A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China

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The decline of Communism after the end of the post-Cold War has seen the rise of nationalism in many parts of the former Communist world. In countries such as the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, nationalism was pursued largely from the bottom up as ethnic and separatist movements. Some observers also take this bottom-up approach to find the major cause of Chinese nationalism and believe that “the nationalist wave in China is a spontaneous public reaction to a series of international events, not a government propaganda.” (Zhang, M. (1997) The new thinking of Sino–US relations. Journal of Contemporary China, 6(14), 117–123). They see Chinese nationalism as “a belated response to the talk of containing China among journalists and politicians” in the United States and “a public protest against the mistreatment from the US in the last several years.” (Li, H. (1997) China talks back: anti-Americanism or nationalism? Journal of Contemporary China, 6(14), 153–160). This position concurs with the authors of nationalistic books in China, such as The China That Can Say No: Political and Sentimental Choice in the Post-Cold War Era (Song, Q., Zhang Z., Qiao B. (1996) Zhongguo Keyi Shuo Bu (The China That Can Say No). Zhonghua Gongshang Lianhe Chubanshe. Beijing), which called upon Chinese political elites to say no to the US, and argue that the rise of nationalism was not a result of the official propaganda but a reflection of the state of mind of a new generation of Chinese intellectuals in response to the foreign pressures in the post-Cold War era. Indeed, Chinese nationalism was mainly reactive sentiments to foreign suppressions in modern history, and this new wave of nationalist sentiment also harbored a sense of wounded national pride and an anti-foreign (particularly the US and Japan) resentment. Many Chinese intellectuals gave voice to a rising nationalistic discourse in the 1990s (Zhao, S. (1997) Chinese intellectuals’ quest for national greatness and nationalistic writing in the 1990s. The China Quarterly, 152, 725–745). However, Chinese nationalism in the 1990s was also constructed and enacted from the top by the Communist state. There were no major military threats to China’s security after the end of the Cold War. Instead, the internal legitimacy crisis became a grave concern of the Chinese Communist regime because of the rapid decay of Communist ideology. In response, the Communist regime substituted performance legitimacy provided by surging economic development and nationalist legitimacy provided by invocation of the distinctive characteristics of Chinese culture in place of Marxist–Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. As one of the most important maneuvers to enact Chinese nationalism, the Communist government launched an extensive propaganda campaign of patriotic education after the Tiananmen Incident in 1989. The patriotic education campaign was well-engineered and appealed to nationalism in the name of patriotism to ensure loyalty in a population that was otherwise subject to many domestic discontents. The Communist regime, striving to maintain authoritarian control while Communist ideology was becoming
obsolete in the post-Cold War era, warned of the existence of hostile international forces in the world perpetuating imperialist insult to Chinese pride. The patriotic education campaign was a state-led nationalist movement, which redefined the legitimacy of the post-Tiananmen leadership in a way that would permit the Communist Party’s rule to continue on the basis of a non-Communist ideology. Patriotism was thus used to bolster CCP power in a country that was portrayed as besieged and embattled. The dependence on patriotism to build support for the government and the patriotic education campaign by the Communist propagandists were directly responsible for the nationalistic sentiment of the Chinese people in the mid-1990s. This paper focuses on the Communist state as the architect of nationalism in China and seeks to understand the rise of Chinese nationalism by examining the patriotic education campaign. It begins with an analysis of how nationalism took the place of the official ideology as the coalescing force in the post-Tiananmen years. It then goes on to examine the process, contents, methods and effectiveness of the patriotic education campaign. The conclusion offers a perspective on the instrumental aspect of state-led nationalism.

The Decline of Communist Ideology and the Rise of Nationalism

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established by a Communist revolution with strong nationalist credentials, as indicated by the classic studies of Benjamin Schwartz and Chalmers A. Johnson (Schwartz, 1951; Johnson, 1962). On 1 October 1949, the founding day of the People’s Republic, Mao Zedong appealed to Chinese nationalism by declaring from the top of Beijing’s Tiananmen gate that “the Chinese people have stood up”. The “new China” in the early 1950s was little Communist because its policies and programs aimed at national greatness and prosperity were ones that any strong national government would have undertaken under the circumstances, and indeed, in a large measure, ones which the KMT (Kuomintang or Nationalist Party) regime had attempted or promised to pursue, albeit without success. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s, the salience of nationalism was shrouded by an overlay of the official ideology, Marxism–Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, promoted by Mao’s political campaigns. After the inception of post-Mao reform in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping launched a campaign to criticize or “reassess” Maoism. His original intention was to eradicate all ideological and psychological obstacles to economic reform. Unexpectedly, it resulted in the demise of the official ideology, which was accompanied by a profound “three belief crises” (sanxin weiji): crisis of faith in socialism (xinxin weiji), crisis of belief in Marxism (xinyang weiji), and crisis of trust in the party (xinren weiji) (Chen, 1995). When Communist official ideology lost credibility, the Communist regime became incapable of enlisting mass support for a vision of the future. Under these circumstances, some intellectuals, particularly the younger generation of intellectuals, turned to Western liberal ideas and called for Western-style democratic reform. The “sanxin weiji” thus evolved into a pro-democracy movement and eventually led to the large-scale Tiananmen demonstration in spring 1989.

From this perspective, the “Tiananmen Incident” could be seen as a result of the bankruptcy of the official ideology. Indeed, when the old official ideology was shattered, the CCP was not able to advance a new one. The functions of the old ideology were replaced with expedient slogans, such as “to get rich” by “practicing” any pragmatic policies. Under these circum-
stances, when the reform brought about such hardships as high inflation and unemployment and the regime did not move quickly enough to compensate people for their losses, there was no effective ideology or long-term vision to inspire the people to bear the suffering for a better future. This situation greatly weakened the basis of mass support for the CCP and gave rise to the anti-government demonstration in Tiananmen Square. To renew official ideology and build broad-based national support for the Communist regime became the most serious challenge to the post-Tiananmen leadership.

The first 2 years after the “Tiananmen Incident” were some of the most politically repressive years in China since 1949. The government concentrated all its efforts on stabilizing the nation. Order was established through the persecution of those who were involved in the democratic movement and administration of draconian penalties for the agitators. The government forcefully reasserted its authority as open dissent and the democratic voice were virtually silenced. At the same time, conservative leaders tried to turn the clock back on the Deng’s reforms by initiating repeated attacks on market-oriented reform policies and attempting to resuscitate Maoist ideology (Zhao, 1993). The conservatives, however, were not successful as they encountered a strong resistance from Deng and other reform leaders who were not willing to abandon lucrative economic reforms. The nation endured a period of political and intellectual stagnation while the party searched for a means of reversing the decline of faith and confidence among the Chinese people. One lesson that the party leaders, reformers and conservatives alike, learned from the “Tiananmen Incident” was that the political indoctrination of the younger generation became an urgent need. They all saw that the “Tiananmen Incident” showed the fatal consequence of loosing “spiritual pillars” (jingshen Zhizhu) which had been incarnated as Marxism–Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought and guided the Chinese people to support and even sacrifice for the regime under Mao. For the reformist leaders, an added lesson was that nothing in the Communist arsenal could now garner mass support and resorting to old Communist ideology was ineffective for indoctrination. They rejected efforts made by conservatives to restore Maoist ideology and looked for something else that could replace Marxism–Leninism dogma as the cohesive ideology to keep the Chinese people together.

Nationalism was thus rediscovered. Deng Xiaoping and his successor, Jiang Zemin, began to wrap themselves in the banner of nationalism which, they found, remained the one bedrock of political belief shared by most Chinese people in spite of the rapid decay of Communist official ideology. It was ironic that pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, while confronting the government, claimed that patriotism drove them to take to the streets in the Spring of 1989. Most people who were involved in the demonstration, both the students and their supporters, also equated promoting democracy with patriotism. Urging the government to stop corruption, to protect citizens rights and to start political reform was considered a most patriotic action. With the renewed discovery of the function of nationalism after the “Tiananmen Incident”, Chinese Communist leaders began to place emphasis on the party’s role as the paramount patriotic force and guardian of national pride in order to find a new basis of legitimacy to bolster faith in a system in trouble and hold the country together during the period of rapid and turbulent transformation. By identifying the party with the nation, the regime would make criticism of the party line an unpatriotic act. The sanctions against China by the Western countries after the “Tiananmen Incident” provided a good opportunity for the Commu-

1. By the same token, most Chinese people, including those who participated in the anti-government demonstration in 1989, supported the government in its offensive military actions against Taiwan in early 1995, because they believed that support for national reunification was a desirable patriotic action.
nist regime to position itself as the representative of the Chinese nation. As much as they could, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin presented their government as the guardian of pan-Chinese economic interests against the Western sanctions. In the name of national interest, they also fought for China’s entry into the WTO (World Trade Organization), and maintenance of the low-tariff treatment on exports to the US, known as MFN status. The most salient example of their effort in identifying the Communist regime with Chinese national pride was the bid to host the year 2000 summer Olympic games in Beijing. Although Beijing failed to get the games, Chinese popular resentment was directed at foreign countries and human rights groups whose bullying was blamed for the failure.

Indeed, nationalism is a powerful and nearly universal sentiment affecting national and international politics in the modern world. The power of nationalism comes from the fact that it “locates the source of individual identity within a ‘people’, which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity.” (Greenfeld, 1992, p. 3). Joseph S. Nye finds that, in modern world history, “nationalism proved to be stronger than socialism when it came to bonding working classes together, and stronger than capitalism that bound bankers together.” (Nye, 1993, p. 61). This is also true in modern Chinese history. After modern nationalist doctrines were embraced by Chinese political elites in the late 19th century, the water of nationalism steadily engulfed all that stood in its path. Other movements and ideologies waxed and waned, but nationalism permeated them all.

Theoretically speaking, nationalism is a rather recent product of the nation-state system, which was established first in Europe and later spread to other parts of the world along with Western imperialist expansion. Unlike much of Europe, “China was not carved out of a welter of remnant feudal suzerainties and city-states under the impetus of 19th-century nationalist romanticism.” (Unger, 1996, p. xii). Chinese nationalism is rooted in the long, humiliating century starting in 1842 when British troops defeated the Chinese army to preserve the British dominated opium trade. During the century following the Opium War, foreign imperialists carved out spheres of influence, sold opium to the Chinese masses, enjoyed the protection of the extraterritoriality in their enclaves on Chinese soil, and frequently embarked on armed invasions of China to punish the Chinese for some act of disobedience. During the long century of humiliation, China struggled to rid itself of foreign imperial powers. Because the origin of Chinese nationalism was a reaction to foreign suppressions, it has contained strong anti-foreign, especially anti-Western, mentality. In 1900, anti-Westernism fueled the Boxer Rebellion and the slaughter of foreign missionaries and their converts. The Versailles settlement left in Japan’s hands German possessions in Shandong and gave rise to the slogan of anti-imperialism in the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Since then, anti-foreign imperialism remains a central theme in the Chinese nationalist discourse.

The concept of nationalism is often expressed in Chinese as aiguozhuyi (patriotism). At the same time, it should be noted that the PRC government never officially endorsed nationalism. The sentiments of the Chinese people were not described as nationalistic but aiguo or patriotic, which in Chinese literally means “loving the state”. CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin emphasized, in 1990, that “the patriotism we advocate is by no means a parochial nationalism.” (Jiang, 1990). In the PRC official discourse, the terms “nationalism” and “chauvinism” referred to parochial and reactionary attachments to nationalities, whereas “patriotism” was love and support for China, always indistinguishable from the Chinese state and the Communist Party. From this perspective, Chinese patriotism can be understood as a state-centric conception of nationalism or, in Charles Tilly’s term, a “state-led nationalism”. Under state-led nationalism, “rulers who spoke in a nation’s name successfully demanded that citizens identify themselves
with that nation and subordinate other interests to those of the state.” (Tilly, 1995, p. 190).

This was exactly what patriotism demanded in China. Michael Hunt observed that “by professing aiguo, Chinese usually expressed loyalty to and a desire to serve the state, either as it was or as it would be in its renovated form.”

As a conception of state-led nationalism in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), patriotism portrays the Communist state as the embodiment of the nation’s will, seeking for its goals the kind of loyalty and support granted the nation itself and trying to create a sense of nationhood among all its citizens. This feature was stated by People’s Daily editorial on the 1996 National Day: “Patriotism is specific… Patriotism requires us to love the socialist system and road chosen by all nationalities in China under the leadership of the Communist Party.” This statist feature contrasts with Chinese nationalism in the early 20th century, which displayed a strong ethnic strain in opposing imperialism and Manchu rule.

The adoption of state-centric nationalism by the PRC was largely due to the decisive military triumph of the People’s Liberation Army which extended PRC sovereignty quickly into most of the old imperial territories and faced the CCP with the reality of a multinational state: approximately 92% of its population consisting of Han Chinese, the other 8% non-Han Chinese were divided officially among 55 minority nationalities. The total area of the minority nationalities amounts to 64% of China’s territory (Dreyer, 1976; Heberer, 1989; Ma, 1989). To avoid ethnic conflict within the PRC, the CCP committed itself to state-led nationalism as a doctrine for creating a single Chinese nation. For the same reason, the PRC government prefers to use patriotism over nationalism. As a Hong Kong scholar indicated, “nationalism is a less acceptable term to Beijing leaders, as it may arouse nationalistic fervor among the 55 minority groups, each clamoring for its own identity. Patriotism is a more acceptable non-political notion to the Chinese central government as it helps the people focus on problems and challenges they shared in common.” (Kao, 1996, p. 11).

State-led nationalism asserts that the Chinese nation includes all PRC citizens irrespective of their nationality. It acknowledges the ethnic differences among China’s population but insists that all are members of a large nation that binds them together by the Communist state. State-led nationalism calls concentration of political loyalty on the state led by the Communist Party and repudiates the idea that Chinese history and culture are purely a Han affair. At the broadest level, state-led nationalism and its nation-building aspirations invest state policy with a nationalistic tone. Development becomes a national cause. Transformation into a powerful and modernized country is a collective effort involving all of the state’s territories and peoples. Economic, political, and social policy-making and implementation all accompany or infuse official propaganda emphasizing national unity, goals, and accomplishments. It is from this perspective that James Townsend stated that “the real nationalist revolution in China came after 1949 in the building of an infrastructure that reached all of the state’s citizens and regions.” (Townsend, 1992, p. 119).

Launching the Patriotic Education Campaign

Although nationalism always constituted an important component of Chinese Communist ideology, it was never singled out as a spiritual crutch for the Communist regime. Coming to the renewed realization of the power of nationalism after the pillars of Marxist ideology crumbled,

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2. Because of its state-centric nature, Michael Hunt argues against reducing Chinese patriotism to the Western term nationalism (Hunt, 1994, p. 63).
post-Tiananmen leadership focused its efforts on fostering state-supported loyalty to the regime by launching a campaign of patriotic education (aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu). At the beginning of the campaign, the conservative and reform-minded leaders of the Party had different emphasis on the primary issue in the agenda of the campaign. The conservatives, such as Ding Guangeng (Director of the CCP Central Propaganda Department) and Deng Liqun (former director of the Central Propaganda Department), regarded the West as a fabricated enemy and tried to turn the patriotic education into fundamentalist assaults on the so-called heping yanbian (peaceful evolution) strategy of the capitalist West. The reform-minded leaders, led by Deng Xiaoping, worried about the potential damage that the campaign against bourgeois liberalization could bring to China’s economic reform and, therefore, wanted to limit the campaign to youth education on patriotism and traditional culture. After Deng Xiaoping made his famous southern China tour in early 1992 to garner support for continuing economic reform, the patriotic education was unfolded as a youth education campaign. Strenuous effort was made at patriotic indoctrination and guoqing jiaoyu (state of the nation education), aimed particularly at intellectuals and the youth.

The first official document on patriotic education, a “Circular on Fully Using Cultural Relics to Conduct Education in Patriotism and Revolutionary Traditions”, was issued by the CCP Central Propaganda Department in 1991, 2 years after the Tiananmen Incident. The campaign was carried out in full scale after Deng Xiaoping’s tour of southern China. A period of relative political stability and intellectual stagnation, combined with economic frenzy after Deng Xiaoping’s tour, created the possibility for a confluence of interests under the umbrella of patriotism. In January 1993, one year after Deng’s trip, the State Education Commission issued a document, “Program for China’s Education Reform and Development,” which laid out patriotism as a guiding principle for China’s educational reform. In November of the same year, the CCP Central Propaganda Department, the State Education Commission, the Ministry of Broadcast, Film, and Television, and the Ministry of Culture jointly issued a “Circular on Carrying Out Education in Patriotism in Primary and Secondary Schools Throughout the Country by Films and Television”. As a result of implementing the document, by May 1994, more than 95% of primary and middle school students in Beijing were organized to watch the patriotic films recommended by the State Education Commission. Beijing cinemas and television stations aired the films and some projection teams were sent to the mountainous areas to show films for local students. TV stations copied video tapes for schools in the suburban mountainous areas. Beijing’s students wrote more than 1.5 million articles about what they learned from the heroes or heroines in the films. A student wrote in his article that

Hai Wa (a little hero in the film, “Urgent Letter”) did not have down clothes and new books, I have even had modern model planes and robots, but he was bright and warm-hearted, sacrificing his sheep—the key source of income for his family—in his efforts to fight against the enemy (of the Japanese). I will learn from his spirit. (Xinhua, 1994a)

A national on-the-site meeting (xianchanghui) on patriotic education in primary and middle schools was held in Shanghai on 18–21 May 1994. The meeting was jointly hosted by the Central Propaganda Department, the State Education Commission, the Radio, Film, and Television Ministry, the Cultural Ministry, and the Communist Youth League of China Central Committee. In June 1994, a national conference on education adopted a document, “Guidelines for the Patriotic Education”, which embraced the patriotic themes of the 1993 program and disseminated down to all educational institutions from kindergartens to universities. After the Guidelines were passed down, for the first time in China since university entrance examinations
were reinstated in the late 1970s, students applying for science subjects at colleges were exempted from the notorious Marxist political science exam, which had been used by the authorities to gauge the political correctness of students entering university but was widely resented. Instead, patriotic education courses were added to the curriculum of high schools and colleges. The Marxist political science examination had been an anachronism. For a long time students simply regurgitated the correct answers in the exam without thinking. The demise of this examination was welcomed by students and teachers alike. As a matter of fact, by getting rid of the Marxist political science examination, the government removed one more source of tension between the students and the authorities. Students claimed that the State Education Commission forced students to study Marxist doctrine and Communist Party propaganda and gave students something to rebel against (Crothall, 1994, p. 8). However, to abolish the political science examination did not mean the authorities were easing up on the student population. In fact it was quite the opposite. Instead of focusing on political dogma to keep students in line, the authorities now switched to the softer approach of patriotic education. At the time of abolishing political dogma examination, the authorities launched the “I am Chinese” program in universities, which taught students to be proud of being Chinese by concentrating on the “great achievements” of the Chinese people and especially the Communist Party. The aim was to win more respect for the party by demonstrating what it had done for the people of China. By appealing to the students’ sense of patriotism rather than trying to convert them to Marxism, the Communist regime hoped to reassert the moral authority of the party.

The patriotic education campaign reached a climax when the CCP Central Committee issued a Central Document, “The Outline for Conducting Patriotic Education”, drafted by the Central Propaganda Department and carried in Renmin Ribao on 6 September 1994. This Outline laid out the objective of conducting education in patriotism “to boost the nation’s spirit, enhance its cohesion, foster its self-esteem and sense of pride, consolidate and develop a patriotic united front to the broadest extent, and direct and rally the masses’ patriotic passions to the great cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics”. Although education in patriotism was for everyone, the Outline particularly singled out youth as a targeted group and called for incorporating education in patriotism into teaching at kindergartens all the way through the universities, and into the entire process of educating people.

Some specific “guidelines” were offered for teaching the youth correct patriotism. The guidelines spelt out a curriculum to be used in a patriotic classroom, of which the following was a condensed list: (1) Chinese history (especially modern history and the rise of the CCP) and tradition; (2) China’s characteristics and realities and their incompatibility to Western values; (3) CCP legendary and heroic stories of revolutionary martyrs; (4) CCP’s fundamental principles and policies; (5) The great achievements of the party rule in China’s modernization process; (6) socialist democracy and rule of law in contrast to the Western conception of rule of law; (7) national security and defense issues in the context of preventing a peaceful evolution and fighting against external hostile forces; (8) the peaceful reunification of the nation and the theory of “one country, two systems”. The emphasis was China’s national conditions (guoqing) in the historical, economic, political, military, diplomatic, social, and cultural fields and in areas of population and resources. The purpose was to help the young people understand where China was strong, where it lagged behind, and what were its favorable and unfavorable conditions so as to enhance their sense of historical mission and responsibility.

On the day of publishing the Outline, Renmin Ribao carried an editorial that urged party and government agencies at all levels to understand carefully the spirit of the Outline and launch a nationwide campaign of publicizing and implementing the Outline in tandem with
the celebration activities for the 45th anniversary of the PRC in October of that year. All localities were urged to list the implementation of the outlines into their work agendas and draft a concrete patriotic education plan in accordance with local conditions. Propaganda organizations in all localities were also called to shoulder the responsibility of coordination and guidance, under the unified leadership of local party committees so as to make a success of the implementation work. In facilitating implementation of the Outline, the publisher of Shishi Baogao of the CCP Central Propaganda Department published The Selected Works for Studying Patriotic Education, which was edited by the Propaganda and Education Bureau of the Department, “to help ideological propagandists, the leading cadres and staff of party and government organs at all levels and grass-roots cadres and people to study and understand the spirit of the ‘Outlines for conducting patriotic education’ and thoroughly to carry out various tasks set forth in the ‘Outline’ while at work.” (Xinhua, 1994b). This propaganda publication collected expositions, speeches, and articles on patriotism and patriotic education by Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin; the Outlines of Patriotic Education; the Report on the Survey of Patriotic Education; other documents on patriotic education issued by the central authorities, the CCP Central Committee’s Propaganda Department and other relevant departments in recent years; and some departments’ and localities’ exemplary experiences in conducting patriotic education. Beijing’s Xinhua hailed that

This publication has very comprehensive contents and is essential reading material for the mass of cadres and people in studying the “Outline for conducting Patriotic Education” and launching the patriotic education campaign. (Xinhua, 1994b)

After the Outline was published, the campaign for patriotic education was in full swing. Military exercises conducted by the PLA off Taiwan from August 1995 to March 1996 boosted a new patriotic fever among the Chinese people. Patriotism remained a central theme of the Communist propaganda after the military exercise. The 1996 National Day editorial of the People’s Daily portrayed patriotism as part of “guohun” (the national soul) that “reflects state interests and national will”. It continued to say that patriotism “can bring into full play the potential of all nationalities, is the most effective way of cementing the strength of all nationalities… to create great undertakings that will shake heaven and earth”. Speaking at the conclusion of a 4-day national meeting of senior propaganda cadres in January 1997, Ding Guangen, a CCP Politburo member and the director of the Central Propaganda Department, said that celebrations over the Hong Kong handover should be a “catalyst for patriotic fervor and for arousing the spirit of nationalism. The return of Hong Kong to the motherland has washed away 100 years of shame and realized the expectations of the Chinese race for a century.” (Xinhua, 1997).

Because the patriotic education campaign put emphasis on youth, all schools, from kindergarten to the university level, turned their classrooms into a forum for fostering patriotic sentiment. High schools and colleges imbued their courses with patriotic viewpoints for students. In addition to two major political education courses, namely, Marxist Theory, and Ideology and Politics, one new course, Guoqing (The State of Nation),3 was added in various schools. Such courses as Traditional Chinese Culture, History of Chinese Art, Theory on Traditional Chinese Paintings, Chinese Calligraphy, and Lectures on Patriotism were also included in

3. During a trip to China in the fall of 1996, this author collected more than a dozen different versions of Guoqing education textbooks published by many official publishers used for junior high, senior high, technical schools, colleges and universities, also a huge Zhonghua Aiguo Zhuyi Dacidian (Grand Dictionary of Chinese Patriotism) published by Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi Chuban She.
teaching curricula. Apart from the young students, young soldiers and officers were likewise targeted by the patriotic education campaign. The PLA General Political Department issued a circular soon after the Outline was published, which outlined plans for implementing the Outline and called on party committees and political organs at all levels in the army to attach great importance and to pay close attention to implementing the Outline in close conjunction with the realities (xianshi) in Army units. Weekly patriotic sing-alongs were initiated in the army. Soldiers and officers were taught to subordinate personal ambitions to the need of the motherland and the socialist cause. Soldiers took part in a quiz to show their love of the motherland and display their selfless spirit. Besides the schools and the army, the Chinese people from all sectors were also mobilized to participate in the Patriotic education campaign. Forums to discuss patriotism were organized in government agencies, enterprises, research institutes, neighborhood committees, and villages. All Chinese people, particularly the young cadres, workers, and farmers, were targeted to take patriotic lessons.

In order to create a social atmosphere favorable for conducting patriotic education, all tourist spots, such as museums, memorials, historical (especially revolutionary) sites, cultural relics, conservation units, popular architecture sites and even local community (town and village) centers were ordered to highlight their patriotic identities. One hundred movies glorifying the CCP were nominated and distributed to the public, particularly students, during the patriotic education campaign. In addition, there was an effort to name a hundred prominent Chinese national heroes; a hundred great achievements and technologies in the PRC history. A building to be named “China at the Turn of the New Century”, occupying 2000 acres of land in Beijing, was built to exhibit the material collected for these propaganda series and become a national center for patriotic education. A patriotic theme park is also planned in the capital. Many historic sites were designated as patriotic education bases for the Chinese people, such as those in northeast China, which experienced the atrocities of Japanese aggressors during the war. These locations receive hundreds of thousands of visitors every year according to an October 1996 Xinhua report. The history of the Japanese invasion in northeast China dates back to the Sino–Japanese War of 1894 and 1895 and the Russo–Japanese war, when Japanese troops occupied the East Liaoning Peninsula, Lushun Port (Port Arthur) and the Manchurian Railway. On the night of 18 September 1931, Japanese troops stationed in northeast China started the war that led to the invasion of China. There are more than 30 sites marking the Japanese invasion in northeast China, according to the Cultural Relics Administration Departments. Four of them were designated by the State Council to be under key state protection, and the others were under local protection. From 1992 to 1996, more than ten million Chinese yuan were put into the protection of the sites, and a number of museums were restored or set up. The museum of the criminal testimony of army unit 731 in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, received more than three million people a year.4

During the campaign, students were organized to visit historical sites for patriotism education such as the museum of revolutionary martyrs, to listen to reports on China’s current situation and to tour various museums relevant to the courses of guoqing (the state of the nation). One Xinhua report stated that, in Hangzhou city of east China’s Zhejiang province, some 4000 university students visited sites of historical importance and attended report meetings in the month after the Outline was published. The China School of Fine Arts in the province prepared a grand show with the theme of Dr Sun Yat-sen and Overseas Chinese, which featured several

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4. Army unit 731 was engaged in chemical warfare and experimented with chemical weapons on thousands of Chinese. “Relics of Japanese Invasion Turned into Patriotic Education Bases”, Xinhua, 22 October 1996.
hundred traditional Chinese paintings, oil paintings and engraving works. Singing contests of patriotic songs, shows of patriotic films and the start of national music clubs became popular in local colleges and universities in the province. Full indoctrination was also achieved through a coordinated effort of every propaganda channel possible such as books, magazines, newspapers, TV/radio shows, video/audio products, art exhibitions, mass rallies, story telling sessions (in kindergartens) and so on. In addition, festival celebrations were used not only for recreational activities for masses but enabled them to receive education for patriotism. In particular, mass displays of patriotic sentiment were given prominence on all traditional holidays, such as the Lunar New Year and national holidays like the National Day (1 October), Labor Day (1 May), Army Day (1 August), the Party’s Birthday (1 July), and Children’s Day (1 June). With all power and sources tightly controlled in its hands, the CCP was able to create a favorable social environment for its patriotic education campaign.

The Contents of Patriotic Education

The CCP consistently used patriotism in conjunction with many other ideological thoughts and dogma in educating the Chinese people, but never before in history singled out patriotism as the primary subject of propaganda. The patriotic education campaign represented a state-led effort to rebuild the legitimacy of the post-Tiananmen leadership in a way that would permit the Communist Party’s rule to continue on the basis of non-Communist ideology rather than the Marxism or anti-traditional iconoclasm that until recently were among Chinese Communists’ defining traits. Indeed the patriotic education campaign was ambiguous in identifying its goals in Marxist terms. The goals were simply defined as rejuvenating China’s national spirit, strengthening the unity of all people of different ethnic groups, reconstructing the sense of national esteem and dignity and building the broadest possible coalition under the leadership of the CCP. Although the essence of the patriotic education campaign was to make the Chinese people support the leadership of the Communist Party, the content of the patriotic education was non-Communist. Marxism–Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought were abandoned in all but name in the campaign. In a way, the campaign deliberately blurred the lines between patriotism, nationalism, socialism, and Communism. As CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin said, “in China today, patriotism and socialism are unified in essence.” (Ming, 1990, p. 15). Patriotic education was placed as the corner stone of a socialist spiritual civilization and patriotism replaced Communism as “the common spiritual pillar” of the Chinese people and “the powerful spiritual force that supports the Chinese people.” (Renmin Ribao, 1993).

The content of patriotic education stipulated in the 1994 Outline was wide-ranging but two themes dominated the campaign. One was Chinese tradition and history and the other was national unity and territorial integrity.

The long history of China and Chinese traditional culture held a prominent place in the education. Special emphasis was given to the Chinese national development process characterized by its unceasing efforts to improve itself and to struggle against foreign aggression and oppression after repeated setbacks. The CCP tried to discover a non-Communist past of the PRC, and define patriotism in terms that had everything to do with Chinese history and culture and almost nothing to do with Marxist tradition. After the Outline was published in 1994, Li Ruifhuan, the Chairman of China’s People’s Political Consultant Conference, broke a long-standing Communist taboo against ancestor worship by laying flowers and planting a pine tree by the mausoleum of China’s Yellow Emperor, the legendary ancestor of the Chinese people. That legend was spun by nobles in 450 BC, who transformed a local agrarian god into a
common ancestor to legitimize their claim to power. As an historical site, the mausoleum drew many visitors during the patriotic education campaign. The Great Wall was also celebrated as an armory of official patriotism, rather than a symbol of the Emperor Qinshihuang, one of the worst tyrants in Chinese history (Waldron, 1995). The celebration of the Great War was accompanied by the revival of Confucianism and other Chinese traditional cultural activities. Icons in Tiananmen Square, itself symbolic of the mandate of heaven in imperial times, were reshuffled. National day celebrations no longer included large portraits of the Communist philosophers Marx and Engels. Instead, a giant portrait of the non-Communist Chinese nationalist Sun Yat-sen stands alone in the square. In the official statement on the patriotic education campaign, “Chinese people’s patriotism and brave patriotic deeds” rather than CCP’s socialist experiments became “the greatest epics ever written in the Chinese history and they represent a glorious page in world history.” (Teuter Textline, 1994). The leadership of the CCP was claimed because of CCP’s patriotism in China’s long struggle for national independence and prosperity not because of its Communist ideals. Patriotism rather than Communism, thus, became the basis of the CCP’s rule of legitimacy. This was clearly stated in one Renmin Ribao commentary:

Since its birth, our party has paid close attention to educating party members and the masses in inheriting and developing patriotism. Patriotism, which constitutes an important component of socialist spiritual civilization, has become more important in the new period of reform and opening up… the Chinese people chose the CCP as their leading force because through history they understand that only the CCP can represent the people’s fundamental interests, take a correct road, and lead the people in fulfilling the grand target of making the country strong. (Renmin Ribao, 1993)

Another emphasis of the patriotic education campaign was national unity and territorial integrity. In this regard, the Communist government took every opportunity to instigate nationalist resentment against foreign pressures. China’s foreign relations thus became an important component of education. To this effort, numerous examples of interference in China’s domestic affairs by hostile foreign forces were provided to the Chinese people as an integral part of patriotic education. International condemnation of the crack-down on the pro-democracy movement in 1989 was presented to the Chinese people as a well-coordinated effort to intervene China’s domestic affairs and change China’s political system; China’s failed bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games was interpreted as an anti-Chinese plot of the West; the detection of the massive use of illegal drugs and stimulants by Chinese athletes and the subsequent disqualification of these athletes from the international games were reported as a Western conspiracy to humiliate China and the Chinese people; the debate on China’s Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status in the US and the international campaign for human rights in China were construed as attempts to “Westernize” or “contain” China; intellectual property rights friction with the United States was labeled an American attempt at cultural intrusion; Taiwan’s president Lee Teng-hui’s visit to the US was portrayed as a US scheme to tear China apart; and Hong Kong residents’ demands for more democracy were described as an international effort to turn Hong Kong into an anti-China base.

Wang Jisi, Director of the American Studies Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences said the objective of Chinese patriotism education was to build a “politically, economically and culturally unified nation-state when foreign and largely Western influences are seen as eroding the nation-state’s very foundation.” (quoted from Chanda and Kari, 1995, p. 21). China’s Foreign Affairs Ministry and other government agencies such as Hong Kong and Macao affairs and Taiwan affairs offices provided figures, statistics, pictures and articles in
support of the patriotic education effort that could be disseminated for public consumption. The regime thus created a sense of crisis among the Chinese people, in an attempt to convince them that international “hostile forces” were doing everything they could to take these territories away from China, or to prevent China from taking them back. These presentations told the Chinese people, especially the younger generation that, if not for the strong leadership of the CCP in fighting against these conspiracies, China would fall apart.

The Methods and Effectiveness of the Patriotic Education

In comparison with previous propaganda campaigns launched by the CCP, especially those in the Maoist years, the patriotic education campaign in the 1990s was carried out in a much more practical and sophisticated way of selling the CCP’s ideas and agenda. The phrase “great, glorious, and correct” was no longer used very often to describe the party in the patriotic education campaign. The tone was changed to glorify China as a nation-state and the party as the guardian of Chinese national interests. The campaign was to build up Chinese national pride and, in the meantime, to create a sense of siege. It tried to convince the Chinese people that the best way to love and defend the nation was to love and defend the state under the leadership of the CCP. Never before in the history of the PRC had an educational campaign been so pragmatic and so systematically executed. In the Maoist years, propaganda was dominated by empty slogans and unrealistic proclamations of dedication to the socialist cause. Official propaganda was full of lies, people quickly grew tired of official propaganda campaigns. The radical political campaigns with noble ideas without substance did not boost confidence in the CCP, but actually cultivated deep suspicion of government intentions and numbed the Chinese people to the words. Compared with the Maoist approach, the propaganda in the 1990s was “dressed-up”. The patriotic education campaign was carried out after the success of China’s opening up and rapid economic growth of the past decade. The Chinese people now had more access to information about the outside world and were noticeably better off in their standard of living. The campaign was thus easily dressed up with true (one-sided, sometimes) figures, statistics and stories to lend credence to the propaganda.

The patriotic education campaign featured a multifaceted approach to building patriotic sentiment that could establish broadly based support for the CCP. Chen Xitong, former Secretary of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee, called patriotic education “xitong gongchen” (systems engineering). At the standing committee meeting of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee, held soon after the Outline was issued in September 1994, Chen reported that diverse forms of patriotic education activities were adopted in Beijing. At the preceding stage, the municipality exhibited and showed 100 patriotic education films, established patriotic education bases and launched the activities of raising national flags in primary and middle schools. Meanwhile, the activities of strolling around Beijing, loving Beijing and building Beijing developed in the activities of singing about Beijing, talking about Beijing, writing about Beijing, sketching Beijing and picturing Beijing. And, the mass discussion activities entitled “I am the policeman of the capital’s people”, “I am the public servant of the capital’s people” and “I am the teacher of the capital’s people” also spread gradually throughout the municipality. According to Chen, “all these activities are good forms of vivid and lively mass patriotic education. These activities have enhanced Beijing people’s sense of glory, sense of responsibility, sense of pride and idea of patriotism.” (Ding, 1994, p. 1).

Indeed, propagandists in the 1990s were not content simply writing slogans on walls, they were more sophisticated than their predecessors. Special Communist symbols were presented
in ways that drew on generalized Chinese patriotism. A good example was the new emphasis on the PRC flag, National Anthem and Emblem. On 28 June 1990, a National Flag Law was passed by the National People’s Congress, which set standards for a daily flag-raising ceremony in Tiananmen Square. The Outline for Conducting Patriotic Education in 1994 specifically called for a strict implementation of the flag-raising system and vigorous efforts to encourage local party committees and people’s governments to hoist the national flag at important meeting halls and meeting places in a solemn, serious, and standardized way. Day-time elementary and middle schools were asked to implement a system of raising and lowering the national flag. Solemn flag-raising ceremonies were also encouraged during group activities, such as ceremonies to begin a new school term, graduation, and sports meetings in schools. All localities were encouraged to organize citizens of 18 years or older to hold adult ceremonies to raise allegiance to the national flag. Adult citizens and students at and above the third grade in primary schools were required to be able to sing the national anthem, and understand the contents of the national anthem and the meaning of the national flag and emblem. During national flag-raising ceremonies, grand meetings, and other activities, the national anthem was required to be played and singing the words to it was encouraged. Singing the national anthem was regarded as a sacred act, which allows citizens to express their patriotic sentiments. The flag-raising ceremony in Tiananmen Square has become a daily attraction to both tourists and Beijing residents. For many Chinese tourists, the flag-raising is the most important thing to see in the capital. Watching the flag-raising ceremony, one tourist said that “the flag represents my country. No matter the difficulty and danger, I want to do whatever I can to keep our flag waving.” (Liu, 1994, p. 9).

To a great extent, the patriotic education served its purpose, evident in the strong support of the government’s positions against foreign pressures by many Chinese people, particularly by the younger generation of intellectuals. One Western observer found that

Patriotic education has worked where political science (Communist indoctrination) failed. Today’s students are far less willing to criticize the party because to do so would be seen somehow as being unpatriotic. Furthermore, the students have seen living standards rise and China’s position in the world improve markedly over the past five years. (Crothall, 1994, p. 8)

Indeed, although rampant corruption, committed mostly by CCP officials, and many other socioeconomic problems in China undermined the legitimacy of the Communist regime, whenever China’s international position was at stake, many Chinese people seemed to go with the government, saying that no matter how corrupt the government was, foreigners have no right to make unwarranted remarks about China and the Chinese people. “The Supremacy of Chinese Interests” (Zhonghua Liyi Zhishang) is the title of one chapter in China Still Can Say No, a follow-up book by the same authors of The China That Can Say No. These authors stated that one of reasons why they “identified with the position of the Chinese government” was to prevent those anti-China’s foreigners from getting benefit (Song et al., 1996, p. 47). A junior at Nanjing University, responding to an American visitor’s questions about the students attitudes toward the US sending two aircraft carriers to the Taiwan Strait in early March 1996, said, “It seems to me the role the United States is playing as a world cop is comical. It is none of your business, so why are you putting your foot in it?” This student added: “We have a saying in Chinese for something that seems out of place: It is like the dog chasing the mouse.” (Tyler, 1996, p. 4).

Indeed, the Chinese leadership’s effort to identify the Communist regime with the Chinese nation could be particularly effective when it faced challenges from perceived hostile foreign
countries. The Chinese people became sensitive to foreign pressures particularly after economic reform opened China’s doors and made China much more interdependent with the outside world. Under these circumstances, many of China’s domestic affairs, even the daily life of the people, were closely related to China’s foreign relations. After the end of the Cold War, China was under heavy pressure from the United States on issues of human rights, intellectual property rights, trade deficits, weapons proliferation. Sino–US relations also entangled in the Taiwan issue. The voice of containment of China reached its peak in Western media when China launched military exercises in the Taiwan Strait following Lee Teng-hui’s visit to the US in May 1995. Under these circumstances, Chinese people became more receptive to the official propaganda that drew parallels between China’s difficulties in its international interactions today with the former imperialism. Widespread indignation about past inequalities and lost greatness, reinforced by the patriotic propaganda, resulted in little tolerance for criticism from abroad. Suspicion of the United States prevailed among many Chinese people after the US sent two aircraft carrier battle groups to “protect” Taiwan in March 1996.

This situation helped narrow a marked gap between the Chinese official propaganda and the popular portrait of the West. For years, many Chinese were so disillusioned by the official propaganda that they assumed the truth must be just the opposite of what the propaganda said. However, after Chinese people had their own sources of information from the Voice of America (VOA), the BBC, and even had chances to visit Western countries in person as contact with the West widened in the 1990s, there was a convergence of perceptions about the West because many Chinese people found the behavior of the West similar to the portrait by the official propaganda. Many Chinese people tended to concur with the official position that the failure of the Chinese bid for the 2000 Olympics was orchestrated by Western bullies, the United States was a “black hand” behind the Taiwan and Tibet independence movements and a “liar” about China’s human rights. Concurring with the government portrayal of Western hostility, a ranking government official declared that “We won’t allow anyone to come and tear us apart. This is the deepest part of the Chinese soul”. He said that he continued to stay in the Communist Party only because “it is the best vehicle for his nationalist sentiments.” (Mufson, 1996, p. A1).

**Conclusion**

This study shows that a vigorous official propaganda campaign in patriotic education was behind the seemingly spontaneous rise of Chinese nationalism in the 1990s. It could not easily emerge without Communist state sponsorship. State-led Chinese nationalism was characterized by pragmatic concerns of the Chinese government over overriding domestic crises. The leading advocate of Chinese nationalism, the Communist state, stressed more the pragmatic or instrumental aspect of nationalism rather than the intrinsic value of nationalism in order to create a sense of commonalty among citizens when the regime faced a threat to its legitimacy.

In this regard, although the patriotic education served its purpose of building national support for the Communist regime, it confirms Lucian Pye’s observation that Chinese nationalism has a “problem of lack of content”, as it is reduced to the expression of a political party’s current policies (Pye, 1993, p. 126). In no country can nationalism be reduced merely to the sum of a party’s policy preferences. Scalapino makes a distinction between mass identifications that derive from a sense of commonalty (and may lend themselves to either national unity or division) and those identifications promoted by the government to justify policies or to manipulate the populace. The two levels can be mutually complementary but are by no means identical (Scalapino, 1994). Although state-led nationalism is instrumental for the Communist regime
to justify its policy, it lacks rich content that can give a real sense of commonality. The ideals of nationalism with all of its myths and symbols should have their own domain, well above the arena of contemporary policy programs of a political party. The effort to restore Chinese traditional culture in the patriotic education campaign may be a pragmatic way of promoting nationalism, but there was a void as to the cultural ideals that could provide the substantive content for Chinese nationalism because the historical legacies of Chinese tradition had been so harshly attacked for so long since the May Fourth Movement. In particular, 40 years of sustained attacks by the Communist regime on traditional Chinese culture left China with a relatively inchoate and incoherent form of nationalism without a substantive core that could be readily articulated. This problem can be easily illustrated by looking at the curriculum spelled out in the Outline for Patriotic Education, in which Chinese history is simplified largely as the CCP history and the great achievements of the Chinese people are attributed to the leadership of the Communist Party.

In this case, state-led nationalism appealed most to somewhat simplified or idealized Chinese history and traditions. Between the two extremes of either nihilistically denouncing the Chinese past or romanticizing it, the Communist government has not created a sense of Chinese nationalism that combines elements of tradition with appropriate features of the modern world culture. As a Western correspondent in Beijing describes, Chinese nationalism in the 1990s has become “a mix of militarism, Maoism, Confucianism; one part modern, one part traditional, one part belligerent and one part lounge act.” (Mufson, 1996). When the content of state-led Chinese nationalism is compared with nationalism in other countries, it appears to be exceedingly thin. There is little to compare with the substance of American nationalism with its mystique about the George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Pledge of Allegiance. Similarly, there seems to be no counterpart to the Japanese feelings about the monarchy and the British pride in the parliament. State-led nationalism is a partisan nationalism in post-Tiananmen China.

References


