinities” with outsiders (Little, 1995 p. 298). This clearly goes against the state attempt to minimise the difference and impose a single interpretation of nationalism based on collective memories. The two are always competing with each other because one’s strengthening is at the expense of the weakening of the other. As Weber (2009 p. 167) puts it, the significance of a nation is “preserved and developed only through the cultivation of the peculiarity of the group”. David Little’s (1995 p. 297) research on the relationship between nationalism and ethno-nationalism suggests that the form of nationalism promoted by the Chinese government tends to be more intolerant to requirements of non-discrimination, and might radicalise ethno-nationalism (e.g. in Tibet) and contribute to antagonism, hostility and instability, while “liberal nationalism contributes to the conditions of peace by cultivating ethnic and religious respect and harmony”.

By the same token, Liah Greenfeld (2000 pp. 10–1) argues that the sovereignty of the people implies the actual sovereignty of individuals as members of a nation. When accentuate the people’s uniqueness, its very being a distinct people, the sovereign becomes a collectivistic definition reflect collective being. Therefore, there is clearly a difference between the “individualistic-libertarian nationalism” and “collectivistic-authoritarian nationalism” (Zhao, 2004).
In the international community, the cohesive effect of state nationalism is often seen as domestically constructive and destabilising to the outside, which is evident from the popularity of China threat theories. The resurgence of Chinese nationalism has caused a gloomy concern among the West that China would embrace an aggressive attitude in dealing with the West (Zhao, 2004 p. 6). What is at core is how scholars inside and outside of China perceive its behaviour. Benjamin Cohen (1991 p. 47) makes a distinction between malign nationalism and benign nationalism, the former “seeks national goals relentlessly, even at the expense of others”, the latter “is prepared to compromise national policy priorities where necessary to accommodate the interests of others”. It is clear that scholars worrying about the rise of Chinese nationalism take it as a realistic, zero-sum game, indicating one’s rise meaning the fall of another. Scholars in defence of the positive role of Chinese nationalism follow a liberalist interpretation. The “flattery” discourse of China’s rise is used to urge China to share more global responsibility (Yee, 2010 p. 3), highlighting the opportunity it created outweigh the challenges it posed to world order. Edward Friedman predicts that post-Mao nationalism could endanger peace in the Pacific-Asia region, which reflects a tendency among strategic analysts in the US and Japan to believe that China is seeking regional hegemony in Asia (Friedman, 1997; Van Ness, 1996). Chen (2005 p. 36) argues that the positive nationalism constructed since the 1980s is “to accommodate both the Chinese desire for a national rejuvenation, and the general welfare of the world community”. David Shambaugh (1996 p. 205) calls it “defensive nationalism”, which is “assertive in form, but reactive in essence”.

In a word, there is no intrinsically moral value of nationalism. State nationalism can be seen as threatening to other states, stability-enhancing for the state, and repressive to ethnic minorities, while ethnic nationalism can be aspirations for liberal and justice for ethnic groups, and at the same time destabilising to the central authority. Whether it is positive or negative depend largely on the eyes of beholders. The way nationalism is framed in a certain social context determines its moral value.

3.9 Entrenching political ideas with master narrative

As analysed above, nationalism is constructed in complex political, social and cultural context. To effectively convey the message out to the public, the CCP needed to offer simplified and catchy slogans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political leader</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Master narrative</th>
<th>Ideological framework</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mao Zedong</td>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Mass line</td>
<td>Marx-Leninism</td>
<td>Class struggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhou Enlai</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Four modernisations</td>
<td>Modernisation</td>
<td>Modernising industry, agriculture, science and technology and military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deng Xiaoping</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Well-off society (xiaokang shehui)</td>
<td>Confucianism</td>
<td>Economic improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Goals</td>
<td></td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1980s</td>
<td>Invigoration of China</td>
<td>Nationalism</td>
<td>More powerful &amp; wealthy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Three-steps strategy</td>
<td>Economic improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Stability overrides everything</td>
<td>Maintaining stability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation</td>
<td>Nationalism</td>
<td>To restore past glory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Three representatives</td>
<td>Marxism-Leninism-Maoism</td>
<td>To represent the development of advanced productive forces, the orientation of advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Harmonious society</td>
<td>Confucianism</td>
<td>Promote harmonious relationship between different groups within China, between people and nature, and between China and the world.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Two Century Goals</td>
<td>Well-off society Socialist modernised China</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>The Chinese dream</td>
<td>Nationalism</td>
<td>Two Century Goals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>By 2021: moderately well-off society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>By 2049: a fully developed nation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2 Evolution of the master narrative in contemporary Chinese political discourse**

It can be seen from this chart that the national story has been shifting between nationalism and Marxism. When the economic improvement is more urgent, the state tend to employ nationalism to stimulate economy. This is consistent with the hypothesis that “nationalist forces may accelerate economic advance by weakening regionally-based pre-modern social structures” (Adelman and Morris, 1965 p. 568). A significant turn from Marxism-based theoretical framework to the emphasis on nationalism and patriotism is since Tian’an men protest in 1989. The legitimacy of the CCP faced great challenge after the “crackdown of demonstrations in the spring of 1989 and the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe” (Wang, 2014 p. 5).

Master narrative is helpful to understand the intentions and the “grand strategy” that the state is aiming at. As Wang (2014 p. 8) argues, the key question to ask is not “about how to measure China’s strength, but how to understand China’s intentions”. The rejuvenation Chinese dream reflects a strong sense of obligation and nostalgia to the restore China in relation to other countries to the extent it had enjoyed in the past. Therefore what outsiders may see as a “rise”, would be regarded a “return”, or a regaining of China’s lost international status, rather than obtaining something entirely new (Deng, 2008 pp. 8–9; Xuetong, 2001; Hunt, 1984; Dittmer and Kim, 1993).
4 The contemporary incarnation of “Grand Union”

The notion of “Grand Union” is a political ideal that has hidden influence throughout China’s political history (N. Yang, 2010 p. 294; Qi, 2015). Although not explicitly spelt out, it has served as a foundation for many other political ideas, for example, maintaining national sovereignty, social stability, economic development, defending external invasions, organising water conservancy project, preventing separatism, strengthening ethnic communications, to name a few (Qi, 2015).

Historian Yang Nianqun articulates that the notion per se contains two implications. On one hand, it projects a sense of national pride in the harmonious existence of various ethnic groups across geographically distinctive regions. On the other hand, the practice of “Grand Union” is always under the shadow of tyranny, dictatorship, and feudalism. According to Yang (2010 p. 57), the notion can be dangerous for three reasons. First, power is centralised at the hand of the emperor, ties the destiny of a whole nation to the judgement of the emperor, making it highly arbitrary. Second, the notion empowered the ruler with a sense of responsibility and superiority, which became an obstacle for social evolution. In addition, extreme forms of obsession with “Grand Union” have resulted in speech crime, or the literary inquisition (wenzi yu) ⁶. Given the ambiguous connotations it contains, Yang argues that this notion could be better understood as a political cultural ideal which is used to match with governance.

“The notion of a centralised state was essentially derived from the Confucian concept of Datong (great harmony) and came to symbolise a presumed historical tradition of cultural unity” (Zhao, 2000 p. 71). Since Qing Dynasty, “Grand Union” had been further crystallised when various policies have taken place to interpret, complement and realise it⁷. When Kang Youwei proposes that external threats need to be combated by strengthening the national identity which is created from five different ethnic groups: the Manchus, Han-Chinese, Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetans (Zhao, 2006 p. 21), the unification of five ethnics is what Kang Youwei called “Grand Union” (Kang 1981; cited in Lin 1984, p.55).

According to Yang (2010 p. 296), until today, it has not only been able to limit China’s governing style, but also shaped Chinese mentality. Because of the fundamental “union” mentality, the CCP was able to gain legitimacy by envisaging a prospect of China without separation. This notion continued to exist implicitly and became the presupposed standard to gauge whether China is unified or spitted. In other words, the notion of “unity”, as well as a closely related notion of territorial integrity in Chinese political discourse derives more from “Grand Union” and its implications on political practices, and

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⁶ The literary inquisition refers to official persecution of intellectuals for their writings. For details, see Zhang and Zhang 2010 “A Review of the Studies on Literary Inquisition of the Qing Dynasty”

⁷ For details, see Yang 2010, “The ‘Grand Union’ historical view from my perspective”
less from the concept of sovereignty in Western political philosophy. Therefore, the construction of “unity” is confined to an ideal status before some parts of China has been taken from unequal treaties. It is with reference to “Grand Union” that the Chinese history textbook created a long list of territories that are claimed to be taken from China when it was week (Friedman, 1997 p. 10). The popularity of “Grand Union” also helps explain the leading role of the CCP. The multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China is a contemporary ramification of the idea of Grand Union. It is designed to blend one-party leadership with popular democracy, and efficiency with diversity (Qi, 2015 p. 36).

As the political ideal of Grand Union highlights collective interests and good leadership, a political multiculturalism, as practiced in the UK, would not be an option for CCP, because it does not answer the question that is fundamental to Chinese political elites: how to accommodate multiculturalism while guaranteeing the loyalty to state nationality (Li, 2006; Zou, 1990). From a Marxist perspective, the unlimited emphasis on heterogeneity of multiculturalism can easily extend to ethno-nationalism, which damaging national unity and stability (Wang, 2010).

Therefore, despite the superficial difference between Socialist democracy and traditional Chinese political regimes, the fundamental pursuit of the “Grand Union” continued. China is still a multi-ethnic nation unified under the leadership of the CCP.

Early sociologist Fei Xiaotong argues that Chinese nation is not a simple addition of 56 ethnic groups. They have integrated into a holistic entity. The national awareness has been an emotion and virtue that is above ethnic identification. Therefore, as Fei puts it, there is multiple layers of social identities, the unity of the Chinese nation based on shared experience, shared destiny, and a shared sense of dignity and humiliation as at the top layer (Fei, 1999 p. 13).

Fei later developed this idea into a theory of “diversity within unity” (duoyuan yiti geju). This theory is based on Marxist inheritance of the unity of opposites, posting that everything in existence is a combination of ultimately contradictory forces. Reflected in history, China as a state is experiencing repeating cycle of unity (he) and division (fen). The cycle is concurrent with the changing status of the contradiction between unity and plurality. When unity took hold, cultural diversity can be strengthened and manifested to a reasonable level; whereas in times of turbulence, political unity has often been prioritised in the whole nation.(Lin, 1991 pp. 9–10).

However, it is worth noting that Fei’s theory confuse a political concept in cultural studies. The idea of “unity” is a political ideal, which did not necessarily exist if one studied it through an anthropological perspective (Ma, 2004 p. 125). Wu Zelin’s fieldwork in Yunnan province indicates that people in border areas were not even aware of being a member of a distinctive ethnic group.
beyond his own small living circle, let alone being a member of a nation at a higher level of the multiple identities.

5 Democracy

Adding a little more depth to this question, it brought us back to the old discussion of whether a drastic democratisation would be inevitable to China. This question is closely relevant because not being genuinely democratic is still the target of many NGOs’ accusations (Amnesty International UK, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2015). In addition, the question of regime type needs to be clarified before moving on to the relationship between democracy and terrorism.

Most Chinese scholars follow party line and favour a gradual reform rather than a radical regime change. They believe that in current international situation, China has no choice but to make every effort to maintain integrity and stability. “China’s current situation absolutely does not allow us time for old-fashioned Western thought. We should immediately abandon superstitions about democracy… we need a government with centralised powers that can produce the best talent that is efficient and competent” (Eastman, 1974 p. 148).

Imposing multi-party election is not necessarily better, because the stable transition of political power to next generation of leadership is crucial to maintain social stability (Qi, 2015 p. 37). Liang Shuming adds that a successful leader in a relatively small polity elected by his constituency is not necessarily capable of handling difficult situations on a larger scale (Liang, 1987). Therefore, compared to a poor imitation of Western election model and breaking up with the long existed political tradition, deepening reform in cadre selection is more practical to maintain stability (Qi, 2015 p. 38).

From a Marxist perspective, “Western” democracy is based on private ownership of means of production and a political philosophy of “natural rights”, whereas Chinese democracy is based on public ownership and the working class. The CCP and Chinese intellectuals follow Marxist claim that the Western version of liberal democracy is in fact capitalist dictatorship. According to Mao Zedong (1940), the “outdated” Western democracy is by nature the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, a one-party fascist dictatorship behind a façade of bourgeois democracy, which is something that the Chinese people would never welcome. The “dictatorship of the proletariat”, coined by Joseph Weydemeyer, is a temporary dictatorial method to overcome the inevitable resistance by the bourgeoisie. The emphasis of the “the dictatorship of the proletariat”, according to Guo (2002, p.101), is the sovereignty in the hand of the people, compared to the king or the church. The purpose of “dictatorship of the proletariat” is to deprive the rights of those who rule by way of dictatorship. The “dictatorship of the proletariat” is proposed as a condition to realise the emancipation of the proletariat, rather than the ultimate goal of socialism and communism (Guo, 2002 p. 101). Following
the majority rule principle as a major democratic spirit, China’s affairs must be decided by the vast masses, and the monopoly of the bourgeoisie government alone must be absolutely rejected (Mao, 1940).

Consequently, Chinese political elites modified Western interpretations of democracy, adding that individual rights can only be realised when the collective interests are protected, or in other word, when the state and society is stable. China lacks the political, social and economic conditions like those in the West when a complete set of political system of democracy has been developed. The democratisation processes was also painful and prolonged in many European countries (Liu, 2005 p. 28). Mao Zedong has realised that Marxist-Leninist theory needs to be adjusted to fit into China’s conditions.

First, democracy by itself would not be directly translated into a successful regime because the rule of majority means that the minority might also be subject to forced subordination (Guo, 2002 p. 102). An extreme variation of majority rule is ochlocracy, whereby the majority does not decide for the best interest of the community. Therefore, it is not the means of democracy that justifies legitimacy, but what sort of end it is approaching to. Likewise, rejecting using the dictatorship against the people is not the same with limiting the power of coercion in dealing with the contradiction with the external enemy, because the former projects dictatorship as an end while the latter a means to achieve harmony.

This is evident also from a linguistic clarification of the term zhengti. Often translated into “regime” and “political system”, it concerns less with the way the state is organised, but primarily with way the state is governed under the rule of highest monarch, using Chinese words, the “art of governing the state” (zhiguo zhidao) (Xu 2007, p.8, cited in Chang 2012, p.6). It further proves that from Chinese understanding, democracy as a means would not satisfy good governance unless combined with other means, even dictatorship.

Democratisation that took place afterwards also supports the claim that democracy as a means does not necessarily lead to good governance. According to Chang, the Utopian understanding that the establishment of a democratic regime is the cure for social problem does not stand up to scrutiny if one looks at the democratisation of East European countries. Promoting democracy without regards to social problems would be counter-productive, and may play a role in inducing nationalist and ethno-nationalist separation movements (Chang, 2012 p. 10). The Western obsession with promoting democracy, as well as popularising democratic peace theory, is derived from a dichotomy between state and society. If society is seen as intrinsically good, then it would be rational to advocate for a form of governance where the power of the state is limited by the people. However, as Chang (2012 p. 10) indicates, this perspective overlooks the positive role of the authority in making and influencing policies.
Second, the party itself is changing. Although the early anti-Feudalism and anti-Imperialism revolution starts with an aspiration towards democracy, the regime type *per se* no longer determines the legitimacy of the ruling party when it began to transform from a revolutionary party to a well-functioning government. As a Chinese saying goes, “seizing power is often easier than holding on to it” (*da jiangshan rongyi, shou jiangshan nan*) (Jiao, 2013). The CCP is well aware of this law, which also why it has contributed such great efforts to maintain social stability. As Deng argues, even according to American experiences of hundreds of years of electoral politics, if China conducts an election in billions of people, a chaos like Culture Revolution will definitely occur, which will eventually lead to a full-scale civil war (Deng, 1989). The polity is laid out in constitution, seeking political pluralism, is by nature seeking regime change (Zou, 1990 p. 17). Based the lessons learnt from the past that power come from military victory, the unity of China had always been a top-down activity, and “no Chinese leader could avoid that heritage” (Wang, 1980 p. 17). “Finer issues such as human rights would simply have to wait” (Wang, 1980 p. 17). Compared to strengthening minority rights and autonomy, which has been advocated by the West, most Chinese thinkers believe that China’s fragile national unity is the more urgent task.

Based on these two points, Mao developed the idea “dictatorship of the proletariat” (*renmin minzhu zhuanzheng*). The theoretical underpinning of this notion is the ways in which different types of social contradictions are understood. According to Mao, there are two major types of social contradictions – the contradiction between the people and enemy, and the contradictions among the people (the proletariat). Mao called for a differentiation in treating with two types of social contradictions: dictatorship (coercion or repression) for the former, and democratic centralism (by means of discussion, criticism, persuasion and education) for the latter. Mao explicates the relationship between the two types of contradictions:

“The aim of this dictatorship is to protect all our people so that they can devote themselves to peaceful labour and make China a socialist country with modern industry, modern agriculture, and modern science and culture. Who is to exercise this dictatorship? Naturally, the working class and the entire people under its leadership. Dictatorship does not apply within the ranks of the people. The people cannot exercise dictatorship over themselves, nor must one section of the people oppress another. Law-breakers among the people will be punished according to law, but this is different in principle from the exercise of dictatorship to suppress enemies of the people. What applies among the people is democratic centralism.” (Mao, 1957)

It can be seen that the word “dictatorship” in Chinese context is translated into two words: “*zhuanzheng*” and “*ducai*”, the former is used in the context of “contradictions within”, and the latter is dealing with the contradiction with the external enemy. In Chinese middle school education, it is
repeatedly taught that confusing these two words would be politically wrong, because the indication of dictatorship against its own people challenges the democratic commitment the CCP has made.

It is dangerous to accept without question the idea that only Western liberalisation is modern. Doing so will intervene current national policy and move China toward Western capitalism (Deng, 1989). Mao’s modification of democracy is one that combines “the centralism based on extensive democracy” and “the democracy under the guidance of central authority”. This formulation is reflected from Mao’s slogan “from the masses, to the masses” (cong qunzhong zhong lai, dao qunzhong zhong qu). The combination of top-down approach and bottom-up approach leads John Naisbitt to coin the term “vertical democracy”. Despite the fact that his “flattery tone” is despised within English language academia, he offered an alternative, context-based application of democracy that is widely welcomed in Chinese academia.

Even though the CCP has adopted a modified version of democracy, Chinese intellectuals have applied the notion pragmatically. They understand democracy as something that “could be a means of communication between government and people to achieve harmony in society as it bring the solidarity of the group and offers the means of national survival in a world of fierce competition” (Zhao, 2010 p. 424). According to Zhao, unlike Western assumption that individuals have particular interest contrary to the general interest of the state, in china popular participation is a sign of civilisation, an attribute of modernity and a pathway toward collective welfare. From this point of view, one possibility is that adopting democracy is a combination of an unwilling bandwagon and refusal to reconcile, in a time it could not resist Americans’ attempt to democratise other countries and could not afford the Americans’ hostility in non-democratic countries in a time when China did not have a better political system to describe how collective interests could be prioritised like it did throughout dynastic history.

Particularly since Xi, China has been following a model of a “state-driven growth combined with strict political control” (Puddington, 2015 p. 19). The CCP governance under Xi shows an increasing tendency of politically left and economic right, or “turning to left with the right turn signal on”. Given Xi’s willingness to reform and his opposition against the idea of an independent judiciary, Kristian McGuire calls him an “authoritarian reformer” (McGuire, 2015). Although there are various policy reforms in policing system (e.g. abolishment of re-education through labour), one-child policy and hukou household registration system, and the expansion of free-trade zones, the CCP under Xi’s leadership has imposed greater restrictions on academic freedom, media and is against “Western values” (McGuire, 2015).

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8 The differentiation of political “left” and “right” is different from the West and different at different times in Chinese history. In this case, Left means conservative, and right liberal.
In relation to terrorism, some would argue that a democratic political culture would curb terrorism because it provides a safe environment to protest for civil liberties. The CCP would not consider democracy as the solution because from its realist standpoint, the major cause for separation movements is the support from the West, rather than resentment caused by bad governance. The fear that less restrictions on surveillance and investigations, limited ability to prevent terrorism attack due to weaker intelligence gathering are the very deepest concern for the CCP. Therefore, the case of China shows that the relationship between democracy and terrorism is not as simple to the extent hypotheses such as “totalitarianism facilitates terrorism” or “democracy allows room for terrorism” could be made. Regime type alone does not explain the situation in China. To understand counter-terrorism in Chinese context, it is not the regime type but the identification of the “other”, or in Marxist words, the changing social contradictions, that shaped China’s security policy.

6 Conclusion: A case for a Chinese school of International Relations?

An underlying theme running through this chapter is constant clarifications of previous confusions caused by either English-Chinese translation or insufficient understanding of cultural and historical context for political issues. It raises the question does it means that a Chinese school of International Relations should be introduced in order to balance the “Western” domination in IR studies. China’s politics is deeply rooted in the its own long-standing history, political ideas and philosophical beliefs, culture and political philosophy, to the extent that some scholars find it difficult to explain its behaviour in international interactions through ready-made IR theories (Deng, 2008 pp. 13–4; Zheng, 2009). Despite its adoption of an ostensible Western Marxist theory, Chinese political elites have been very much affected with its own rationale of how politics work in China. Against this backdrop, a number of Chinese scholars began to argue that a Western dominated IR theories needs to be complemented with Chinese perspectives (see Ren, 2008 p. 293). What Chinese scholars see as “academic hegemony” needs to be confronted with alternative research from non-Western perspectives, in condition that both sides need to be based on unequivocal conceptualisation and rigid reasoning (Mei, 2000 p. 65).

The first question to ask is to what extent that Chinese scholarship would qualify as good research, and subsequently, form effective debate with English language academia. There are some well-acknowledged shortcomings regarding current Chinese scholarly works. Chinese scholars tend to confuse ideological pursuit with national interests, and policy analysis with academic research (Wang, 1995 pp. 11–2) and always filled with repetitive interpretations of the party line and hollow content. Chinese academics agree that “IR with Chinese characteristics” needs to be more academic than “adding footnotes” or “illustrating” China’s behaviour in international community (Li, 2003), in order

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9 For the debate over whether democracy promote or prevent terrorism, see Lutz and Lutz 2010 “Democracy and Terrorism”
to make genuine contribution to academia, and more importantly, effectively enter into conversation with English language scholars. It is not to say that Chinese scholars will eventually need to be approved by English academia. Without the exchange of argumentations and academic debate, the "Chinese school" will only be limited within Chinese academia (despite that they are written in English), making it pointless to call it a "school". As Ren Xiao (2008 p. 295) puts it, "a school does not simply come into being when it is given a name".

The second question is whether it would be appropriate to stress the dichotomy between "English language academia" and its Chinese counterpart. It is it is necessary to clarify what a Chinese school is to bring into human knowledge, and whether it would be legitimate to use Chinese culture to inform theory (Ren, 2008 p. 300). According to Lin Minwang (2013) if social sciences are to produce universal theories to understand the world, than a Chinese school would be complementary and there would be no space for "Chinese characteristics". By contrast, if human understanding is confined by culture, then national experiences, ways of thinking, and collective memory do make a difference, thus a national label for IR theories would be inevitable (Lin, 2013).

Therefore, while blindly applying Western developed IR theories is certainly result in something that is less qualified as knowledge (Zheng, 2009), both healthy criticism and an open mind are to be embraced for people favouring a Chinese school. Even if human knowledge is confined by culture, it does not have a boundary. Knowledge should not be limited within a territorial or linguistic field. If what the Chinese school is proposing is to discursively create this boundary by avoiding using others’ discourse, then it is something critical theorists would reject. Deliberately creating a national boundary of IR theories does not stimulate international debate between China and English language scholars. To break the already existing American and English boundaries, establishing a new system of IR theories is not the only pathway. There are already traces of similar philosophical ideas from ancient classes, to name a few, social contract theory in Confucianism, and realism in the Art of War. An array of studies from a Chinese perspective is also already there (the "unknown known") without explicitly given a name of "Chinese school". The boundary of "Western" knowledge can be pushed to the extent it has a global dimension by discovering and addressing deviations in existing theories from English language literature.
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