

Approaching "Pareto Optimality"? --- A Critical Analysis of Media-Orchestrated Chinese Nationalism

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Introduction

Nationalistic fervor has been inexorably on the rise in China since the 1990s, a phenomenon orchestrated and magnified by the media, born of design as well as fortuity. The adopted form of nationalism has become as much a commodity as a state instrument. Evidently, three separate external events have helped to reinforce this new brand of Chinese nationalism: (a) China's bids to host the 2000 and 2008 Olympics, (b) NATO's bombardment of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999, and (c) the US spy plane collision with a Chinese fighter plane in April 2001.

Whilst China's economy grew by leaps and bounds during the post-Cultural Revolution era, a raw and amorphous form of nationalism had begun to coalesce, though it was not until the 1990s that this was articulated, either separately or in concert, by the new left-wing intelligentsia, the media, the state and the populace at large. This phenomenon is tied to China's growing economic might and its coming of age on the global stage. The new nationalism so palpable in China today can be laid at the door of Washington, whose policy of confrontation-cum-engagement with Beijing after the 1989 Tiananmen tragedy helped fan the flames of incipient Chinese nationalism, which was manipulated by the Party. As a result, the public communication has been the major conveyor belt of nationalist sentiment that found solid expression through well-defined channels and stage-managed occasions.

So, what role does the media play in this process? A more charitable view would hold that the Chinese media have risen to the occasion by mobilizing public opinion against actions that could be readily perceived as provocations by the West; a less charitable view would assume, not unreasonably, that the media merely did the bidding of the Communist Party. Still, it would not be fair to characterize the media as mere puppets as they, too, have discovered how rewarding it is to mine the lode of nationalism. And so, with the media tapping into this rich vein to boost circulation or viewership, this commercial objective has dovetailed with the state imperative to keep nationalistic sentiments simmering or to bring it to the boil to suit the circumstances of the day.

In a sense, the mainstream media in today's China are approaching a de facto status of Pareto Optimality, a term named after the Italian economist Alfredo Pareto (1848-1923), despite the fact that they are still required to perform within the structure inherent in a command system. In economics, Pareto Optimality refers to the state where no one is worse-off in one state than another but someone is better-off. We borrow this term to describe the comfortable position of the mainstream media in fanning or manufacturing popular nationalism.

Ever since the 1990s, the issue of nationalism has been turned into a successful recipe for the Chinese media to gain advantage. On the one hand, the media managed to mobilize popular emotion and expression within the Party's tacitly demarcated parameters, whilst, on the other hand, they successfully raked in sizeable profits through packaging nationalism with hedonistic fare. In this new game, the mainstream media thus occupied the unique position in their interaction with the Party, the market and audience through which the media were encouraged to pursue a tactic that can surely leave them greatly better-off without letting other parties be worse-off. In other words, the media can 'play with the fire of Chinese nationalism within a contentious but safe haven.'

The attack on the embassy in Belgrade and the Sino-US mid-air collision show the power of the mainstream media in fanning or restraining the flames of Chinese nationalism. It demonstrates how the media in China are now readily disposed to seizing particular emotive events that can be opportunistically presented as a packaged commodity for lucrative gain. The US media's perceived 'demonization' of China has become an increasing powerful symbol in public communication and media discourse since the mid 1990s. Indeed, the seeds of popular nationalism are developing into a formidable force, heavily influenced by the media and popular journalistic writings and with few indications that it will abate in the foreseeable future.

There have been a number of scholarly studies that have dealt with this recently identified phenomenon (e.g. Whiting, 1995; Unger, 1996; Zheng, 1999). Some argue that Chinese nationalism has developed from an 'affirmative' position to an 'assertive' one (Segal, 1996). Others defend rising nationalism as a situational matter, a form of defense to external challenges that is more reactive than proactive (Zhao, 2000; Yan, 2001). Others suggest that it has been at the instigation of the authorities in order for it to regain political legitimacy. Some even go so far as to conclude that the recent wave of Chinese nationalism has been the most aggressive and chauvinistic ever (Friedman, 1997; Liu, 2000).

However, research up until now has barely touched upon the relationship between the issue of Chinese nationalism and the role played by the media and popular journalistic writings. This study therefore attempts to make a modest contribution through a critical analysis of media-orchestrated Chinese nationalism in the 1990s. By exploring the major themes and facets, we will

make an effort to examine the phenomenon and lead to a better understanding of the media's shifting trajectory within the recent wave of Chinese nationalism in post-Tiananmen China.

From Pro-Westernization to Anti-Westernization

Modern nationalism in China has its roots in the time of the Qing dynasty in the 19th century, a period marked by Western encroachment (that included Japan), culminating in the anti-foreign Boxer rebellion. In the face of recurrent humiliating experiences, defeats and unequal treaties (Hong Kong was offered on a platter to the British following the Opium Wars), a modern nationalist consciousness emerged, driven in part by the desire to build China into a strong and modern nation to defend against, as well as compete with, foreign ambitions (Zhao, 2000:2-5).

The seeds of nationalistic sentiment in the 1990s were sown in the preceding decade and can be traced to the pro-Western liberal thoughts and ideas that commanded public discourse during the 1980s. When Deng Xiaoping returned to power in the late 1970s after the death of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), he was intent on modernizing China's economy, if necessary, with imported Western technology and management but not its democratic politics. For the Chinese, the 1980s commenced with a "three-belief crisis," centering on the crisis of faith in socialism (*xinxin weiji*), crisis of belief in Marxism (*xinyang weiji*), and the crisis of trust in the Party (*xinren weiji*). Underpinning those three-belief crises was the collective reaction to the failure of the Chinese communist experience, which reflected public disillusionment and resentment of Maoist ideology. It thus presented opportunistic circumstances for the emergence of a liberal alternative, what is now called the New Enlightenment Movement (for more detailed discussion see Wang, 1998).

Throughout the 1980s (up until the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989), Chinese intellectuals had allied themselves with the reform bureaucracy within the Party, harnessing the media to advocate pro-Western liberal agendas such as responding to public opinion and accountability, calling for media freedom, and frequently using the West, particularly the US, as a point of reference (Lee, 2000a). As a result, the first decade of the post-Mao reform era bore a distinctive intellectually driven, yet popularly embraced school of thought, which adopted pro-Western liberal tendencies as the basis for economic reform and modernization.

Its main task was to introduce and promote Western-style institutions, technology, and value system, in order to replace the existing traditional (feudalistic) Chinese culture. Some identified this phenomenon as anti-traditionalism (Gu, 1993); others termed it 'Culture Fever' (*wenhua re*) (Barne, 1999).

The New Enlightenment Movement's pro-Western and anti-traditionalist stance did prove enormously influential and representative of popular opinion. During the mid-1980s, nationwide surveys showed a vast majority of the population and the political elite expressing a strong interest in Western culture and political ideas (Min, 1989). As a consequence, advocates of the New Enlightenment saw the introduction of Western liberalism as not merely a shrewd strategy to berate Mao's socialist praxis, but also a manifest proclamation of the advantages of pursuing liberal democracy in the interests of China's modernization.

The public communication, and, particularly, the mass media, played a significant role in the movement. In effect, the media became a discursive nexus, as well as the pre-eminent body for catalyzing alternative forms of cultural freedom and expression with the core message of championing the liberal agenda and disseminating pro-democratic ideas. As such, the media gradually developed into a potent forum for the public during the 1980s. "The People's Daily," the Party's mouthpiece and the most influential newspaper at the time, became a major advocate of the New Enlightenment Movement. That this was made possible can be largely attributed to the support of the reform-minded factions of the ruling elite headed by Hu Yaobang, and later by Zhao Zhiyang, both of whom were Party general secretaries in their times. It was also emboldened and solidified by an influential group of reform-minded journalists led by chief editor of "The People's Daily," Hu Jinwen, and, among others, senior reporter Liu Binyan and editorialist Wang Rongsui (Wang, 1997).

Also playing a pivotal role in the movement was the "World Economic Herald" (1980-1989), a weekly newspaper based in Shanghai, which was seen as the trailblazer of China's press reform. Though affiliated to a semi-official academic association, it was not under the direct control of the Communist Party. Throughout its nine years of existence, the influential newspaper became a prominent source of public discussion articulating the liberal agenda, and introducing contemporary Western thought and ideas, to champion the course of far-reaching political and socio-economic reform. It often took bold initiatives to establish a radical framework for public debate and to push back the Party's existing demarcations of acceptability (Yu, 1992).

The media's appeal to pursue a pro-liberal political agenda reached a zenith when a six-part TV documentary entitled "River Elegy" (*He Shang*) was aired on China Central Television (CCTV) in 1988. The enormous impact of the program and the ensuing debates far exceeded expectations. It was an important symbol of the then-popular anti-traditionalist sentiment and sought to fuse two seemingly opposite national feelings of nihilism and nationalism. Essentially, the work mourned the decline of the great Chinese nation and sought to instill nationalist pride in the great Chinese nation by lamenting that the country had plunged to its nadir. By implicitly linking the authoritarian leadership (as was

the case with any reference to anti-traditionalism, a euphemism for the Communist Party) to the backwardness and static nature of Chinese traditional culture, the documentary-makers were suggesting that for China to go forward, it had to wholeheartedly embrace Western-style modernization (Su, et al., 1988).

In summary, then, the rise of liberalism and pro-Westernization discourse in the 1980s was a reaction to the bankruptcy of Mao's utopia and communist doctrine despite the strong resistance of conservative hard-liners (including the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in 1983 and the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization Campaign in 1987, both short-lived). It took place in circumstances where, 1) market economic reform remained relatively successful; 2) the old Communist Party's ideology and discourse lost credibility while the idea of liberal democracy increasingly became an alternative spiritual resource; 3) the media began to become an agent of social change alongside its alliance with the reform-minded political elite and intellectuals; and 4) the rulers and the ruled still had some illusions about each other in their drive towards modernization. There was little apparent indication towards the latter part of the 1980s to suggest that this movement would not further develop. However, the transforming effects of sudden tragic events were to alter the trajectory.

Chinese Nationalism – the Rise of Anti-Westernization

If the 1980s was predominantly pro-Western, the ensuing decade was decidedly anti-Western. In other words, the form and substance of Chinese nationalism in the 1990s are anti-Westernization with an ever-increasing tendency to target the US as the main foe. The 1989 Tiananmen crackdown was a turning point in the fortunes of the New Enlightenment movement. To an extent, it was a showdown between the two opposing forces of pro- and-anti-liberalism. The ramifications were far-reaching and deeply felt across all segments of society. Any previously held romantic notions of democratization and political reform - a belief shared among many of the liberal elite - were buried in the short term following the Tiananmen tragedy in 1989. As a consequence, many people turned away from politics to focus on material aspirations. Meanwhile, the authorities were well aware that the Tiananmen military crackdown had, in effect, demolished the legitimacy of communist rule. As a result, the authorities seized upon nationalism as a common discursive framework in an attempt to reunite the country and restore its bankrupt legitimacy. As Huang points out, "The post-Tiananmen regime eagerly embraced Chinese nationalism as a new fount of legitimacy. The Chinese Communist Party began in earnest to revive traditional values, which the Maoist regime had tried for years to eliminate. The strategy has worked, as evidenced by the recent rise of anti-American sentiment" (Huang, 1995:57).

Interestingly, politicians and the Party leadership were not the only ones to beat the nationalist drum. In fact, early pro-nationalist sentiments were being

endorsed by state-approved voices outside the conventional state 'apparatchik.' The most notable and directly influential of these early voices was that of He Xin, a researcher who became a media star immediately following the 1989 suppression. He seized upon his media celebrity status to launch a high-profile campaign to "defend Chinese national interests." He Xin denounced the prevailing New Enlightenment movement as a product of hostile Western liberal ideas out to subvert China's socialist system. He also justified the Tiananmen military blitz as necessary in maintaining China's stability and social order (He, 1991, 1996). Unsurprisingly, the Party capitalized on his polemic in an attempt to restore its post-Tiananmen credibility. Under such circumstances, it was unprecedented that "The People's Daily," together with other official news media, initiated such an intensive media campaign between 1989 and 1990 to give He Xin's views prominent coverage (e.g. "People's Daily," December 11, 1990).

By late 1991, endorsement of nationalistic sentiments emerged from another arm of the political elite: the neo-conservatives led by a group of so-called 'crown princes' (or children of high-ranking Communist Party officials). This group appealed to the Party to alter its political strategy if it was to survive in the post-Cold War era. In particular, they argued in their widely circulated pamphlet (under the name of the Ideology and Theory Department of "China Youth Daily") the need to nurture Chinese nationalism as the new source of political legitimacy. They claimed that upholding nationalism and patriotism would prove more effective than traditional communist ideology in combating the Western machination of 'peaceful evolution' (an official term specially referring to political subversion or negative reference to cultural osmosis) (He, 2000:283). It is small wonder, therefore, that these ideas aroused a great deal of incipient nationalistic feelings among the elite.

Synchronous to these developments, the media also launched the so-called "Patriotic Education Campaign," emphasizing the understanding of the 'national situation' (*guoqing*). Jiang Zemin, the newly appointed Party boss who was personally in charge of this push, asked the media to carry out more efficient propaganda in educating the younger generation on why only the Communist leadership could make China strong and prosperous. Moreover, the Party ordered patriotic education courses to be included in the high school and college curriculum (Barme, 1999:256-258).

Official discourse in the post-Tiananmen regime thus heavily identified with a patriotic framework adjudicated by the Party. These hyperbolic statements, as Pye points out (1996:106), have one central message: No one can legitimately criticize government policies without being impugned as unpatriotic.

With adroit manipulation of the media, the issue of nationalism became carefully stage-managed by the authorities so as to achieve a drip-by-drip effect into the popular consciousness. An important media-promoted event that

galvanized the Chinese public occurred in 1993 when Beijing lost out to Sydney to host the 2000 Olympics. The slogan employed by the media was “to give China an opportunity.” The focus of the media campaign took on an affirmative tone, emphasizing the 21st Century as the Chinese century.

However, the failure of Beijing’s bid was blamed on a US-led Western conspiracy to deny China a prestige project (Yan, 2001:36). As Lu Zhifang, a Beijing lawyer, was quoted as saying, “That was the moment when the Chinese started believing that the US wanted to contain China” (Chanda & Huus, 1995:20).

Indeed, a concatenation of external events contributed to the groundswell of nationalistic fervor. These included NBC sports anchor Bob Costas, who implicitly accused Chinese athletes of regularly taking drugs during the 1996 Atlanta Olympics; the visit of Taiwanese President Lee Tenghui to the US in 1995, and, subsequently, the first democratic presidential election in Taiwan in 1996; the annual debate in the US Congress over the ‘most favored nation’ status for China, which regularly turned out to be a harsh forum to criticize China’s human rights record. To top it all off, Western scholars and journalists in their writings invoked ominous scenarios – “the Clash of Civilizations” (Huntington, 1996), “Containing China” (Rachman, 1996), and, most threateningly, “The Coming Conflict with China” (Bernstein & Munro, 1997). All told, they were seen as further evidence of the West’s scare-mongering and proactive attempts to hem in China. The growing anti-American feeling was reported on July 14, 1995 in the “China Youth Daily,” the voice of the Communist Youth League. In a comprehensive survey entitled “The World in the Eyes of Young Chinese,” the “China Youth Daily” found that 87.1% of the respondents believed that “the US was the most hostile country to China.” Such evidence became rich fodder for the Chinese media, eager to play the nationalist card, and occasioning Yan Xuetong, an influential international relations scholar in China, to note that “the Chinese Government and its people believe that the US is attempting to prevent China from growing strong so that the US can continue to dominate the world” (Yan, 2001:36).

Whilst the media in China have become increasingly populist over recent years, the media-advocated nationalist wave has not simply been a short-lived burst of spontaneous public feeling but has been, in part, intellectually driven. A number of new, predominantly Beijing-based, intellectual publications, established or reshuffled during the 1990s, fanned the fires of the nationalism debate. Among the influential and flagship publications were “Strategy and Management,” “Reading,” “National Studies,” “Open Times,” “Orient,” “Chinese Culture and Scholar,” “Frontiers,” and “Horizons.” These publications and their increasing social impact coincided with the rise of the New Left. This movement played an important role in nurturing the nationalism debate, which in turn helped to lend weight and legitimacy to the growing influence of the

movement. Wang Hui, the heavyweight of the new left theorists and the chief editor of its flagship magazine "Readings," provides detailed justification of contemporary Chinese nationalism and the New Left's current strategy (Wang, 2000).

Under such circumstances, from the mid-1990s onward, popular debate regarding Chinese nationalism became widespread. The publication of two books – "China that can say no," written by a group of young graduates, and "US Media Demonizing China" by scholars and journalists - helped to focus this radical form of espousal. The books became the first of a wave of bestsellers on the theme of mobilizing popular nationalism.

The Hong Kong and Macau handovers provided yet another opportunity for media-projected Chinese nationalism. Achievements under the current Party's leadership were highlighted. Hong Kong was cast as the long-lost child returning to its motherland. The flurry of exchange and name-calling between the then Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten and the Mainland Chinese administration were widely reported (Pan, Lee, Chan, & So, 1999).

Throughout the 1990s, therefore, media-driven Chinese nationalism became increasingly assertive and aggressive, frequently drawing on external events to play up perceived Western threats. In that sense, the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 was a godsend. Alongside these developments, however, popular emotion and approval of patriotism (the official term for nationalism) also generated vast business opportunities. Indeed, the Chinese media today are no longer just the mouthpiece of the Party, but are driven by their own commercial interests and employ increasingly sophisticated methods in packaging nationalism and hedonism (Lee, 2000b). As a result, the combination of political need and market logic, together with the powerful onrush of consumer culture, external pressures, and domestic Party manipulation, has created a "Pareto optimality" social condition for the media to pursue a nationalism agenda both as an alternative political discourse and as a saleable commodity.

Popular Journalistic Writing and Nationalist Discourse

The rise of popular nationalism during the 1990s grew in tandem with an increasingly commercialized tabloid media. While in general the mainstream media adopted a nationalistic stance, its discourse and arguments varied in intensity but unerringly within the State's domain. Several major themes can be identified and drawn from the published material. One such theme is 'reverse racism,' which is characterized by a vitriolic style of writing that places emphasis upon self-deprecation (Wang, 1999). It was most notably prevalent throughout China's most recent period of 'pro-Westernization,' the 1980s. Another theme revolves around the "China Can Say No" series, which first made its appearance in 1996 (Song, et al., 1996). Launched by a group of young

writers, this anthology of their own popular journalistic writings and its sequel (by different writers as well as the same ones) are marked by the use of assertive ultra-nationalistic rhetoric. Yet another series emerged at about the same time - the "US Media Demonizing China" series (Li & Liu, 1996; 1999; Li, 1998). Compared to the "China that can say No" series, the book on "Behind the Scenes of Demonizing China" (English version: "Demonizing China: a critical analysis of the US press"), published in December 1996, and its sequels by Li Xiguang and Liu Kan et al. have clearly demonstrated how the power of discourse can invoke and incite public sentiment.

A fourth theme could be traced to a few high-profile academics, writers and intellectuals. This new cultural elite developed a so-called 'resistance discourse' of anti-Western domination. They shared a common denominator and critical approach to upholding their radical position against liberal discourse in post-Tiananmen China. Paying special attention to the issue of media representation and cultural identity, they proclaimed that one of major problems concerning Chinese intellectuals is the lack of their own discursive framework to resist the dominance of Western discourse (Wang, 1998; 2000).

In contrast to the plebeian or intellectual arguments for Chinese nationalism, the militaristic perspective is more defiant, ruthless, substantial and imaginative. "Unrestricted War" (*chao xian zhang*) appeared in 1999, and was written by two authors, both of who were colonels in the Chinese Air Force (Qiao & Wang, 1999). As the title of the book suggests, it refers to a super war that would transcend all existing rules and international agreements. Thus, the book is about how China could defeat the US military supremacy by launching a war without frontiers, with every means at its disposal. A flow chart is presented, depicting 24 tactics such as spreading computer viruses, cyber 'hacking,' financial and physical terrorism, cross-border drug-trafficking, and environmental degradation. In fact, the authors argue that it would be perfectly justified to use any method and weapon, however conventionally immoral, in order to enable China to win the war against the US, a vicious call that could be seen in "September 11"'s terrorism attacks on the US.

Between 1996 and 2000, a plethora of such journalistic writings was published. Apart from those that have already been mentioned, here are just a few highlights: "US-China Military Confrontations: Before and After" (Hong, 1996); "The Brand Portrait of US-China Confrontations" (Chen, et al., 1996); "Confrontation with the US" (Wu, et al., 1997); "Listening to China: the new Cold War and the future strategy" (He, et al., 1997); "Nine Times That China Said No" (Li, 1999); and "The Future Hope of Humankind Rests on China" (Ju, 2000). In addition, numerous articles and essays appeared in newspapers and magazines, which further fanned the flames of popular and emotional nationalism. Several characteristics can be identified from such a wide genre.

Firstly, all these writings are based on a clear assertive framework, which is quick to blame and attribute criticism to the perceived wrongdoing of the other side. In this case, more often than not, it is linked to the US's 'superpower' status and makes constant reference to the souring bilateral relations between China and the US since the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. All of them claim that the US-led Western world is attempting to contain a rising China through military intimidation (e.g. Lee Teng Hui's 1995 visit to the US triggered a crisis in the Taiwan Strait and led to the US sending two aircraft carriers there); political subversion (for example, supporting Chinese dissidents, sympathizing with the Tibetan independence movement and the Falun Gong sect, the annual accusations of China's human rights record at the UN, etc.); cultural infiltration; and media demonization.

As a result of this common framework, the second characteristic is that all these writings - bar a few in academic publications, in particular those written by the New Left - are invested with vitriol, xenophobia, jingoism and occasionally hysteria. There is keen competition among these writers to produce more sensational works or blustering presentations to incite public resentment. In this way, exaggeration, distortion, factual errors and misleading information abound. One such example comes from a "New York Times" report (May 14, 1999) by Elisabeth Rosenthal on Beijing's public reaction to NATO's bombardment of the Chinese Embassy. The lead reads, "Ever since NATO bombs hit the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade last Friday, China's state-run media have dished up a ceaseless stream of banner headlines and jarring photos" (underline added).

However, when the neutral term "state-run media" was translated into Chinese, it read negatively as "state-manipulated media" (see Li & Liu, 1999:94). This translation was used to support the authors' preconceived argument of how the US media demonized China. Since the majority of the Chinese public can barely read English, the persuasive effect of this kind of language-manipulating exercise is indeed potent.

Thirdly, as for the methodology concerned, none of these works, except for a few academic publications by the New Left, attempt to employ a social scientific approach in collecting systematic data or applying solid empirical analyses, or any other serious forms of study. Quite often these works take a deliberately antagonistic position with very selective and anecdotal sources of evidence. It is also interesting to note that quite a few of the writers cite their own stories to support their anti-American stand, either through their own personal frustrations or biased emotional accounts of their life experiences in the West (e.g. Song, 1999).

Fourthly, commercial interests became very much a driving force in motivating most of these authors. As a result, there has been a plethora of such titles, with similar content and style, most of which are unashamedly sensationalist. Many of them had, in fact, been already published elsewhere and

were hurriedly rolled out. Take the “Say No” series as a typical example. Within just a few months of the initial book’s publication in 1996, bookstores were inundated with titles in the “Say No” series, such as “Still say no,” “Just want to say no,” “How to say no,” “Not just say no,” and “Why say no,” to name just a few. Of course, some were purely commercially opportunistic ‘free riders.’ In 1996, 400,000 ‘legal’ copies of a “Say No” sequel (i.e., “China that still can say No”) had been sold in Beijing alone, following the huge commercial success of the first such book, which sold a record 250,000 copies in its first month of publication. Others, however, did not achieve such sales, as the readers often found the books too sensationalist and coarse, involving little serious research or depth. Nevertheless, the commercial yardstick became a paramount consideration for most publishers and news media through which they could not only shape and manipulate public opinion, but also rake in profits without worrying too much about giving political offence, a typical Pareto move in the post-Tiananmen public communication domain.

Patterns and Strategies of Media Produced Nationalism

The rise of nationalism was one of the most important political developments in China during the 1990s. Within these developments, the media have shaped the public mind with substantial effect. As Kluver points out, the media have an inordinate role in shaping public consciousness, particularly when people have little experience with or understanding of foreign nations (2001:2). Through the combination of nationalistic sentiment and the economic and political circumstances, the Chinese media altered the trajectory of their relationship with the state and the public in an ever-competitive market. In addition, the Chinese media adopted a variety of different approaches in the transmission and projection of the agenda as the media create certain types of discourse and narrative frameworks that influence public perception and subsequent understanding and responses to issues and events. Broadly speaking, it can be broken down to four major patterns and strategies in broadcasting the discourse of nationalism. (See Table 1 on the next page.)

1. Conforming to the official Party line through the use of ritual rhetorical phrases, images and a news-frame that fulfils Party expectations. This strategy involves the regular and repeated utilization of Party-endorsed patriotic slogans broadcast at media-staged ‘patriotic education campaigns’ aimed at reminding the Chinese people of their century-long humiliation at the hands of the West on the one hand, and the great achievements under the leadership of the Communist Party on the other. This is perhaps best exemplified in the affirmative nationalistic media-frame adopted during the coverage of events such as the Hong Kong and Macau handovers, as well as in the performance of Chinese

Table 1. Four Major Patterns of Media-Produced Nationalism

<i>Patterns</i>	<i>Affirmative*</i>	<i>Assertive*</i>	<i>Aggressive*</i>	<i>Rational/ Critical</i>
Media frame/ Core message	Only Party represents China's interests, National pride	China v.s West, China's one Hundred years of humiliation	U.S as the chief enemy (US containing a rising China)	Call for political reform Building a democratic China
Agenda- setting strategy	Strictly following the Party Line	Party line plus own agenda	Mainly initialized by the media	Pushing the boundaries of authority- led acceptability (da cha bin qiu)
Main features	Conforming to the Party line	Stretching Party- set boundaries	Alternating between Party line and bottom line, commercially motivated	Advocating rational nationalism
Central position/theme	State Nationalism/ Patriotism	State-cum-popular Nationalism	Popular Nationalism	Rational Nationalism
Example/ Media campaign	Patriotic education, HK/Macau handover, Olympic Games Bid,	Crisis Coverage on Chinese Embassy bombing (99), China-US mid-air collision (01)	'China Can Say No' series, 'US Media Demonization' Series	Southern Weekly, Open Times, Some online forums
Discourse approach	Mobilizing, Propaganda	Emotional, Sensational	Bellicose, Demagogic	Argumentati ve, Analytical,
Party's attitude	Fully supported and instructed	Consented, Proactive	Tacit, Endorsed	Antagonistic Alert, Suppressive

* Note: The terms "affirmative", "Assertive" and "Aggressive" are defined in Whiting's framework (1995).

athletes at the Olympic Games. These broadcasts largely fall into the "affirmative nationalism" category as defined by Whiting (1995), which mainly concentrates on " 'us' as a positive in-group referent with pride in attributes and achievements," while the "assertive," according to Whiting, adds "them" as a negative out-group referent that challenges the in-group's interests. The third type in Whiting's analysis (1995:295) belongs to the "aggressive" category, which identifies a specific foreign enemy as a serious threat, requiring action to defend vital interests.

As the affirmative form of nationalism is regarded as quite a favorable thematic discourse among the gamut of official rhetoric, the media contribute

proactively in maximizing the popular impact in presenting and disseminating ideas that have helped form the basis of affirmative nationalism. Whilst “dancing under the Party’s assigned tone,” the media have been able to gain maximum return, both commercially and politically.

2. Responding assertively to external challenges or crises, though still largely conforming to the official line. The media are able to exercise a greater degree of autonomy in terms of their technique, coverage, and scope in allowing them to adopt their own form of wisdom and professional judgment to construct the intended frame. Although similar to Type I, it is more assertive and aggressive in setting its own agenda, which may not necessarily toe the party line. Technically, at least, this may even result in a deviation from Party expectations, as displayed by the coverage of the Chinese Embassy bombardment in Belgrade in 1999. This involved stretching the Party-set boundary (on acceptable opinions rather than on issues) to remain commercially competitive, satisfying an audience increasingly hungry for news stories that capture popular sentiments. In this regard, therefore, the Party sets the tone, but the media can formulate their own additional sub-agendas and present them in a more dramatic, eye-catching, and assertive manner.

3. Seizing public sentiments of resentment and gaining inspiration from the New Left intellectuals to perceived threats from US hegemony, the media set their own agenda to produce popular nationalism and stir heated debates in a more aggressive manner. In essence, this is firmly assertive not only in form and style but also in its core message and substance. Within this strategy, the media take the initiative or launch the campaign. In the case of the “Say No” series, for example, the media were eager to engage for commercial reasons, even though officials were reluctant, as China intended to improve souring relations with the US. The State could hardly express objection due to the degree of popular sentiment and support these issues carry. This, in itself, works in the media’s interest. Each progressively radical step seems allied with an audience eager for more sensationalistic appeals and topics. A prime example is the tabloid style newspaper “Globe Times,” a subsidiary paper of “People’s Daily,” which became a major advocate of Chinese nationalism in the 1990s. This tabloidization phenomenon has gone hand in hand with its increasing media commercialization.

Through persistently pushing hard at extending Party boundaries, the media have managed to set their own message frame and have attracted a viable audience, while minimizing Party displeasure. This strategic ritual alternates between the bottom line and the Party line, and implicit Party collaboration with this form of concerted nationalism discourse has undoubtedly been mutually beneficial. It is important to emphasize that Type II and Type III strategies share strong and persistent common themes of retribution, defending itself from past external aggression and humiliation. It is these types of themes that have

became a recurrent driving force shaping popular nationalism in current media production and promotion. This strategy is most explicitly exemplified by journalistic writings such as “China can say No” and “Demonizing China.”

4. This strategy is undoubtedly more immediately challenging. Known as ‘rational nationalism,’ this pattern occurs when any meaningful political reform or questioning of the Party dictatorship in the media remains a distant prospect. Promoting rational nationalism becomes an indirect way of advocating political reform. Heralded through different modes of media, the major precept is for a better and more prosperous Chinese nation in the 21st century (e.g., Liu, 2000; Zhu, 2000). Eradicating the internal decay of outdated cultural and political practices, in order to push political reform further, is a prerequisite. Understandably, this approach is currently marginalized due to its inherently subversive nature. Only selected media like the “Open Times,” and “Southern Weekly,” published in Guangzhou, as well as a few others, have managed to pursue this course of development without heavy reprisal. The Internet and some magazines are major outlets that publish this form discursively.

How are these strategies linked to one another? Types I to III have become widely adopted strategies by the media in producing and selling nationalism because they are not only effective and profitable but also fall within the politically safe haven and “Pareto optimality.” Strategy III requires particular attention in that it is a media-initiated alliance with the New Left elite, which has provided an alternative version that is both popular and controversial. Type IV continues to occupy some limited space in the wide spectrum of today’s forms of nationalism and offers a liberal alternative version to the rhetorical style sponsored by the Party. However, because of its subversive nature to the Party-state, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for it to become a major contributor in the construction of Chinese nationalism in its current context.

Conclusion

As alluded to earlier, the Chinese media today have found themselves in a winning position of “Pareto optimality.” Despite having to toe the Party line, they have found a unifying theme - nationalism - that is popular, commercially attractive and officially endorsed. The nation’s increasing affluence, and the recent policy drive for greater economic self-sufficiency and economic confidence through de facto privatization and the joining of the WTO, has resulted in a burgeoning media market. This has, in turn, endowed the media with increasing economic and business clout. The media now operate within an increasingly commercial environment, necessitating a shift towards a more populist style and narrative-framework.

Market competition has demanded the increasing tabloidization of the media, eager to pander to an ever-increasing audience hungry for more

sensationalist materials and stories, which not only reflect popular sentiments but influence mainstream attitudes as well. This radical shift in style has taken place in a context where the media have been forbidden to address political reform or directly challenge Party authority. However, this stylistic revolution in broadcasting has created an illusion of a shift in content and an increase in the volume of information, which is profitable and, more fundamentally, is having a real and potent effect on domestic opinion and outlook. However, playing with the fire of nationalism is fraught with risk, and the condition of so-called "Pareto Optimality" is full of problematic; thus, if unrestrained, it can lead to something more sinister and devastating with divisive effects in the domestic context as well as in the milieu of regional stability. This, then, will ultimately impinge on the media's credibility and performance.

The trends and behavior of the Chinese mainstream media in recent years suggest that it has not yet reached its limit of state-approved influence in forming opinion. A nationalist agenda will be continuously used to divert internal crises, while market interest will ensure that the media capitalize on popular feelings for commercial gain. For the public, national identity and patriotism remain an unwavering element of political consciousness that so far shows no signs of abating. Meanwhile, international responses and external effects may further consolidate the media's nationalist agenda. Through the combination of perceived US hostility and international pressure vis-à-vis certain issues on human rights, Falun Gong, the trade deficit, Tibet and Taiwan may make nationalism a persistent issue for the international community in dealing with China in the short term and will present formidable challenges beyond. All these issues are likely to be construed by the media within a nationalist framework and potentially presented in a simplistic dichotomy of pro-Chinese or anti-Chinese. In that sense, nationalism, be it popular, official, affirmative, or assertive, will become a recurring phenomenon governing the domain of public discourse through media presentation.

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