



Patricia Villa

Scrutinizing the Role of Humiliation Narratives: An Alternative Take on China's State Behavior in the South China Sea*

Introduction

The relative rise of China in the Asia Pacific region has been grounded since its reform and opening up took place in the 1970's, followed by the recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the sole government representing all of China by the United Nations (UN) and the rest of the world. While increasingly attracting neighbors with its new image, recent activities not only in the South China Sea but also in other disputed areas have increasingly started to upset what was once a warm and friendly atmosphere in the region. Not only is the perceived aggression in disputed areas worry fellow claimant states, China is also in dispute with Korea on straightening up facts regarding Northeast Asia's regional history, not to mention its long standing agony against Japanese aggression committed during the Second World War.

Seemingly chaotic, one problem that could be used as a point of inquiry is looking into the motives that drive China's state behavior. It would be interesting to note that despite the negative views held against China by various claimant states, it does enjoy a good deal of support domestically. In this case, what is apparently perceived as threatening towards others is conceivably normal for the public.¹ The ascension of the CCP into power

* Original version of paper delivered at the international conference marking the 30th anniversary of the Philippine Association for Chinese Studies held at Joy-Nostalg Hotel and Suites in Ortigas Center, Pasig City on December 2, 2017.

¹ Through a personal correspondence in a roundtable discussion with several Chinese counterparts from Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China in December 2015, the actions of the party and their government are justified given that if it does not adopt a hardline stance in claiming territories, its legitimacy will be compromised.





was officially realized in 1949 when it successfully defeated, through a Protracted People's War, the Kuomintang-led (KMT) Nationalist Government, internationally recognized as the Republic of China (ROC) after its coalition government with the latter collapsed upon driving away together Japanese imperialist forces out of China. The victory led to the establishment of a new government dubbed as the People's Republic of China, leading the defeated ROC to retreat to Taiwan and later on losing its sovereign status and its seat in the UN in 1975.

Considerably, the Mao-led communist party had only one proclamation to which the party holds on to this day, that the CCP alone can save all of China, signifying that the people's victory was enabled by the party (Gries, 2004a; 2004b). Such a narrative, as Hughes (2006) would later point out, is vital for the survival of the party at a time when China is rebuilding its nation after being ravaged by British and Japanese imperialist forces – a period that the Chinese call the “century of humiliation” between 1842 and 1949.

While the newly established party-state is domestically busy in solidifying the public, it is internationally caught, as with many other countries that were involved because of their alignment, in the middle of the strife between the United States and the Soviet Union. The difficulty furthered in the 1960s upon the imposition of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution which was a campaign led by the party to accelerate the country's immersion into the socialist way of life. Seeing its excesses, the campaign was later on halted.

Upon Mao Zedong's demise and later on Deng Xiaoping's rise as the new Supreme leader, the party-state saw a shift in its paradigm – from a strictly Marxist-Leninist-Maoist worldview, it began adopting a more pragmatic approach in dealing with its domestic and international affairs (Chai, 2003). Indicative of such a shift to pragmatism was signaled by the Reform and Opening Up policy of the party, which opened China's doors to the world under the banner of the “Invigoration of China.”

Continuing on with generations of leaders, the narrative of national salvation remained – Jiang Zemin's “Three Represents,” Hu Jintao's “The Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation,” and the more recent, Xi Jinping's “Chinese Dream.” All programs under such frameworks, especially the Hu Jintao's rhetoric on the “Harmonious Society,” point out to how China intends to achieve national salvation and redeem its collective self-esteem that was lost during the Century of Humiliation. Included in the salvation is the reclaiming of disputed territories, which in





their defense are territories that were lost to imperialist forces.

This study will look into one of the legitimizing forces that drive Chinese state behavior and foreign policy, one of which is through the invocation of the humiliation narratives stemming from the collective memory of the century of humiliation between 1842 and 1949.

Research Questions

Given the issues and gaps within the existing literature which will later on be further elaborated, this study intends to inquire how the narratives of humiliation serve as a driving, enabling, and legitimizing force of Chinese foreign policy. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Which specific Chinese foreign policies did the narratives figure into?
2. What events highlight the innate character of the narratives among the Chinese people?
3. How does the Chinese government mobilize public support through the narratives?
4. What role do the narratives fulfill in Chinese foreign policy?

As evidenced in the literature review, one of the most noteworthy frameworks utilized by Moore (2014) was Robert Putnam's notion of two level games. Through this, he probed into the domestic situation (first level) and the international situation (second level) to come up with a comprehensive answer as to why both China and Japan would not back down and compromise their claim to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. He concluded that domestically, the Chinese public has the need to save "face" – a phenomenon that is related to the narratives of humiliation. Such a domestic need is pursued by the state on an international level, especially now that Japan "owes" China an apology because of the war crimes. In terms of the innateness of the narratives among the Chinese people, Z. Wang (2014) points to the Chosenness-Myths-Traumas (CMT) complex, wherein the collective traumas of the people are used to advance a particular cause which in this case is the achievement of past glories which they believe was held by China prior to the First Opium War in 1842.

Overall, the purpose of this inquiry is to explore and understand the narratives of humiliation as a driving force behind Chinese foreign policy. Veering away from purely structural and agential explanations, this study





hopes to address the narratives as not merely orchestrated by the party-state but as well as innate among the Chinese people through shared histories and collective memories. This study, in turn, aims to be able to provide a holistic and context specific explanation of Chinese state behavior.

Rationale of the Study

Much of the literature on the narratives of humiliation has already established that such have been a recurring theme in Chinese foreign policy. In line with this, I intend to veer away from contributing to the furthering of the development of the narratives and instead use it as a takeoff point to understand how the Chinese government utilizes its legitimation mechanisms to solidify and stabilize its forces internally, enabling its foreign policy agendas to be smoothly implemented with minimal domestic impediments and constraints.

Moore utilized a noteworthy inquiry and framework (2014). His study intended to understand how it is possible for both China and Japan to opt not to compromise their respective stances on the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute using Robert Putnam's notion of two-level games. Mainly, it is this framework that inspired this paper to explore further the Chinese government's legitimation tactics.

Understanding China's legitimation tactics – while being mindful of observation, ideological, and methodological bias – enables one to further understand Chinese politics. Scholars such as Said (1978) have long criticized the dominant Western discourse of understanding Asia through Western standards. It has been deemed as simplistic and deterministic, and almost devoid of the uniqueness of the historical developments of a particular society. This research hopes to fill the gap in today's understanding of modern Chinese politics. Mere labels such as authoritarian, dictatorial, and illiberal box out the necessity of understanding cultural and historical contexts. Such also resulted in miscalculations and failure to posit context-specific assumptions with regard to state behavior.

Scope and Limitations

This study will only be limited to analyzing the officially translated and published works of selected Chinese leaders and objects on display in three





significant museums and one site in Beijing from the 1970s to the present.

In no attempt to generalize, the results and conclusions that may be drawn to the study may be specific to China's case, although it goes without saying that the research design may be applied by other researchers, with modifications, who would wish to examine the same phenomenon on a different context.

Conceptualization

This section will discuss the theories, which will be utilized in analyzing how the narratives of humiliation serve to legitimize Chinese foreign policy. The first part elaborates on understanding a state's needs based on the claims of Alexander Wendt (1999). Such will be used to strengthen the argument that the humiliation narratives and the accompanying need for the redemption of "collective self-esteem" (p. 236) are innate among the Chinese population. What follows is the CMT complex posited by Johan Galtung (2001).² It argues that the state is capable of framing and orchestrating, and highlighting a particular discourse – which in this case is the humiliation narrative – to fit a certain agenda. A closer scrutiny of certain foreign policy agendas will be conducted under this lens. The utilization of two theories addresses the aim of the paper to elicit a holistic understanding of Chinese state behavior that is neither confined nor boxed into the dichotomous debate of structure and agency.

Understanding a state's needs

Wendt (1999) presupposed the need to elicit culture not just an explanation of last resort but rather as a primary consideration in analyzing state behavior. In this regard, he argued that ideas, as constitutions, are vital in understanding a state's interests (135). For the purpose of this study, Wendt's claim in understanding a state's interests – specifically of the Chinese government's interests – lies in understanding its needs which is divided into two: 1) identity needs; and 2) material needs.

² I would like to give due credit to Zheng Wang as the utilization of the CMT complex in this study is inspired and slightly paralleled (with minor alterations) to that of his in his work, "Chinese Dream: Context and Concept." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* (2014), vol. 19, pp. 1-13.





Identity needs refer to “the internal and external structures that constitute... actors as social kinds” (130). Whereas Wendt (1999) went along to argue that there is no assurance that such needs will ultimately lead to actions aimed at addressing such needs, one should also be cautious as to not entirely claim that such needs are not satisfied, the agents will not survive. It almost goes without saying that all of the actions of an actor – for this instance, the state – is directed towards securing the satisfaction of that need.

On the other hand, Wendt (1999) also presented that actors have material needs, which are more likely paralleled after the concept of human nature.³ Material needs constitute physical security, ontological security, sociation, self-esteem and transcendence.⁴ Of primary consideration in this study is fourth material need – self-esteem.

At an individual level, self-esteem as a material need entreats humans' need to feel good about themselves. In the context of East Asian states, self-esteem is compensated through honor, glory, achievement, recognition, power, and even group membership or the ability to identify one's self as part of a collective (Wendt, 1999; Moore, 2014, p. 225). These are achieved through certain practices, the most common examples of which is paying respects to an elderly or a person of authority by bowing your head (Japan, Korea, China). When such honors are applied in a group dynamics, in this instance, the nation, the concept of “collective self-esteem” may be invoked, more so on the national level.

Collective self-esteem translates to national interest (Wendt 1999, p. 236). In the case of China, a negative collective self-image has been persistent in the nation's discourse specifically pertaining to the state of their domain and its people from 1842 to 1949. Later on, this will be intersected with Galtung's (2001) CMT complex framework as to who reinforces such negative collective self-images. As far as the Chinese are concerned, their grandeur as well a unique culture have been lambasted by the British and furthermore (and more severely) by the Japanese.

If we are to look at the actions of the State in relation to “aggression” and the reaction of its people through the lens of collective self-esteem, the

³ A disclaimer on the concept of human nature was also guaranteed by Wendt (1999) himself as he initially stated that such needs, while material, still do not entirely guarantee that actors will act upon to satisfy such needs. After all, “people do commit suicide.” This implies, however, that if the satisfaction of such needs was not acted upon, humans would not have survived evolution (p. 131).

⁴ For a detailed definition of each material need, see Wendt (1999), pp. 131-132.





implications seem more plausible as opposed to the prevailing discourse of increasing military spending and improvement of military capabilities.⁵ The satisfaction of collective self-esteem, along with the other three national interests – physical survival, autonomy, and economic well-being – is key to securing state-society complexes⁶ (p. 237).

Similar to the satisfaction of needs at an individual level, Wendt (1999) claims that the actions and efforts expended by the state and the society are all aimed at meeting such needs. When met, a feeling of satisfaction is induced (positive self-image, in the case of collective self-esteem). If unmet, feelings and perceptions of anxiety, fear, frustration may prevail which will later on be compensated through increased efforts, changes in interests, or even engagement in aggression.

CMT complex as ‘master narratives’

Based on Wendt’s (1999) premise, it is safe to claim within the parameters of this study that both the society and the state have needs that they ultimately aim to satisfy. Domestically, the Chinese society is not so much as isolated as the world thinks they are. A legitimate claim was made by Gries (2004), arguing that the Chinese people are not mere agents with no self-consciousness as to how they would act on a certain issue.

While the claim is noteworthy, one must still consider how the state factors in to the dominance of a particular discourse. As Carr (1939) once noted, “It is victors who write history,” the political implications of which point to how history is shaped by dominant powers. In this instance, we point to the Chinese state. Galtung (2001) argues that certain events in history shape and define a group’s identity and behavior, mostly in conflict situations. In this sense, the Chosenness--Myths-Trauma (CMT) complex may be observed.

Chosenness refers to the impression that people are chosen by some sort of transcendental forces. Trauma, on the other hand, refers to the invocation of a past distress that “casts shadows onto the future” (Wang, 2014, p. 3). It is constituted by experiences that define a group’s deepest

⁵ A precedent may be considered here as Wendt (1999) used the example of how the defeat of Germany in World War I translated into national humiliation and degradation, which later on resulted into the redemption of collective self-esteem manifested through the popularity and rise of Adolf Hitler, and later on, fascism (pp. 236-237).

⁶ For a thorough discussion on national interests, see Wendt (1999), pp. 233-238).





threats and fears through feelings of hopelessness and victimization. The failure to reverse, compensate, and get back from the injury damages a group's collective self-esteem, eventually leads to feelings of degradation and humiliation. It may be seen that this coincides with Wendt's (1999) claim on the need to satisfy collective self-esteem as a national interest.

Lastly, myths refer to certain glories allegedly experienced by a particular group, and is often viewed as something that should be re-enacted or re-achieved. In this case, the humiliation narratives point to the grandeur of the Chinese society as the Middle Kingdom prior to it being lambasted by the British during the First Opium War, and eventually by its "little brother" Japan during the Second World War.

As mentioned, the CMT complex as a framework will be used to understand how the state invokes the humiliation narratives to instill pride and eventually result to the legitimization of its foreign policy agendas. Specifically, this study aims to trace the existence of the narratives in Deng Xiaoping, Hu Jintao, Jiang Zemin, and Xi Jinping's overarching foreign policy frameworks. I deem that the case of China will be suitable for such an inquiry as the state is defined and guided by a single party. This reduces, if not eliminates, the dilemma of having to give primary considerations to personal idiosyncrasies, as the foreign policy agendas are consistent despite the individual who heads the state.

The Research Variables

The study will be revolving among three variables: the state as the independent variable, foreign policy as the dependent variable, and the humiliation narratives as the control variable.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between and among the three variables, where the state invokes the humiliation narratives. The injection of the narratives is considered as part of the legitimization process prior to the fulfillment of the foreign policy agenda. The dotted line signals the embeddedness of the humiliation narratives into Chinese foreign policy. In this study, the state is defined as a unitary actor – integrated within which are the society, culture, history, and, in China's context, the Communist Party. I took the liberty of adopting Wendt's (1999) definition of a state as "people too" since the inquiry requires its "anthropomorphization" and/or humanize. Put in his terms, it may be termed as the "state-society complex."



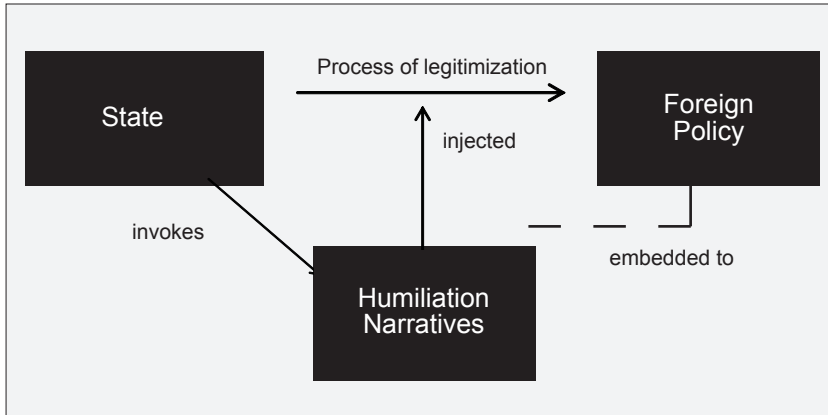


Fig. 1. Illustration of a State's Invocation of the Narratives to Legitimize Chinese Foreign Policy. *Hus confex nonequit. Gratur in dioraecre atui*

On the other hand, the humiliation narratives point to what the Chinese dubbed as the “century of humiliation” which transpired from 1842 until 1949. The “humiliating” events began during the First Opium War, fought against the British, all the way to the notorious Rape of Nanjing in 1937, inflicted by Japanese soldiers against the former capital of China. The year 1949 signaled the end of the humiliation upon the victory of the Chinese revolution with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as its vanguard party. Since then, the party has aimed at securing not only the Chinese people’s welfare (according to its claims) but also its foothold as the single party ruling all of China. The humiliation narratives, if placed within Wendt’s and Galtung’s assumptions on collective self-esteem and group identity, taps into the unsatisfied needs of those who lived and experienced the humiliation.

In the succeeding section, I proposed that these unsatisfied needs are tapped by the state through the humiliation narratives. The narratives are placed as control variables as these have been changed depending on the internal and external landscape China is situated in.⁷ Lastly, China’s

⁷ Recent trends showed signs of the narratives being contingent upon victor narratives. Victor narratives, according to Gries (2004), point to how the CCP salvaged all of China from the century of humiliation. The intention is to highlight that the CCP and the CCP alone can save China.





foreign policies are always anchored in a particular framework set by the party, which this study is interested in. Chinese leadership over the last few decades (from 1970s to the present) have indicated that the main goal is national rejuvenation – the reclaiming of China's former status in the region and in the world, at least as evidenced by pronouncements. Wang dubbed this as an “old wine in a new bottle,” specifying that no matter how the state phrases the framework, the agenda remains the same.

Initial Findings

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union at the turn of the 20th century, the CCP was at a dilemma in terms of keeping its legitimacy⁸ as the sole existing party to rule all of China – lacking the legal-rational source of legitimacy enjoyed by liberal democratic states (Gries 2004a). To be more specific, the narrative of humiliation is currently being utilized by the party as a legitimizing tool for CCP leaders to instill national unification as well as maintain the idea that only the CCP can save China (Wang, 2013; 2014). A discussion on this was also put forward in an earlier work by Atanassova-Cornelis (2012).

The metaphor, “an old wine in a new bottle,” coined by Wang (2013; 2014), represents the narrative of humiliation applied by generations of leaders that have spearheaded the rule of the CCP and China. Whether utilized positively as a victor narrative, such as what Mao Zedong did, or negatively as a victimization narrative, such as what leaders Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping did, the core concept that is China's century of humiliation remains embedded in the narratives, easily justifying the actions included in China's rise.

In this light, it is important that one understands China's worldview prior to and after said humiliation. Wang (2014) showed that the century of humiliation, as a historical memory, is deep-seated in the Chinese people's history and is in fact part and parcel of the construction of China's

⁸ One of the three sources of political legitimacy coined by Max Weber, legal-rational authority is possessed by a government whose power stems from a clearly defined set of formal and constitutional rules, contrary to the first two sources – traditional authority and charismatic authority. See Heywood, A. (2013). *Politics*, 4th ed. Palgrave MacMillan: New York, p. 82.





national identity. A more specific case is shown in Atannassova-Cornelis' (2012) article, wherein she showed how China's relations with Japan and the US are crucial in this identity construction. As Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream has been turning heads, catching much attention and developing discourse in the international community, Zhao (2013) offered a nuanced understanding of how this strident turn in Chinese nationalism would enable as well as challenge the full realization of said dream.

Borrowing Wang's (2013; 2014) metaphor, the objective of this section is to show that there may be shifts in the paradigms utilized by the CCP – from a strict adherence to the Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought (MLMZT) to a pragmatic and multilateral-oriented approach in foreign policy – but the narratives of humiliation are embedded underneath each generation of leaders' slogans (Chai, 2003). Inquiring how do Chinese nationalism and the narratives of humiliation shape Chinese foreign policy, this review of related literature aims to establish that the narratives of humiliation, be it in the victor narrative or victimization narrative, were always present as pretexts for Chinese foreign policy. In the end, the literature review aims to establish research gaps for a possible research question.

As a disclaimer, this literature review acknowledges the looming debate on whether incumbent Chinese President Xi Jinping will again shift from the victimization narrative to the victor narrative, as the deadline for achieving the first of the two centenary goals is fast approaching.⁹

The following sections highlight the major concepts that the study will be dealing with in relation to other concepts. It begins with relating Chinese nation-building and foreign policy, specifically how the party maintains that foreign policy represents Chinese identity; followed by addressing the major debates theorizing whether Chinese nationalism is culturally universal or top-down. Succeeding subsections include how scholars view the foreign policy implications of Chinese nationalism and a summary of the major theories and methodologies used by authors. The state of the literature is also included followed lastly with a conclusion identifying and enumerating the gaps in the literature.

⁹The two centenary goals put forward by incumbent Chinese President Xi Jinping is usually presented along with the Chinese Dream as twin aspirations. Specifically, the first two centenary goal is targeted to be achieved by the year 2021, when China is supposed to already be a moderately well-off society in lined with the 100th founding anniversary of the CCP; the second is set to be achieved by the year 2049, the 100th founding anniversary of the PRC, when China is supposed to be a fully developed country.





Chinese Nation-Building and Foreign Policy

Attanassova-Cornelis (2012) examined Chinese identity as a victim, a developing country, a great power. Evident in the formation of the arguments per angle of Chinese identity was the “othering” of Japan and the US, situating both as critical to the century of humiliation and China’s arming up, respectively.

Similar to what is being put forward by Wang (2014), Chinese identity as a victim is predicated under the narratives of humiliation which was mainly put forward in the patriotic education campaign led by Jiang Zemin in the 1990s. Japan, in this case, is seen as a major player in the century of humiliation (1842-1945), when China was placed under colonial rule by the British and then later on by the Japanese in the first and second Sino-Japanese War (1894 and 1931, respectively), and the notorious Rape of Nanjing in 1937. Presently, such historical atrocities are being invoked because of the escalation of tensions in the Diaoyu/Senkaku disputes. Coinciding with Gries (2004a), the century of humiliation became the nation’s narrative, seen in both lenses as victor and victim.

On the other hand, the US – under China’s perspective – strains any chances for Mainland China and Taiwan to be reunified. To be more specific, the issue with the Strait is considered by the PRC as a domestic policy (Atanssova-Cornelis 2012, p. 97). With the US simultaneously supplying armaments to Taiwan while adhering to the one China policy, the possibilities of reunification remain dim, as part of the victim mentality constitutes the cross-strait issue. One of the building blocks of patriotism, economic growth, and modernization kept dissatisfaction with the regime at bay along with maintaining and ensuring political stability and national unification. Development, according to CCP, is “the basis for solving all problems in China and for China to conduct effective diplomacy” (Wen, 2007, as cited in Atanassova-Cornelis, 2012, p. 98). The three building blocks paved the way for the state to strengthen the people’s loyalty. Applying these in foreign policy,

The projection of China’s identity as a developing country influences leaders’ primary focus on economic objectives. The importance PRC elites attached to a peaceful external environment, improved living standards, and a strengthened ‘comprehensive national power’ (CNP) reflects this goal and is directly linked to China’s so-called ‘revitalization.’ (p. 98)





As a developing country, there is pressure on the PRC to maintain a delicate balance with Japan in terms of establishing an acceptable domestic equilibrium. The inculcation of the century of humiliation among the public has, while beneficial to the government, also posed a challenge as they have to quell anti-Japanese sentiments. As with the US, prevention of escalating tensions and formation of conflict because of its “meddling” with the cross-strait issue is key in line with maintaining a peaceful external environment.

Similarly, on a social constructivist note, Liao (2013) highlights China’s “strong sense of entitlement to international acclamation” (p. 149). Due in part of the patriotic education campaign¹⁰ (Wang 2008) spearheaded under the leadership of Jiang Zemin, the Chinese people collectively adhere to the idea that China – the Middle Kingdom (*zhongguo*) – prior to the First Opium War (1842) fought against the British colonizers, held a high status and grandeur relative to the rest of the world (pp. 788-789). For Moore (2014) and earlier on, put forward by Gries (2004b).

Lastly, Chinese identity as a great power. China’s recent military build-up has been met by the neighboring countries including the US with much caution. Included in this track is the growing assertiveness over claiming lost territories, examples of which are the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands (with Japan), and to an extent, Taiwan as part of Mainland China. Effective defense, therefore, is a precondition for China’s successful revitalization. For CCP leaders, the “great power” identity is a restoration of its perceived rightfully deserved international respect and status – something that equates to what they believe they enjoyed prior to the century of humiliation. Particular to dealing with Japan and the US is the creation of the “discourse of danger” to justify military build-up to counter external threat.

It can be observed that political elites have placed much effort in strengthening the sense of national unity centered on the state and the CCP. This coincides with what Wang (2014) claimed in his article: that the goal of the CCP is to maintain the loyalty of the people to them by instilling the notion that only the CCP can save and/or revitalize China which will eventually lead to achieving its former status as a great power.

¹⁰ Launched after the Tiananmen incident, the patriotic education campaign sought to educate China’s humiliating experience in the hands of its colonizers, the British, and later on, the Japanese (see Zheng Wang, 2008).





On the Concept of 'Face,' 'Collective Self-Esteem,' and 'Imagined Community'

Interestingly, such efforts placed at strengthening national unity, for Gries (2004b) and Moore (2014) have deeply-rooted concepts that are not supposed to be taken lightly. Specifically, Moore (2014) gives due emphasis on the Confucian value of honor, or in Gries' (2004b) words, "face" or "collective self-esteem," and on a more widely known term coined by Benedict Anderson (1991), an "imagined community." In a study utilizing social constructivism, Moore (2014) explains how the Chinese's shared meanings of past glories fuel nationalism and their strong feelings against any aggressors, which in this case is Japan because of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute in the East China Sea. Specifically:

Face can be considered a need, whether we speak of individuals or states – accepting here provisionally, for convenience sake, realist understandings of the unitary or anthropomorphized state – and can also be defined as something akin to dignity or honor (p. 223).

Applying such concept using Robert Putnam's notion of two-level games in foreign policy, Moore (2014) explains that both China and Japan have "face needs" that need to be satisfied. Probing closer, the Chinese people's face needs stem from the notion that China did enjoy certain past glories, as mentioned earlier, prior to the First Opium War (p. 230). A comparable argument, albeit analyzed through the CMT complex, was also made by Wang in 2014. Utilizing the CMT complex as a framework in explaining the embeddedness of historical memory among Chinese people's consciousness, Zhen Wang (2014), in his article "Chinese Dream: Concept and Context" from the *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, argues that western scholars have aversions in understanding China's "fixation" over their historical experience at the hands of their colonizers. For scholars Orville Schell and John Delury, "to move forward, the country must move on from its emphasis on a century of national humiliation and a rising China needs a new national story" (2013).

While it is a valid concern that a rising power like China should now construct a new narrative as it takes the stage on an international level, one cannot simply discredit the deep seatedness of the narrative of national humiliation in the Chinese people. Put in terms of the CMT complex, the Chinese government, in order to instill a top-down nationalist discourse





(Zhao, 2013), has had to institutionalize the said narrative as a way to indoctrinate certain chosen glories and chosen traumas. For the Chinese, these would involve how they perceive China prior to the First Opium War (1839-1842), and how China was in between 1839 until 1945 (when the Japanese surrendered), respectively.

As Wang (2014) showed in his article, as well as in an earlier but related piece published in *The Diplomat* in Deng Xiaoping's Invigoration of China, Jiang Zemin's Great Rejuvenation, and Hu Jintao's Harmonious Society, hence, the metaphor, "an old wine in a new bottle." Cross-examining this with Gries' (2004) book chapter on "Nationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy" in *China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy*, the narrative of humiliation had always been present, be it in Mao's victor narratives¹¹ or Deng, Jiang, Hu, and Xi's victimization narratives. Despite being in opposite poles, such narratives are always based on China's colonial history and how China will one day regain its former status as a great power.

Similarly, Gries utilized the concept of face (2004b) in an earlier work on Chinese nationalism. He looked into the negative reactions that the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 drew among the people. While the protests were highly criticized as state-orchestrated, Gries (2004b) notably argued that such a top-down view of Chinese nationalism is myopic. It must be understood that the Chinese people themselves have deep attachments to their national identity. In this regard, he advances the need to look into the people's collective self-esteem, which was emphasized as not only unique to China or on East Asian nations but is rather culturally universal. For Gries (2004b), face "captures the interplay of self and society in the process of constructing personhood" (p. 23), hence, the negative reaction of the Chinese people.

Chinese Nationalism: Culturally Universal or Top-Down?

Such views are of course not without criticism. Structuralists such as Atanassova-Cornelis (2012) and He (2007) argued that the victimization

¹¹Victor narratives pertain to how China won over its colonizers – the British and the Japanese. On the other hand, "Victimization narratives" point to how said colonizers, during the Century of Humiliation (1839-1945), have lambasted China's great civilization (Gries, 2004).





narrative is a CCP imposed top-down nationalism managed through the patriotic education campaign under Jiang Zemin's leadership in the 1990s. He (2007) noted that the problem with the war historiography in China lays under the fact that it "remains under the custody of politicians and ideologues" (p. 24). Such claims do reinforce the idea that Chinese nationalism is indeed party-state orchestrated.

Liao (2013) and Gries (2004a; 2004b), however, noted that in analyzing societies, the people must not be seen as static – as if they are mere pawns of state policies incapable of deciding on their own and bereft of attachments to history and do not have a sense of community.

In sum, the key motivations of Chinese foreign policy include legitimacy, redemption of collective self-esteem, and bringing back past glories. Be these top-down or culturally universal, it still shows that the humiliation narrative, whether the Chinese as victors or victims, was always evident. All throughout the different generations of CCP leadership – Deng's Invigoration of China, Jiang's Great Rejuvenation, Hu's Harmonious Society and Xi's Chinese Dream – the narratives remain deep-seated although some would argue that they were orchestrated by the party.

Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism

Zhao (2013) and Weiss (2015) were very particular with the changing attitude of the state toward the rise of popular nationalism in China. For one, the state seems to encourage protest culture as part of its pragmatism toward handling and adhering to the public's sentiments.

Recognizing that it has monopoly over crafting foreign policy, Chinese leaders also acknowledge the fact that growing public sentiments – specifically anti-US sentiments – have to be addressed (Sorensen, 2016). Deng Xiaoping's *tao guang yang hui* (hiding its capabilities, focusing on national strength building and biding its time) policy served as a guide for leaders in handling such sentiments. Learning from the mistakes of the Soviet Union by "confronting the US so as to exhaust itself" (Zhao, 2013, pp. 541-542). Doing so meant that China learned to "live with the hegemon" (p. 541), recognizing that US dominance held the key to China's modernization. Since the early 2000s, Chinese leaders have placed much stress on peaceful coexistence, peaceful rise, and peaceful development.





In line with this, Zhao (2013) puts forward that the CCP has adopted a two-pronged strategy in dealing with nationalism. While such maintains the legitimacy of the CCP, the public also used it to judge and question the performance of the state. The danger of the latter will materialize should the CCP fail to deliver its nationalist promise – which in this case is to achieve revitalization. Relating this to Atanassova-Cornelis' (2012) and Wang's (2014) respective articles, said revitalization would mean achieving China's former status as a great power, a status it enjoyed prior to the First Opium War in 1842.

The two-pronged strategy, hence, allows the state to mobilize popular support from the public. On one hand, they encourage expression of popular sentiments; on the other, they ban anti-foreign demonstrations. The CPP leaders viewed nationalism, in this sense, as a force that must be channeled in its expression. As for implications to Chinese foreign policy, Zhao notes that:

The rise of nationalism, therefore, did not make Chinese foreign policy particularly inflexible or irrational. A strident turn, however, has taken place parallel with China's growing economic, diplomatic, and military muscle in the 21st century as the Chinese leadership has come to be more responsive to, and share more of, the views of popular nationalism in adopting tougher approaches to forcefully pursuing core interests (p. 553).

However, prior to this kind of understanding, Chinese nationalism as fueled by the narratives of humiliation were seen as a major part of the China threat. Zhu (2001) noted that a solidified domestic public support for the government caused a certain degree of alarm for Western observers, particularly to the adherents of the Realist school. Such a support, according to critics, would make it easier for the Chinese government to push through with its aggression in claiming the disputed areas, posing a "strong challenge to the post-Cold War international and political economic order currently dominated... in general by the US" (p. 2; Brittingham, 2007). Townsend (1992) is keen on calling such a perception as caused by the phenomenon of culturalism to nationalism, wherein the highly Confucian and hierarchical way of the Chinese viewing other states has now changed into nationalism out of necessity, as the state aims to now preserve national unity (p. 99).





Summing Up Theories and Methodologies

As far as the literature is concerned, two approaches are most commonly used by authors studying Chinese nationalism and Chinese foreign policy. Some go for an institutionalism and structuralism, stating that Chinese nationalism, through the government's constant emphasis on the century of humiliation, is orchestrated by the party; whereas some defend the agential notion that the Chinese people are not mere pawns of the government but rather capable of deciding for their own. Under this premise, the people are considered as having deep-seated attachments to their history and identity.

Particular of which are scholars like Moore (2014) and Gries (2004a; 2004b) who often elicit concepts such as face and collective self-esteem. Moore's (2014) concept of face or the need to fulfill a nation's "face needs" is hinged upon the notion that such a character dwells from the Confucian values that are still evident to this day in contemporary Chinese society.

Enhanced by Putnam's (as cited by Moore, 2014, p. 226) notion of two-level games – first level is domestic and the second is state in relation to another state – and analyzed through the case of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute, states have face needs that have to be satisfied. Such utilization of an unusual framework in analyzing state behavior and foreign policy takes off from the criticism that mere confinement of state behavior into a set of theoretical assumptions cannot fully explain why it is difficult for China and Japan to find optimal solutions to the disputes (p. 237).

Notably, however, the claim that such an over articulation and need for restoring self-esteem is not unique between Moore (2014) and Gries (2004a; 2004b). This is evidenced by Liao's (2013) utilization of social constructivism and Wang's (2014) analysis of Chinese nationalism through the CMT complex as discussed in the foregoing paragraphs.

This field, formerly dominated by Western/Western-educated scholars who intend to understand how the government mobilizes its people to support its every move, some Asian/Asian-educated scholars have now stepped into the scene, trying to understand, at most on the grassroots level, the worldviews of the Chinese people.





State of the Literature

The existing debates on the use of humiliation narratives to elicit support translating to legitimization activities is wide, however, the discourse has not left the stage on whether it is orchestrated or innate amongst the public. Domestically, the literature confirms that the invocation of the narratives fuel Chinese nationalism structurally through programs such as the patriotic education campaign act. However, pieces of evidence and episodes of collective memory point to how the Chinese strongly identify themselves in terms of national identity with or without the invocations of such narratives.

Discussions on the shifting of a national ideology – from communism to nationalism – are also abundant. However, remaining scarce is the literatures on how can these eventually determine a state's behavior. The continuing aggression in claiming disputed territories is nothing but uncharted, yet, traditional theoretical views on state behavior remain as the dominant way of analyzing China. This study intends to fill that gap in the existing literature by looking into how humiliation narratives serve to legitimize the Chinese foreign policy.

Conclusion

As provided for by authors analyzing Chinese nationalism and foreign policy, three key ideas emerge: 1) that the century of humiliation is always a major part of the narrative of Chinese national agenda in each generation of leaders; 2) that this, through the patriotic education campaign and consistent propaganda from the government, has now generated popular nationalism – a tool utilized by CCP leaders to maintain stability and to achieve national unification; and 3) that all of national agendas are meant to deliver a single message: that only the CCP can only save China. The message has always been present from Mao's victor narrative all the way to Deng, Jiang, Hu, and Xi's utilization of the victimization narrative. The humiliation part, no matter how optimistic or pessimistic its existence in every generation's historical memory, plays a huge role in delivering said message.

Despite paradigmatic shifts from a strictly Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought worldview to being more pragmatic-multilateral-





oriented (Chai, 2003), one thing remains constant: that the narratives have intended to elicit it is that only the CCP can save/rejuvenate/unite China (Wang, 2013). The aforementioned notions are widely shared among China watchers. However, the current policies, particularly the Chinese Dream, spearheaded by President Xi Jinping, begs the question developed as a research gap in this literature review: with growing domestic pressures from the public, how can China make itself understood by the rest of the world, maintaining a peaceful external environment whilst not compromising the calls of the public? The reviewed books and journal articles mostly analyze the implications of Chinese nationalism and foreign policy.

However, what is puzzling the international community right now is the way China tries to project itself to the world – specifically, how it interacts with other states despite the fact that its neighbors view it as aggressive. The literature review established why the Chinese government sees the necessity of taking a hardline stance on issue that are within the scope of China's national rejuvenation – most controversial of which is the reclaiming of lost territories, including Taiwan, the South China Sea along with the disputed islands.

References

- Atanassova-Cornelis, Elena. (2012). "Chinese Nation Building and Foreign Policy: Japan and the US as the Significant 'Others' in National Identity Construction." *East Asia*, vol. 29, pp. 95-108.
- Berkofsky, Axel. (2016). "'The Chinese Dream' and Chinese Foreign and Security Policies – Rosy Rhetoric vs. Harsh Realities." *Asia-Pacific Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 109-28.
- Brittingham, Michael Alan. (2007). "The 'Role' of Nationalism in Chinese Foreign Policy: A Reactive Model of Nationalism and Conflict." *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 147-66.
- Callahan, William. (2004). "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism." *Alternatives*, vol. 29, pp. 199-218.
- Carr, E. H. (1990). *What is History?* London: Penguin Books.
- Chai, Winberg. (2003). "The Ideological Paradigm Shifts of China's World Views: From Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to the Pragmatism-Multilateralism of the





- Deng-Jiang-Hu Era." *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 163-175.
- Creswell, John. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Flick, Uwe. (2009). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 4th Ed. California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Galtung, Johan. (2001). "The Construction of National Identities for Cosmic Drama: Chosenness-Myths-Trauma (CMT) Syndromes and Cultural Pathologies." In P. Udayakumar. (Ed). *Handcuffed to History*. Westpoint: Praeger.
- Gries, Peter. 2004a. "Nationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy." In Yong Deng and Fei-Ling Wang. (Eds). *China Rising: Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- . (2004b). *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hao Yufan and Ying Hou. (2009). "Chinese Foreign Policy Making: A Comparative Perspective." *Public Administration Review*, vol. 69, pp. 136-141.
- He Yinan. (2007). "History, Chinese Nationalism, and the Emerging Sino-Japan Conflict." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 16 no. 50, pp. 1-24.
- Heywood, Andrew. (2013). *Politics*. 4th Ed. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.
- Jakobson, Linda, and Manuel, Ryan. (2016). "How are Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China?" *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 101-110.
- Liao Ning. 2013. "Dualistic Identity, Memory-encoded Norms, and State Emotion: A Social Constructivist Account of Chinese Foreign Relations." *East Asia*, vol. 30, pp. 139-160.
- Moore, Gregory. (2014). "'In Your Face': Domestic Politics, Nationalism, and 'Face' in the Sino-Japanese Islands Dispute." *Asian Perspective*, vol. 38, pp. 219-240.
- Pierce, Roger. *Research Methods in Politics*. London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Sorensen, Camilla. (2015). "The Significance of Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' for Chinese Foreign Policy: From Tao Guang Yang Hui to Fen Fa You Wei." *Journal of Chinese International Relations*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 53-73.
- Townsend, James. (1992). "Chinese Nationalism." *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 27, pp. 97-130.
- Wang Fei-Ling. (2005). "Preservation, Prosperity, and Power: What Motivates China's Foreign Policy?" *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 14, no. 45, pp. 669-694.





- Wang Zheng. (2008). "National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China." *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 52, pp. 783-806.
- . (2013). "The Chinese Dream from Mao to Xi." Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2013/09/the-chinese-dream-from-mao-to-xi>.
- . (2014). "The Chinese Dream: Concept and Context." *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, vol. 19, pp. 1-13.
- Wang Zhengxu and Yu You. (2016). "The Arrival of Critical Citizens: Decline of Political Trust and Shifting Public Priorities in China." *International Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 105-124.
- Weiss, Jessica Chen. (2015). "Popular Protest, Nationalism, and Domestic-International Linkages in Chinese Politics." In Scott, Robert and Stephen Kosslyn. (Eds). *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., pp. 1-13.
- Wendt, Alexander. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yang Lijun and Chee Kia Lim. (2010). "Three Waves of Nationalism in Contemporary China: Sources, Themes, Presentations, and Consequences." EAI Working Paper No. 155.
- Zhang Jian. (2015). "China's New Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: Towards 'Peaceful Rise 2.0?'" *Global Change, Peace & Security: Formerly Pacific Review: Peace, Security, & Global Change*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 1-15.
- Zhang Qingmin. (2014). "Towards an Integrated Theory of Chinese Foreign Policy: Bringing Leadership Personality Back In." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 22, no. 89, pp. 902-922.
- Zhao Suisheng. (2000). "Chinese Nationalism and its International Orientations." *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 115, no. 1, pp. 1-33.
- . (2005). "China's Pragmatic Nationalism: Is it Manageable?" *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 131-144.
- . (2013). "Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: The Strident Turn." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 22, no. 82, pp. 535-553.
- Zhu Tianbiao. (2001). "Nationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy." *The China Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-27.

