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# National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory

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# National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China

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This manuscript explores the state's political use of the past and the function of history education in political transition and foreign relations. Modern historical consciousness in China is largely characterized by the "one hundred years of humiliation" from mid-1800s to mid-1900s when China was attacked, bullied, and torn asunder by imperialists. This research focuses initially on how such historical memory has been reinforced by the current regime's educational socialization through the national "Patriotic Education Campaign" after 1991. It then explores the impact of this institutionalized historical consciousness on the formation of national identity and foreign relations. This study suggests that, even though existing theories and literature illuminate certain aspects of China's political transition and foreign affairs behavior, a full explanatory picture emerges only after these phenomena and actions are analyzed through the "lenses" of history and memory.

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According to Eller (1999), the prime raw material for constructing ethnicity is usually the past—history. It is collective memory of the past that binds a group of people together. The powerful link between collective memory and history is particularly salient in the education system. Forging a country's collective memory is an integral part of nation-building (Podeh 2000, 65). Schools are the primary social institutions that transmit national narratives about the past. All nation-states, whether Western democracies or nondemocratic societies, have placed great emphasis on teaching their national history with the aim of consolidating the bond between the individual citizen and the homeland.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly evident in the case of political transitions. As Evans (2003, 5) suggests, "seldom does history seem so urgently relevant or important as in moments of sudden political transition from one state form to another." From post-Communist East Europe to East Asia and to South Africa, political transitions have often necessitated, among other things, the rewriting of school history textbooks.<sup>2</sup> What is the relationship between history education, historical memory and the formation of national identity? What are the implications of the uses and abuses of national history for political purposes? What role does history and history education play in political transition and foreign relations?

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Podeh (2000), Hein and Selden (2000), Cole and Barsalou (2006).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Evans (2003).

An exploration of these questions would provide a unique and important approach in the study of world politics.

In the study of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) historiography on the frequent peasant rebellions in the history of China, Harrison (1972) considers the party's rewriting of Chinese history as "the most massive attempt at ideological reeducation in human history." The "Patriotic Education Campaign," which began in 1991, is another massive attempt by the party at ideological reeducation. However, when compared with the former campaign, its scope and implications are considerable. This campaign is a nationwide mobilization effort targeted mainly at Chinese youth. As a central part of the campaign, Beijing called upon the entire nation to study China's humiliating modern history and how much the country has been changed by the Communist revolution. The CCP has set the entire propaganda machine in motion for this initiative, the content of which has become institutionalized in China—embedded in political institutions and inaugurated as the CCP's new ideological tool. For example, the Party has conducted major revisions of its schools' history textbooks since 1991. In the new textbooks, a patriotic narrative replaced the old class-struggle narrative. The official Maoist "victor narrative" (China won national independence) was also superseded by a new "victimization narrative," which blames the "West" for China's suffering. This research indicates that the campaign represents a major shift in Beijing's identity politics. Through the nationwide education campaign, Beijing has creatively used history education as an instrument for the glorification of the party, for the consolidation of the PRC's national identity, and for the justification of the political system of the CCP's one party rule.

The recent Tibet crisis and the demonstrations against the Olympic torch relay have generated a new tide of nationalism encompassing not only the younger generation inside China, but highly educated overseas Chinese. Why are these Chinese young people, many from elite schools in the United States or the European countries, so "patriotic" and "nationalistic"? And why did these Chinese, many of them surrounded by the international media everyday and out of control of the Chinese regime, come out to defend Beijing's policy in Tibet? These questions on current affairs are actually closely related to several other important questions that have puzzled China watchers since 1989: After the Tiananmen incident, many scholars predicted that the regime in Beijing would not last long, as the official socialist ideology had already lost credibility. How did the CCP survive and then regain legitimacy in the 1990s? Is economic development the only answer? How do we explain the rapid conversion of China's popular social movements from the internal-oriented, anti-corruption, and anti-dictatorship democratic movements in the 1980s to the rise of external-oriented, anti-Western nationalism in the 1990s?

This manuscript tries to supply the answer to these questions through exploring one the most misunderstood and least addressed elements in Chinese politics today—historical memory. The findings here indicate that full comprehension of the politics of history and memory is a prerequisite to understanding these questions. It examines the importance of collective historical consciousness in China—China's 100 years of humiliation when it was attacked, bullied, and torn asunder by imperialists and how this historical memory has been reinforced by the regime's educational socialization of the Chinese citizenry. This study suggests that, even though existing theories and literature illuminate certain aspects of China's political transition and foreign affairs behavior, a full explanatory picture emerges only after these phenomena and actions are analyzed through the "lenses" of history and memory.

The place of historical memory in the conduct and understanding of international politics is still a significantly understudied field. This research presents a detailed case study exploring how history and memory manifest themselves in

the formation of a group of people's identity and what happens to politics and foreign relations when historical grievances and national humiliation come to the center of political discourse.

### Historical Memory, History Education, and Identity Formation

According to Pennebaker (1997, vii), powerful collective memories, whether real or concocted, can be at the root of conflicts, prejudice, nationalism, and cultural identities. Smith (1986) believes that ethnic, national, or religious identities are built on historical myths that define who is a group member, what it means to be a group member, and, typically, who are the group's enemies. Smith (1996, 383) also argues that "one might almost say: no memory, no identity, no identity, no nation." While exploring the sources, dynamics, and structures of contemporary conflict, especially the striking proliferation of deadly conflicts between ethnic and other so-called identity groups after the end of the Cold War, some scholars have paid special attention to the power of history and memory over human thought, feelings, and action.<sup>3</sup> As Bell (2006, 3) notes, most of the literature on memory and politics focuses on the construction, reproduction, and contestation of national identities. Callahan (2006, 184) suggests that much more attention has been given to national identity with the rise of sociological constructivism in the 1990s, since national identity is seen as determining national interests, which in turn determine policy and state action.

Some scholars contend that collective memory and identity are formed on the basis of the primordial ties of blood, kinship, language, and common history. As Gong (2001, 26) says, "transferring from generation to generation, history and memory issues tell grandparents and grandchildren who they are, give countries national identity, and channel the values and purposes that chart the future in the name of the past." Volkan (1997, 48) identified a "chosen trauma" (the horrors of the past that cast shadows onto the future) and a "chosen glory" (myths about a glorious future, often seen as a reenactment of a glorious past) as elements in the development of group identity. According to him, a group incorporates the mental representation of the traumatic event into its identity, thus leading to the intergenerational transmission of historical enmity. A group's "chosen trauma" consists of experiences that come "to symbolize this group's deepest threats and fears through feelings of hopelessness and victimization." The word *chosen* fittingly reflects a large group's unconsciously defining its identity by the trans-generational transmission of injured selves infused with the memory of ancestors' trauma. Similarly, Galtung (2001) identifies chosenness (the idea of being a people chosen by transcendental forces), trauma and myths, which together form a syndrome: the Chosenness-Myths-Trauma (CMT) complex. This complex is made up of key historical events that have been critical in defining a society's identity and how it behaves in conflict situations.

The constructivists view identity as being manufactured rather than given. Some analysts emphasize that ethnicity and identity are socially constructed, with people choosing a history and common ancestry and creating, as much as discovering differences from others. In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Lowenthal (1985) argues that it is us, the contemporaries, who construct our past selectively and for a variety of different reasons. According to Halbwachs (1992, 224), who conducted path-breaking work on collective memory, collective memory reconstructs its various recollections to accord with contemporary ideas and preoccupations. The past is reconstructed with regard to the concerns and needs of the present.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Duncan S.A. Bell (2006); Gong (2001); Ian McBride, ed, *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Victor Roudometof, *Collective Memory, National Identity, and Ethnic Conflict: Greece, Bulgaria and the Macedonian Question* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

Anderson (1991) argues that print languages laid the foundation for national consciousness by creating unified fields of exchange and communication. The “print capitalism” (book market, mass media, etc.) linked people in disparate regions to a larger and imagined national community. Cole and Barsalou (2006, 10) find that political leaders as well as many citizens have a vested interest in retaining simple narratives that flatter their own group and promote group unity by emphasizing sharp divergences between themselves and other groups. They are highly resistant to histories that include the presentation of the other side’s point of view.

People learn their group’s history not only from their parents or grandparents. Podeh (2000, 66) suggests that a state education system constitutes a major instrument for socializing young people to society’s dominant values. The goal being that the successful completion of this task will turn young people into loyal citizens and will help instill a shared identity. Mehlinger (1985, 287) argues that school textbooks are “the modern version of village storytellers,” because they “are responsible for conveying to youth what adults believe they should know about their own culture as well as that of other societies.” In Mehlinger’s opinion, none of the other socialization instruments can compare to textbooks in their capacity to convey a uniform, approved, and even an official version of what the youth should believe. History textbooks are major components in the construction and reproduction of national narratives. Hein and Selden (2000, 3–4) take the view that history and civics textbooks in most societies present an “official” story highlighting narratives that shape contemporary patriotism. According to Podeh (2000, 66), both the school system and textbooks become “another arm of the state” or “agents of memory” whose aim is to ensure the transmission of “approved knowledge” to the younger generations. Thus, textbooks function as a kind of “supreme historical court” whose task is to decipher, from all the accumulated “pieces of the past,” the “true” collective memories, those that are appropriate for inclusion in the canonical national historical narrative.

Some scholars have conducted detailed case studies examining how various countries deal with the history and memory issues in their education systems and how conflicting national narratives of different sides have generated conflicts. For example, according to Soh (2003), Koreans harbor a deep sense of victimization in collective memories of their checkered historical relationship with Japan, which, in turn, has generated a nationalist vehemence to vanquish Japan’s ethnocentric representations of bilateral and regional events in history textbooks. In his *International Security* article, Ienaga (1993/1994) presents examples of how war, militaristic values, and episodes from Japan’s past have been presented to Japan’s schoolchildren since the 1920s. According to this research, Japan’s textbooks have taught generations of its children that war is glorious, and have concealed many of the sad truths of war.<sup>4</sup>

Some scholars emphasize that history and memory can be used “instrumentally” to promote individual or collective interests. In their struggle for power, competing elites use history as a tool to mobilize popular support. Ethnic categories can also be manipulated to maintain the power of a dominant group and justify discrimination against other groups. The manipulation of the past provides the opportunity to mold the present and the future. For example, Kaufman (2001) argues that people are taught ethnic hatred, not born into it. Ethnic war occurs as a result of symbolic politics, in which ethnic leaders or activists use

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<sup>4</sup> The controversy surrounding the history issues and the adoption of history textbooks in East Asian countries have been issues of much debate among scholars of many different disciplines. See, for example, Christopher Barnard, *Language, Ideology and Japanese History Textbooks* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Laura Hein and Mark Selden (2000).

emotional ethnic symbols (including historic memory) to promote hostility toward other groups and pursue ethnic domination.

Scholars have particularly discussed how states and elites have used history and memory as resources and instruments to conduct political mobilization. According to Volkan (1997), once a trauma becomes a chosen trauma, the historical truth about it does not really matter. In war or war-like situations, the leader evokes the memory of the chosen trauma, as well as that of the chosen glory, to galvanize his people and make his group more cohesive. Historical enmity thus acts much like an amplifier in an electrical circuit. Megill (1998, 39–40) argues that “when identity is problematized, memory is valorized.” In moments of crisis, people hark back to the past with amplified intensity. Bell (2006, 6) puts forward, “as identity are challenged, undermined, or possibly shattered, so memories are drawn on and reshaped to defend unity and coherence, to shore up a sense of self and community.” Smith (1999, 9) emphasizes the link between historical memory and the rise of nationalism, “what gives nationalism its power are myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritage and the way in which a popular living past has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias.”

There is a significant link between historical memory and political legitimacy. Zerubavel (1995) finds that the relationship between collective memory and society’s legitimization is best evidenced by the typical attempt of nationalist movements to create a master commemorative narrative that legitimizes their aspirations for a shared destiny by emphasizing a common past for its members. According to Apple and Christian-Smith (1991, 10), though textbooks pretend to teach neutral, legitimate knowledge, they are often used as “ideological tools to promote a certain belief system and legitimize an established political and social order.” The selection and organization of knowledge for school systems is an ideological process that serves the interests of particular classes and social groups. Bell (2006, 20) suggests that the politics of memory has proven central in transitions to democracy throughout the world. Perceptions of the past are essential in both de-legitimizing previous regimes and in grounding new claims to political legitimacy. Some (Zajda and Zajda 2003, 363) find that the collapse of Communism in Russia in 1991 necessitated, among other things, the rewriting of school history textbooks. Putin’s government has been restoring a Soviet-style patriotic education in order to nurture Russia’s wounded self-esteem after the dramatic political change.<sup>5</sup>

Many studies have demonstrated that ethnocentric views, myths, stereotypes, and prejudices often pervade history textbooks. For example, Podeh (2000) conducted research on history and memory in the Israeli education system. According to him, the kind of textbooks read by Israeli or Palestinian school children as well as what they are taught in the classroom has become a major issue in the context of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. From the 1950s through the 1970s, Israeli textbooks were designed to serve the goals of the newly emerging society. The historical narrative was “replete with bias, prejudice, errors, misrepresentations, and even deliberate omissions.” Arabs were portrayed through stereotypical terms that further reinforced a distorted image of Arabs in Israeli society. Hein and Selden (2000) examined and compared controversies over textbook depictions of recent wars in Japan, Germany, and the United States. They take the view that history lessons not only model behavior for citizens within their own society but also “chronicle relations with others.” The stories chosen or invented about the national past are invariably prescriptive, instructing people how to think and act as national subjects and how to view their relations with outsiders. Textbooks can propagate hatred between two peoples.

<sup>5</sup> See also Catherine Merridale (2003).

Many authorities on China affairs have used adjectives of the superlative degree to describe the special significance of history and memory in China. For example, political scientist Peter Gries (1999, 15) says: “It is certainly undeniable that in China the past lives in the present to a degree unmatched in most other countries.” Sociologist Jonathan Unger (1993, 1) argues, “More than in most other countries, history was and is considered a mirror through which ethical standards and moral transgressions pertinent to the present day could be viewed.” Anne Thurston (2001, 170) comments about national psychology: “Everything we know about individual psychology suggest that the traumas so many Chinese have suffered in the past dozen, 30, 50, 100, and 150 years are both exceptionally painful and exceedingly difficult to overcome.” Although most scholars readily acknowledge the prominence of history and memory in Chinese society, the insights that do exist are scattered among diverse bodies of literature on history, politics, culture, and communication. These insights require supporting empirical research. As Katzenstein (1996, 24–5) suggests, national identities must be investigated empirically in concrete historical settings. Moreover, systematic research exploring the deep structures and implications of history and memory in Chinese politics and foreign-policy decision-making is still lacking.

### **Patriotic Education Campaign**

#### *Background*

Following the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the most important challenges facing the CCP in the 1980s was what Chen (1995) called the “three belief crises”: crisis of faith in socialism, crisis of belief in Marxism, and crisis of trust in the party. When the official Communist ideology lost credibility, the Communist regime could no longer enlist mass support for a socialist vision of the future. Under these circumstances, some intellectuals adopted liberal ideas and called for Western-style democratic reform. Zhao (1998, 288) believes that there is a direct link between the Tiananmen pro-democracy movement in the spring of 1989 and the belief crises. These crises became even more evident following the international collapse of Communist ideology itself. China’s Communist rulers feared that, in the mind of ordinary Chinese citizens, they had already lost the “mandate of heaven” to rule.

The outbreak of the Tiananmen pro-democracy movement shocked the CCP rulers. Shortly after the suppression of the demonstration, the Party began to reflect on the past in order to find the root cause of the incident. The Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, concluded that the biggest mistake for the CCP in the 1980s was that the party did not focus enough attention on ideological education.

I have told foreign guests that during the last 10 years our biggest mistake was made in the field of education, primarily in ideological and political education—not just of students but of the people in general. We did not tell them enough about the need for hard struggle, about what China was like in the old days and what kind of a country it was to become. That was a serious error on our part.<sup>6</sup>

The patriotic education campaign, launched shortly after the Tiananmen movement, is exactly a history education campaign “about what China was like

<sup>6</sup> See Deng Xiaoping (1994). “Address to officers at the rank of general and above in command of the troops enforcing martial law in Beijing.” (June 9, 1989), *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol. III. Its English translation (translated by *People’s Daily*) is available at <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/c1990.html> (June 23, 2005).

in the old days.” The major foci of this campaign are educating Chinese people, especially the young people, about China’s humiliating experience in the face of Western and Japanese incursion, as well as explaining how the CCP-led revolution changed China’s fate and won national independence.

The discourse of national humiliation is not just the standard view of Chinese Communist historiography; it is a recurring theme in both pre-1949 Republican writings and post-1949 Taiwanese discourse as well. According to Cohen’s (2002) research, the issue of national humiliation first began to emerge in public discussion during the late Qing. Callahan (2006, 185) finds that patriotism and national humiliation were closely linked in editorial commentaries and history textbooks of the early 20th century. In this way, national humiliation was part of the construction of citizenship and national identity in the Republic of China (ROC). However, during Mao’s time, the national humiliation narrative was not used by the CCP leaders as a major ideological tool. The CCP, as a socialist party, defined itself as “the vanguard of the Chinese working class.” Mao and Communist historians used class struggle theory to explain Chinese revolution, foreign imperialism, and the Chinese civil wars. A “victor narrative” was particularly emphasized in Communist historiography: it was under the leadership of the CCP that Chinese people overcame the difficulties and won national independence. According to this theory, China’s decline and suffering in modern history were caused mainly by the internal corruption and incompetence of the feudal or capitalist rulers, the Qing Court and the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT). Foreign invasions thus became a secondary factor in explaining China’s traumatic national experience. Callahan (2006, 185) found that “according to the records of the National Library of China, no new books about ‘national humiliation’ were published in China between 1947 and 1990.” In the 1990s, with the decline of Communist ideology as a source of legitimacy, the CCP leaders realized that history education on national humiliation was an effective device for the regime to legitimize its rule. National humiliation discourse thus was revived in the service of patriotic education.

The patriotic education campaign was made official by two documents issued in August 1991: “Notice about Conducting Education of Patriotism and Revolutionary Tradition by Exploiting Extensively Cultural Relics” and “General Outline on Strengthening Education on Chinese Modern and Contemporary History and National Conditions.”<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that both documents were roused by a letter from the CCP leader Jiang Zemin. Jiang’s letter was addressed to the Education Minister and his deputy. It was also published in the *People’s Daily*. In this letter dated March 9, 1991, Jiang wrote:

We should conduct education on Chinese modern and contemporary history and national conditions to pupils (even to the kids in kindergarten), middle school students and to the university students. The education should go from the easy to the difficult, and should be persistent.<sup>8</sup>

As a normal procedure of political operation in this system, the top leaders normally give their policy instructions through well-drafted internal or public speeches or by letters to the related officials. After receiving the leaders’ instructions, the concerned departments of the CPC central committee, or the ministries of the State Council, will work busily to draft an official document. Though these documents use titles such as “notice” (tongzhi), “outline” (gangyao) or “proposal” (yijian), they carry the same, if not greater, weight than laws and regulations. Through the local governmental agencies and institutions, the CCP

<sup>7</sup> CPC Central Committee 1991 and Ministry of Education 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Jiang Zemin (1991), English translation by the author.



works to ensure that all employees learn these documents and understand the Central Committee's ideas. In China, most schools, from elementary to high school, as well as the colleges and universities, are run by the state. This ensures that nearly all school officials are appointed by education agencies of local governments. As a result, most schools have established CCP committees or branches. The General Outline (1991) required that all schools take no longer than three years to incorporate the requirements of this outline into the school curriculum. It stressed that "history education reform" is China's fundamental strategy to "defend against the 'peaceful evolution' plot of international hostile powers and is the most important mission for all schools."

Although the campaign was officially started in 1991, it was not carried out at full scale until August 1994 when the CPC's Central Committee issued the "Outline on Implementing Patriotic Education." According to Zhao's (2004, 218) interpretation, a period of relative political stability and intellectual stagnation, with the stimulus of an economic frenzy after Deng's southern tour in 1992, created the possibility for a confluence of different interests under the umbrella of patriotism. After three years' preparation, Beijing was able to set off an upsurge of patriotic education throughout the whole society.

The CCP was willing to tell people why they launched this education campaign. The 1994 Outline explicitly laid out a series of major objectives of this campaign:

The objectives of conducting patriotic education campaign are to boost the nation's spirit, enhance cohesion, foster national self esteem and pride, consolidate and develop a patriotic united front to the broadest extent possible, and direct and rally the masses' patriotic passions to the great cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics.<sup>9</sup>

"This says it all," as Pyle (2007) comments. In order to provide the legitimacy for CCP rule, which is no longer supported by the Communist ideology, patriotic education stresses the role of the Communist state as the bearer of China's historic struggle for national independence. Callahan (2006, 186) believes that the leaders wanted to use this campaign to shift the focus of students' youthful energies away from domestic issues back to foreign problems. "A patriotic education policy was formulated not so much to reeducate the youth (as it was in the past), as to redirect protest toward the foreigner as an enemy, as an external Other."

#### *New Narrative, New Curriculum*

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Marxist historiography gained orthodox status in the writing of Chinese history. For Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (Communist Manifesto 1848), class struggle is the motor force of historical progress. The concept of class struggle is particularly emphasized in Communist historiography. In addition, Communist historians use the class struggle theory to explain topics such as peasant rebellions, foreign imperialism, and the Chinese civil wars between the CCP and the nationalist KMT. Under the class struggle narrative, many peasant rebellions in Chinese history, including the brutal Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), are adorned as heroic class struggles against the bourgeoisie. The CCP also depicted the anti-Japanese War in Marxist terms, portraying Japanese workers and peasants as fellow victims of militant imperialists.

<sup>9</sup> English translation by the author. The original text (Chinese) is available in the following site: *Xinhua News Agency*, 2005. [http://www.news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2005-03/16/content\\_2705546.htm](http://www.news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2005-03/16/content_2705546.htm)

As Barme (1993, 260) observes, “every policy shift in recent Chinese history has involved the rehabilitation, re-evaluation, and revision of history and historical figures.” In the 1990s, the CCP once again “used the past to serve the present,” but this time the class struggle theory no longer served its interest. The ruling regime found it necessary to conduct a major revision of history textbooks. In prompt response, the official People’s Education Press published new history textbooks for both middle and high schools in 1992.<sup>10</sup> The focus of the new history textbook was on the foreign powers’ invasions and oppressions. The previous “class struggle narrative” was replaced by the “patriotic narrative.” The Taiping Rebellion and the capitalist KMT were no longer important contents. He (2004) noted the change in historical writing:

Generally speaking, the new history no longer centered on the ideological and political conflict between the Communist CCP and capitalist KMT. Instead, the “defending fundamental fissure” for Chinese national identity was now drawn between the Chinese nation and those foreign nations that had invaded and humiliated China in the past.

Coinciding with changes in historical perspectives, the descriptions and comments on past events and well-known characters were also changed. A typical example is the depiction of General Tso (Zhuo) of the Qing Dynasty. In the new textbooks, General Tso is no longer the devil who suppressed the Taiping Rebellion, but a national hero because he also defeated the Russian invasions in Xinjiang. The narrative of the anti-Japanese War has also been revised. The emphasis is placed on the international and ethnic conflict between China and Japan, rather than the internal and class conflict between the CCP and KMT. For example, in the early 1980s, history textbooks provided detailed descriptions about KMT corruption and impotence along with its nonresistance policy. Also, the textbooks purported that the anti-Japanese War was fought solely by Communist troops. However, in the new textbooks, the new narrative gives considerable credit to the KMTs military resistance.

Another major narrative change occurred since the appearance of a patriotic education campaign. Gries (1999, 80–1) remarks that the educational emphasis during the Mao era was China as a victor, which then glorified Communist victories over Nationalist KMT and foreign invaders. Mao was a master of the use of “heroic” or “victor” narratives to mobilize popular support. Because its success in gaining national independence gave legitimacy to the Communist Party, victory over “War of Resistance” (against Japan) and the civil war (against KMT and the United States) has been central to official postwar histories. However, in the post-Tiananmen era, the CCP leaders realized the very survival of the Party depended largely on whether (and how soon) they could change the younger generation’s attitude toward both the Western powers and the Party itself. Neither was the heroic and victor narrative helpful in cultivating the young generation’s hateful attitude toward China’s old enemies which made them less appreciative of the Communist revolution. Essentially, the patriotic education campaign was designed to present the Chinese youth with detailed information about China’s traumatic and humiliating experience in the face of Western and Japanese incursion. The CCP-led revolution changed China’s fate and won national independence, thus ending national humiliation.

<sup>10</sup> The two new history textbooks published in 1992 are: (1) *Gaoji Zhongxue keben zhongguo jixiandaishi* [High School Textbook Chinese Modern and Contemporary History], Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe (People’s Education Press 1992a); (2) *Chuji Zhongxue jiaokeshu zhongguo lishi* [Middle School Textbook Chinese History], (People’s Education Press 1992b)

In the new textbooks approved after 1992, the official Maoist “victor narrative” was superseded by a new “victimization narrative” that blames the West for China’s suffering. “China as victor” has slowly been replaced by “China as victim” in nationalist discourse. This change of narrative is found in the official documents, history textbooks, and popular culture. The new emphasis on foreign powers’ brutality and Chinese misery during the past has made many Chinese, especially the younger generation, confront the foreign atrocities and the Chinese sufferings during the “century of humiliation.” They were exposed to many details that they did not previously know due to the suppression of information by Maoist victor narrative. One (Gries 2004, 70) believes the transition from “China as victor” to “China as victim” reveals a great deal about recent changes to Chinese national identity.

As a specific measure to implement the “General Outline on Strengthening Education on Chinese Modern and Contemporary History and National Conditions” (Ministry of Education 1991), modern and contemporary Chinese history has become a required core course in high school since 1992. For each textbook, the Ministry of Education always formulates detailed “Curricular Standards,” often called “Teaching Guidelines,” to exercise direct authority over educational content and teaching methods. According to the official “Teaching Guideline for History Education” (Ministry of Education 2002), a core course means that it has three class-hours per week and altogether 99 hours for two semesters. The other history courses, such as *Chinese Ancient History* and *World Modern and Contemporary History* are elective courses with two class-hours per week and 60 hours for two semesters. The Teaching Guidelines of the high school history course—*Chinese Modern and Contemporary History Textbook* (Vol. I) also provides an official narrative of modern Chinese history:

Chinese modern history is a history of humiliation that China had been gradually degenerated into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society; at the same time, it is also a history that Chinese people strived for national independence and social progress, persisted in their struggle of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism, and was also the history of the success of New-Democratic Revolution under the leadership of the CCP.<sup>11</sup>

In China, the national entrance examinations, required prior to attending a university, have been called the “baton” of high school education. Because of the limited resources of higher education, many high school graduates do not have the opportunity to attend universities. Admission decisions are heavily based on the candidate’s scores in very competitive examinations. Therefore, all the students will study the required subjects and contents very carefully. In China’s education system, a candidate can take the nationwide examination in either one of two categories—humanities or sciences/engineering. History is only a testing subject for humanities majors. However, all the students were required to take the politics subject (mainly about Marxism, Mao’s thoughts, and the CCPs current policies). The 1991 outline stipulates that beginning in 1992, knowledge of modern and contemporary Chinese history is to be included in the politics section for those students concentrating in the science/engineering major. After these reforms, modern and contemporary Chinese history—“education on national humiliation”—has become one of the most important subjects in the national education system.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Education 2002. “Lishi Jiaoxue Dagang [Teaching Guideline for History Education]. Beijing: People’s Education Press.

*Patriotic Education in the Party-State System*

The CCP has over 60 millions members. Party members, multilevel employees of state agencies or state-run organizations, military officers, and soldiers are all required to be familiar with CCP documents and its leaders' speeches. This system represents a kind of on-going course on politics. After the collapse of Communism as an ideology, "patriotism" has become the most important tool for the ideological education of the party-state system. The local government and party agencies have been required to set up permanent "leading groups" to coordinate the work of this patriotic education. More importantly, during the campaign the CCP leadership had begun to use the content of patriotic education to ensure the membership and identity of the ruling party.

The classic definition of the membership of the CCP, according to the Constitution of the Party, is that the Party is "the vanguard both of the Chinese working class and of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation." However, the class struggle theory was no longer useful in the identification of the Party. In his 1996 speech, Jiang Zemin used four superlatives to describe his Party's "new" membership.

Our party has inherited and carried forward the Chinese nation's outstanding tradition, and has made the *biggest* sacrifice and the *biggest* contribution in the struggle of national independence and safeguarding of national sovereignty. We have therefore won the heartfelt love and support from people of all nationalities in China. The Chinese Communist is the *firmest*, the *most* thoroughgoing patriot. CCP's patriotism is the *highest* model of conduct for the Chinese nation and the Chinese people.<sup>12</sup>

He emphasized that the Party had made "the biggest sacrifice and the biggest contribution" in the struggle of national independence and safeguarding national sovereignty. As such, he introduced the new identification of the Party—the Chinese Communist is "the firmest and most thoroughgoing patriot."

In his speech at the 2001 Meeting celebrating the 80th Anniversary of the founding of the CCP, Jiang argued that "the fundamental and most important conclusion" drawn from Chinese modern and contemporary history is that "without the Communist Party, there would have been no New China." In the same speech, Jiang also listed the major accomplishments of the Party:

We have thoroughly put an end to the loose-sand state of the old China and realized a high degree of unification of the country and unparalleled unity of all ethnic groups. We have abrogated the unequal treaties imposed upon China by Western powers and all the privileges of imperialism in the country. The feudalistic segmentation of the country has gone forever on this land of China. ...We have forged a people's army under the absolute leadership of the Party and built a strong national defense. ...We have thoroughly ended the history of humiliating diplomacy in modern China and effectively safeguarded State sovereignty, security and national dignity.<sup>13</sup>

Each of these accomplishments is closely connected with the "100 years of national humiliation." However, Jiang and other CCP leaders have always avoided talking about the tremendous failures and catastrophes that have been caused at the Party's hand, such as a famine in the late 1950s, the Culture Revolution, and the democracy movement in 1989. For this Party, its failures are internal, but its legitimacy to rule China, has been justified by ending the history of humiliating diplomacy and regaining China's national independence.

<sup>12</sup> Jiang Zemin (1996), translation by *Xinhua News Agency*.

<sup>13</sup> Jiang Zemin (2001), translation by *Xinhua News Agency*.

“Rejuvenating China” (zhengxing zhonghua) was probably the most popular political slogan in China in 1980s and 1990s. The slogan was painted on walls, coined into trademarks, and imprinted on stationery all over China. Jiang claims that “Rejuvenating China” is “a grand mission that history and the era have entrusted to our Party.” “Backwardness incurs beatings by others” (luohou jiuyao aida) is another popular political slogan in China; it has been used as a political theory to explain China’s national experience during the “100 years of national humiliation.” The CCP draws upon it to justify its arms development, nuclear program, and manned space aviation. Actually, history and memory have provided a complete set of theories to define the identity and world view of the CCP: The Party’s responsibility and leadership roles have been entrusted by the record of the past century—the Party has made the biggest sacrifices and contribution in the struggle to “put an end to the past humiliation.” Therefore, the Party is “the firmest and most thoroughgoing” patriot. As Renwick and Cao (1999) observe, the CCP has claimed legitimacy on a portrayal of itself as the historic agency that restored national unity and practical independence. The central myth of the Party—the “theory” that has been used to explain how the world works for the Chinese people—is clear: “Only the Communist Party of China can save China; only the Party can develop and rejuvenate China.”

*“Patriotic Education Bases”: China’s Memory Sites*

Museums and public monuments have played very important roles in the formation of a national memory and identity in different societies. Today, the Chinese people are living in a forest of monuments, all of which are used to represent the past to its citizens through museums, historic sites, and public sculptures. Although people all over the world cherish their own memory sites, the special effort made by the Chinese government, since 1991, to construct memory sites and use them for ideological reeducation is unparalleled.

In 1991, the CCP Central Propaganda Department issued “Notice about Conducting Education of Patriotism and Revolutionary Tradition by Exploiting Extensively Historical Relics.” This document explains the rationale for using historical sites for patriotic education:

Using the rich historic relic resources to conduct education on the masses about loving our motherland, loving the party, and loving socialism has the characteristic of visualization, real, and convincing. In some aspects, this approach has better educational effectiveness compared with that of normal oral lessons and written propaganda materials. It provides a very important method and vivid textbook for younger generation to know about national history, to understand state’s current situation and to learn from our tradition.<sup>14</sup>

In August 1994, the CPC Central Committee issued the “Outline on Implementing Patriotic Education” setting off an upsurge of patriotic education throughout the whole society. The 1994 Outline further required local governments of all levels to establish “patriotic education bases” as one of the most important contents of the campaign. The Outline states:

Different sorts of museums, memorial halls, buildings in memory of martyrs, sites of important battles in revolutionary wars, protected historic relics, and scenic sites are important places for conducting patriotic education. The propaganda departments of different level’s party organizations should work with the local education, and relic and civil affairs agencies to select and determine the local

<sup>14</sup> CPC Central Committee (1991). Translation by *Xinhua News Agency*. Its Chinese version is available at <http://www.sznx.com.cn/nt/student/shaoxiandui/ab8/wenjian/23.htm> (Accessed July 7, 2005).

education bases. Work units of different levels in both the urban and rural areas should actively use these bases to conduct educational activities. Schools should incorporate this kind of educational activities into the curriculum of moral education.<sup>15</sup>

Setting up typical examples or models is a customary way for the CCP to launch a political campaign. In March 1995, the Ministry of Civil Affairs announced that, after a careful nomination and selection process, 100 sites were selected as the national level “demonstration bases” for patriotic education. In the history of CCP political campaigns, the selection of typical examples has always represented the party’s interests, values, and strategies in a specific period of time. Among the 100 bases, 40 are memory sites of China’s past conflicts or wars with foreign countries—including battle fields, museums, memorial halls, and monuments in memory of martyrs. Twenty-four sites represent a memory of the civil wars between the CCP and the KMT (1927–1949). Altogether, 64 percent of the “demonstration bases” were actually memory sites of past wars and conflicts. The remaining sites can be categorized into two groups: myths and heroes. Twenty-one are wonders of Chinese civilization, including ancient architecture, such as the Great Wall; museums of ancient civilizations; and great achievements or relics of prehistoric civilizations. Those left over are in memory of Chinese heroes (including memorial halls for CCP leaders, such as Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou), memory buildings for the Party’s “model workers or soldiers” and the “patriots”—people who were not members of the CCP but have made a special contribution to the Chinese revolution. Among the 40 sites established in memory of external wars and conflicts, half are in remembrance of the anti-Japanese War (1937–1945). Many are memorial halls built in the ruins of old battlefields. The Korean War was not fought in China’s territory. Therefore, two of the Korean War memory sites are actually commemorations of two Chinese soldiers and were built in the soldiers’ hometowns. Table 1 provides a summary of the 100 “demonstration bases.”

After being selected as demonstration bases, most memory sites receive financial support from the government for construction or renovation and enlargement. All demonstration bases have hosted numerous organized visits from schools, the army, and government agencies. For example, the *Chinese People’s Memorial Hall of Anti-Japanese War* was built in 1987 and then rebuilt in 1995. It has received more than nine million visitors since 1987. Chinese leader Jiang Zeming wrote an inscription for its reopening in 1997 after the enlargement. The inscription reads: “Hold high the patriotic banner, use history to educate people, promote and develop Chinese national spirit and rejuvenate the Chinese nation.”<sup>16</sup>

Beijing’s impetus for sustaining the 100 national-level demonstration bases was to set an example for local governments to follow suit. Shortly after the 1994 Outline was issued, each of the PRC provinces (autonomous regions) and centrally administered municipalities (CAMs), established provincial-level “patriotic education bases.” Further, a large amount of county-level bases have also been created. Many local governments support “leading groups” to coordinate the work. According to an interview with the deputy minister of the Propaganda Department, a dozen provinces put more than 10 million Chinese Yuan into the development of the patriotic bases annually.<sup>17</sup> According to Wang (2006), only five PRC provinces or CAMs—Beijing, Hebei, Jiangshu, Jiangxi, and Anhui—have established more than 434 provincial-level bases and 1,938 county-level patriotic

<sup>15</sup> CPC Central Committee (1994). Its Chinese version is available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2005-03/16/content\\_2705546.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2005-03/16/content_2705546.htm) (Accessed July 7, 2005). English translation by the author.

<sup>16</sup> The Web site of the *Chinese People’s Memorial Hall of Anti-Japanese War* is available online at: <http://www.china1937.org.cn>.

<sup>17</sup> “Zhongxunbu fuze tongzhi tan dierpi aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi” [Cadre in charge of the Department of Propaganda talks about the patriotic education bases], *Jiefangjun Bao* (*The PLA Daily*), June 13, 2001, Section 4.

TABLE 1. The 100 National-Level Patriotic Education Bases

External conflicts (40 sites)	20 sites—anti-Japanese War (1937–1945) 7 sites—Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) 4 sites—Korean War (1950–1953) 1 site—Russian invasion (1858) 1 site—the 1962 China-India War 1 site—the 1662 War with the Dutch over Taiwan 1 site—Invasion of the Eight-Power Allied Forces (1900) 5 sites—Other general anti-imperialism museums/sites
Civil Wars (24 sites)	Civil wars between CCP and KMT (1927–1949)
Myths (21 sites)	15 sites—Wonders (ancient architecture, museums of ancient civilizations) 4 sites—Relics for prehistoric civilization 2 sites—Great achievement after 1949
Heroes (15 sites)	7 sites—CCP Leaders 4 sites—Model workers 4 sites—Patriots

education bases. The estimated total number of memory sites for the country should be over 10,000. Visiting these memory sites has become a regular part of all schools' curriculum.

#### *New Approaches, New Media*

As Zhao (1998, 298) points out, in comparison with previous propaganda campaigns launched by the CCP (especially those in the Maoist years), the patriotic education campaign was carried out “in a much more practical and sophisticated way of selling the CCPs ideas and agenda.” In the past, traditional propaganda campaigns were dominated by empty political slogans and preaching. Knowing the Maoist approach to propaganda no longer appealed to ordinary people, especially the younger generation, the patriotic education campaign is “dressed-up.”

In October 2004, 10 government ministries and CCP departments issued a new document—“Opinions on Strengthening and Improving the Work of Patriotic Education Bases.” This document asks government agencies and education institutions to “liberate thoughts” and to improve teaching methods, especially those that involve communication with the younger generation. It also mentions that officials should try to “make entertainment a medium of education.” That same month, Beijing put forward a new patriotic education project—“*Three One Hundred for Patriotic Education*.” The “three one hundred” are 100 films, songs, and books with a common theme of patriotism. Seven PRC ministries and CCP departments, including the Ministry of Education and the Propaganda Department, jointly recommended 100 selected films, 100 selected songs, and 100 selected books to the whole society. Many of these films, songs, and books were about modern and contemporary Chinese history—as evidence, one selected book is entitled, “Never Forget Our National Humiliation.”<sup>18</sup> Since the 1950s, the Chinese have made many films on historical events, such as the anti-Japanese War, the Opium War, and the Korean War. For example, “Sangkumryung Campaign,” a recommended film, tells a story of brutal battles between the Chinese and Americans in Sangkumryung during the Korean War. The government normally provides the financial support to produce these films. Such “mainstream”

<sup>18</sup> “Mo Wang Guochi” [Never Forget Our National Humiliation], Beijing: Haiyan Chubanshe (*Haiyan Press*), 2002.

films—films on the themes of patriotism and socialism—normally also generate lucrative profits. One reason is that government agencies and schools frequently organize their employees and students to screen these films.

To attract more people to selected patriotic education bases, the CCP Central Committee and State Council launched a new program entitled “Red Tourism.” The purpose of Red Tourism is to encourage people to visit the former revolutionary bases and landmarks. In 2005, China’s National Bureau of Tourism (NBT) published a list of “100 Red Tourism Scenic Spots” and recommended them to tourists. The NBT also named 2005 as the “Year of Red Tourism.”<sup>19</sup> Many of the 100 scenic spots are also among the list of patriotic education bases made in 1994. Essentially, the CCP skillfully replaced the term “education” with “tourism.” According to a report from the *Xinhua News Agency*, more than 150 major “red tourism” sites in 13 provinces and municipalities received 20 million visitors in 2004.<sup>20</sup> From 2004 to 2007, more than 400 million people have taken “red tourism” in different provinces in China. Popular destinations include Chairman Mao Zedong’s hometown in the southern province of Hunan, and Yanan, the CCPs “holy place of revolution” (a small town in Shaanxi Province where the CCP stayed during the anti-Japanese War period).<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the CCP Central Committee asked local governments to make use of important legal holidays and national traditional holidays to carry out patriotic education. According to the 1994 Outline, “The patriotic content should be especially stressed during the important celebrations such as the New Year, Spring Festival, Women’s Day, Labor Day, Youth day, Children’s Day, the Party’s Birthday, Army Day, and National Day.” The government organized series of activities to celebrate several important anniversaries of historical events. According to Zhao (2004, 220), there were over 10,000 official events and various celebrations commemorating the 50th anniversary of the victory of the anti-Japanese War in 1995. In 1997 and 1999, a series of large scale activities were organized all over the country to celebrate Hong Kong and Macao returning to the homeland. The celebration activities for both events lasted for more than 6 months. In 2005, the Party launched a special propaganda campaign to memorialize the 60th anniversary of the anti-fascist and anti-Japanese war.

#### *Institutionalization*

In 2006, the Chinese government proudly announced that its “One-Child-per-Couple Campaign,” which started in 1976, “has helped China prevent 400 million births by the end of 2005.”<sup>22</sup> But how do we evaluate the effectiveness and implications of the “Patriotic Education Campaign” which is inherently an ideological education campaign? Actually, as Markovits and Reich (1997, 9) suggest, the politics of collective memory are impossible to quantify and hard to measure with the methods of survey research. Cole and Barsalou (2006, 13) have also advised that evaluating the impact of history education on individual students and the larger society is extremely difficult.

In their book *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane (1993) proposed an analytic framework to study how ideas (defined as “beliefs held by individuals”) help to explain political outcomes. According to them, once ideas or beliefs become embedded in rules and norms—that is to say, once

<sup>19</sup> “China Boosts ‘Red Tourism’ in Revolutionary Bases,” *Xinhua News Agency*, February 22, 2005; <http://www.china.org.cn/english/government/120838.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> “China Boosts ‘Red Tourism’ in Revolutionary Bases,” *Xinhua News Agency*, February 22, 2005; <http://www.china.org.cn/english/government/120838.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> “‘Red tourism’ booming in China,” *Reuters*, December 21, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> “China’s Family Planning Policy Helps Prevent 400 Million Births by 2005,” *Xinhua News Agency*, May 3, 2006; available at [http://english.people.com.cn/200605/03/eng20060503\\_262703.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200605/03/eng20060503_262703.html).



they become institutionalized—they constrain public policy. Furthermore, once a policy choice leads to the creation of reinforcing organizational and normative structures, the policy idea can affect the incentives of political entrepreneurs long after the interests of its initial proponents have changed. The term *institutionalization* is used here to denote the process of embedding particular values and norms within an organization, social system, or society. In general, when institutions intervene, the impact of ideas may be prolonged for decades or even generations. In this sense, ideas can have an impact even when no one genuinely believes in them as principled or causal statement.

According to White (1990, 55), one of the defining characteristics of the Maoist era in Chinese politics (1949–1976) was the continual use of “mass mobilization campaigns” (*quanzhong yundong*) to achieve socialist goals. Even though Deng Xiaoping officially announced that the CCP would abandon the “storming” model of “bottom-up” mobilization in which the elite party membership is subject to rectification by the non-elite masses (such as the Culture Revolution), in its stead, the “top-down” model of party-controlled mobilization from above has remained an integral, active part of the postrevolutionary Chinese political process and an important leadership device for the CCP.

The CCPs official definition of a “mass mobilization campaign” is: “Organized mobilization of collective action aimed at transforming thought patterns, class/power relationships and/or economic institutions and productivity.”<sup>23</sup> White (1990, 59) also listed three specific indicators of campaign activity: first, *informational* indicators (e.g., newspaper articles, slogans, mobilization meetings, targets for criticism, stories for emulation, pamphlets, signs, banners, and exhibits); second, *organizational* indicators (e.g., sending in outside cadres, creating work teams, reallocation of resources, disruption of work routines, or reorganization of the unit); third, *mass participation* indicators (e.g., participating after regular work hours; mobilization of minority, youth, or other special groups and organizations; study groups, local, regional, and national rallies).

Virtually all of the above tools were utilized in the patriotic education campaign. The Campaign started in the early 1990s as an education campaign targeting young people and school students. Over time, it has gradually become a nationwide mobilization. “Patriotism,” along with history and memory, have become the most important content for ideological education of the party-state system. The CCP set the entire propaganda machine in motion for this Campaign. All the employees of state agencies or state-run organizations, school teachers and administrators, military officers, and soldiers have all been required to take regular political classes on patriotic education and to participate in various activities and events on the theme of patriotic education.

The CCP leaders also replaced the Maoist approaches of mass campaign with routinization; radicalism gave way to “systems engineering.” The implementation process has gradually evolved into a pattern of *institutionalized mobilization*. This has become the biggest difference between the patriotic education campaign and other political campaigns that the CCP has launched. The Party has set up some permanent “leading groups” or offices at the different levels of government and party agencies to coordinate the work of patriotic education. Routine procedures have also been developed to administer work and coordinate with other relevant departments. In addition, funding and personnel have been increased and regularized.

Most CCP political campaigns are short-term mobilizations that temporarily intensify coercion and vary from region to region in timing, intensity and scope.

<sup>23</sup> This definition is quoted by Tyrene White from a 1959 article in *Hongqi* [Red Flag], the official magazine of the Central Committee of the CCP. See Tyrene White, “Postrevolutionary Mobilization in China: The one-child policy reconsidered,” *World Politics* 43(1) (October 1990), p. 55.

However, in the “Outline on the Implementation of Education in Patriotism” (CPC Central Committee 1994), the CCP leadership especially emphasizes that the patriotic education campaign as a long-term project and should be carried out “unwaveringly” and “tirelessly.” Since 1991, the Communist government has turned words into action. As discussed in previous sections, the content of history and memory has become embedded in Chinese education systems, party-state systems, popular culture and public media. Having realized the changes of social context in China, the CCP regime has correspondingly changed their approaches of mobilization and propaganda. In comparison with previous CCP propaganda campaigns, the patriotic education campaign has been “dressed up” and carried out in a much more practical and sophisticated way, as discussed in the previous section. In particular, the Party has made special efforts to “make entertainment a medium of education” and to socialize educational content penetrating every facet of people’s daily lives.

### History Education, Nationalism, and Foreign Relations

The 1990s and 2000s have witnessed a surge of nationalism in China. In May 1999, for example, major cities in China saw their biggest and angriest demonstrations in decades in response to the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. In Beijing, about 100,000 protesters converged on the U.S. embassy pelting it with rocks and debris, wrestling with police, and attempting to set fire to embassy vehicles. The residence of the U.S. Consul General in the southwestern city of Chengdu was stormed and partially burned.<sup>24</sup> In April 2005, another event which ignited outrage in China (and also South Korea) was when the Japanese Education Ministry approved a controversial new series of junior high school textbooks that critics say whitewash Japan’s militaristic past. Two weeks following the textbooks’ approval, anti-Japanese protests broke out in more than 10 Chinese cities. The protests are considered the largest anti-Japanese demonstrations in China since the two countries normalized diplomatic relations in 1972.<sup>25</sup> In March and April 2008, demonstrators targeting the Olympics torch relay to protest the Chinese government have met with vigorous and emotional counter-demonstrations by Chinese living and studying overseas. Almost every pro-Tibetan protest was met with a considerable pro-China protest. Inside China, large-scale anti-French demonstrations were seen in more than 20 cities since the disruption of the Olympic torch relay in Paris and French President Sarkozy’s threat to shun the Olympic Games opening ceremony.<sup>26</sup>

Some scholars (Gries 2004; Pyle 2007; Zhao 1998, 2004) believe that the campaign for patriotic education has greatly contributed to the rise of nationalism in China in the 1990s. For example, Zhao (1998, 288) attributes the nationalistic sentiments of the mid-1990s to the dependence on patriotism and the patriotic education campaign both designed by the Communists to build support for the government. Crothall (1994, 8) finds that while Chinese students usually hate to take such “political science” classes and study Marxist doctrine with Communist Party propaganda, nevertheless, they find the new patriotic education appealing.

All the indications are that patriotic education has worked where political science failed. Today’s students are far less willing to criticize the party because to do so would be seen, somehow, as being unpatriotic. Furthermore, the students have seen living standards rise and China’s position in the world improve markedly over the past 5 years.

<sup>24</sup> Rebecca MacKinnon, May 8, 1999. Protesters attack U.S. Embassy in Beijing. *CNN*.

<sup>25</sup> “Japan Seeks China Talks on Riots.” *CNN*. April 16, 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Sanderson, Protests against French supermarket Carrefour spread, the Associated Press, April 19, 2008; available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24218173/>

As Francis Fukuyama (2007, 38) observed, the upsurge in nationalism in both China and South Korea appears to be associated with generational change. That is, those who have been the most assertive in pushing a nationalist agenda tend to be younger people who did not directly experience either the Pacific War or the Korean War. Furthermore, as time has passed, the nationalist attitudes have only grown stronger. Most participants of China's 1999 anti-American protests, the 2005 anti-Japanese protests, and the 2008 counter demonstrations during the Olympic torch relays were college students and young people in their twenties.<sup>27</sup> The patriotic education campaign started from 1991. That means most students began to receive patriotic education since they entered into primary school or middle school. They are the "generation of patriotic education."

Some foreign leaders and international media viewed China's history education as the root cause of the rising grassroots nationalism in China. Japanese Foreign Minister Machimura connected China's anti-Japan sentiments with China's history education. He said China should "modify" its education on history.<sup>28</sup> A *Japan Times* editorial states that the Chinese government introduced a "patriotic education syllabi" in 1994 to raise anti-Japanese sentiments stemming from Japanese atrocities conducted in China before and during World War II. According to a survey released by Japan's *Asahi* newspaper in April 2005, more than 80 percent of Japanese believe that China's nationalistic education system encouraged the recent protest.<sup>29</sup>

The rise of nationalism is also a double-edge sword. It could help authorities to consolidate its power and promote political solidarity in Chinese society by focusing animosity on external opponents, rather than domestic issues. But the rise of nationalism can also put pressure on the government's policy-making. As Pyle (2007, 33) observes, the Belgrade bombing, the U.S. spy plane collision, the Japanese textbook, and Yasukuni Shrine controversies all evoked a popular anti-foreign nationalism. The state has struggled to retain control over the nationalist discourse. During all these crises, the government not only negotiated with the foreign governments, but also had to "negotiate" with its domestic audiences, especially China's new nationalists. The government needed to be tough to maintain its legitimacy. As Pyle puts it, "[t]he government struggles to maintain its version of the master narrative, but the effort to both promote and contain nationalism is fraught with danger."

The recent arguments about nationalism in China have been focused on an either-or debate on whether Chinese nationalism is a "top-down" imposition on the people of China by the state or as much a "bottom-up" phenomenon.<sup>30</sup> This article, however, aims to explain the cultural and historical foundation of Chinese nationalism. It explores the power of historical memory in Chinese identity formation and political discourse. The national humiliation discourse certainly is propaganda in today's China, however, it has a large and sympathetic audience. For many Chinese people, the foreign invasions, the military defeats, the unequal treaties and all the details of invaders' atrocities during the "100 years of national humiliation" are not merely a recounting of national history. People learn these sad stories not only from history textbooks or patriotic education activities, but also from their parents and grandparents. Without comprehension of the primordialist background of Chinese nationalism, we would not be able to fully understand why this elite-led top-down propaganda campaign could have realized its objectives of enhancing the regime's political legitimacy and improving social solidarity. This article has no intention of measuring to what extent

<sup>27</sup> Based on the author's interview in Beijing in 1999 and 2006.

<sup>28</sup> "Japan Glosses, China Distorts," *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, A 11, April 11, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Magnier (2005).

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Gries (2004) and Zhao (2004).

the campaign for patriotic education has promoted the rise of nationalism in China. However, it argues that full comprehension of this campaign is a precondition to understanding the rapid conversion of China's popular social movements from the internal-oriented, anti-corruption, and anti-dictatorship democratic movements in the 1980s to the rise of external-oriented, anti-Western nationalism in the 1990s. The institutionalized historical discourse about the country's traumatic national experiences has profoundly influenced the young people's attitudes and perceptions toward the outside world.

History education is no longer a domestic issue in East Asia. Historical narratives and the interpretation of the past have always been the major barriers for a real reconciliation among countries in this region. To a great extent, memories of the past conflicts have come to shape international relations in East Asia. As one (He 2007) points out, the "history quarrel" between China and Japan not only poisoned popular feelings toward each country, but it also exacerbated a mutual perception of intention and provoked domestic opposition to accommodative foreign policies. There is actually a feedback loop in each of the East Asian countries whereby the nationalistic history education stimulates the rise of nationalism, and the rise of nationalism provides a bigger market for nationalistic messages.

Podeh (2000, 68) suggests that controversies over textbooks reveal one important way "societies negotiate, institutionalize, and renegotiate nationalist narratives." In each of the East Asian countries, there are internal debates and controversies over historical issues and about which historical facts the younger generation should learn from their history classes. For example, in his article "Modernization and History Textbooks," Chinese history scholar Weishi Yuan (2006) strongly criticized China's history textbooks and history education. He believed that the current history education is actually fostering blind nationalism and closed-minded anti-foreign sentiment. For example, he challenged the textbooks for portraying the 1900 Boxer Rebellion as a "magnificent feat of patriotism" without describing the violence committed by the rebels or their extreme anti-foreign views. This essay was published at *China Youth Daily's* weekly supplement, a well-known and popular national newspaper in China. Due to the publication of this article, this weekly supplement was closed down by the government.<sup>31</sup> In Japan, the history curriculum has always been an issue of much debate among historians, politicians, and ordinary people.

Basically, the lack of internal consensus indicates uncompleted nation-building and identity search in these countries. Japan, South Korean, and Taiwan have all claimed a national objective of becoming a "normal country." However, such a process of normalization presupposes a reconciliation of opinions at home over their country's own history and a reconciliation of their own self-image with the images its neighbors hold of their past. A *Newsweek* article has commented on China's history education: "To face the future confidently, China must be able to face its past truthfully."<sup>32</sup> This comment holds true for each of the East Asian countries. The unsolved historical issues and the uncompleted search for national identity has become one of the major security uncertainties in East Asia.

Historical memory issues are not only relevant for Sino-Japanese relations. Some scholars have discussed how historical memory has influenced China's foreign relations with other countries. From the viewpoint of Gong (2001, 28), for example, the Sino-U.S. embassy bombing crisis was generated by the divergent "frames of history" between the two countries.

<sup>31</sup> The original text (Chinese) of this article and its English translation are available at this Web site [http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20060126\\_1.htm](http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20060126_1.htm).

<sup>32</sup> Zakaria, Fareed. May 30, 2005. The Virtue of Learning Vices. *Newsweek*, U.S. edition.

The accidental U.S. bombing of the PRC embassy in Belgrade forcibly demonstrated that in some matters of history, Chinese memory is too long while U.S. memory is too short.

Gries (1999, 32) argues that the Belgrade bombing incident fits perfectly into the “victimization narrative” in China and thus provides the fuses to touch off Chinese popular nationalism. Chinese leaders and Chinese people saw themselves as “injured”—as the victim. Feelings of shame surrounding past traumas can lead victims to both over-exaggerate current threats and desire revenge. Emotions impact cognition as well as behavior. In fact, the “victimization narrative” of Chinese suffering at the hands of the West as a cultural factor underlies perceptions of present-day wounds to face and simultaneously centralize the need for appropriate amends, such as an apology.<sup>33</sup> They assert that this historical memory played a role in the Sino–U.S. spy plane negotiation, as it does in Sino-Western relations generally. Hamrin and Wang (2004) explain that the fate of Taiwan remains highly symbolic in the Chinese memory of the nation’s past, even though the return of Hong Kong and Macao has served to assuage the sense of trauma under imperialism. But even deeper lies the potent myth of a unitary Chinese state persisting for thousands of years.

Megill (1998, 39–40) discusses that, in the moments of crises, memory could be “valorized,” people hark back to the past with amplified intensity. Historical memory has been used to explain China’s conflict behavior in international crises. Wang (2006, 260–1) presents three conditions or factors that very often activate Chinese historical memory: emergency (e.g., accident or unexpected events) and urgency; incidents that involve Chinese suffering; and disputes with a country that has historical problems with China. In crisis situations of confrontation and conflict, especially when confrontation is perceived by the Chinese as an assault on fundamental identity, face, and authority, then history and memory very often serve as major motivating factors. Through the lens of historical memory, an isolated and/or accidental event (as viewed by the outsiders) was perceived by Chinese leaders as a new form of humiliation. The accidental or mischievous behavior on the part of the United States caused injuries and deaths and therefore touched on sensitive Chinese feelings about Western imperialist nations taking advantage of a weakened China in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The beliefs of history and memory justified the escalation of the conflict and the course of its development. Being tough and aggressive had an ethical and moral correctness. “Cool diplomacy” would not pass the domestic test, especially when the patriotic education campaign has greatly strengthened Chinese people’s history consciousness and, therefore, was curtailed as an option. This also helps to explain why many of the Chinese government’s actions in external affairs are regarded as “harsh” by foreigners but perceived as “soft” by much of its domestic audience.

In the past five or six years, as many China watchers have noticed, a more mature and “normal” foreign policy is in the making in Beijing.<sup>34</sup> As a result, China is becoming a more responsible and predictable player in international affairs. China has gradually discarded Mao’s mentality of power struggle and zero-sum confrontation and has begun to take a more cooperative and problem-solving attitude in international disputes. However, other systemic barriers still

<sup>33</sup> Gries and Kaiping (2002, 175).

<sup>34</sup> For articles about China’s new diplomacy, see Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, “The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policymaking in China: the Ascension and Demise of the Theory of ‘Peaceful Rise,’” *China Quarterly*, June 2007. Zheng Bijian, “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ to Great-Power Status,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005; Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s New Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2003. See the official Web site of Chinese Ministry of Education for related policy documents: [http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/sjtu\\_shezheng.jsp](http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/sjtu_shezheng.jsp) (August 13, 2007)

stand in the way. Actually, the regime often finds itself in a dilemma. There is a serious inconsistency between the regime's current foreign policy and its long-standing domestic propaganda. On one hand, a cooperative relationship with the Western countries and a professional, open and active diplomacy will serve China's national interests; but on the other hand, artificially creating an enemy image and willful political usage of history and memory are still important strategies for the regime to increase internal cohesion. Along these lines, Gong (2001, 42) writes that China's "overreliance on history to provide national legitimization could challenge the ability of any Chinese government to satisfy its own people or to engage easily internationally."

### Conclusion

In the 1994 Outline on the Implementation of Education in Patriotism (CPC Central Committee 1994), the CCP Central Committee set a goal for the Campaign:

If we want to make the patriotic thoughts the core theme of our society, a very strong patriotic atmosphere must be created so that the people can be influenced and nurtured by the patriotic thoughts and spirit *all times and everywhere* in their daily life. It is the sacred duties for the press and publishing, radio, film and television departments of all levels to use advanced media technology to conduct patriotic education to the masses.

Many indicators suggested that this elite-led top-down propaganda campaign has realized its objectives of enhancing the regime's political legitimacy. More importantly, the content of history and memory has become institutionalized in political institutions and education systems, as the CCPs new ideological tool. During this process, the ruling party has successfully socialized the education campaign to penetrate every facet of people's daily lives so that the masses can be "influenced and nurtured."

When the CCP launched the campaign of patriotic education in 1991, shortly after the "Tiananmen Incident," the party faced a serious crisis, the official Marxism and Maoist ideologies were bankrupt. The campaign has proved to be one of the most important maneuvers that the Party conducted for its survival in the post-Tiananmen and post-Cold War era. During the processes of the campaign, the Party skillfully utilized China's humiliating past to arouse its citizens' historical consciousness and promote social cohesion. The discourse of national humiliation has become an integral part of the construction of Chinese nationalism.

In the past, many of the CCPs political campaigns started with great momentum but lost steam early on. The change of leadership often contributed to these failures. Very often, new leaders would launch their new political campaigns to demonstrate differences between them and their predecessors. It should be noted, that the patriotic education campaign is an exception. Started in 1991, the Campaign is currently still well under way without any signs of decline. Initiated by Jiang Zemin, the Patriotic Education Campaign has still been promoted by the current CCP leader Hu Jintao. For example, a 2007 new initiative of education reform in higher education has made "Chinese modern and contemporary history" a required core course for all college students in China. As Guo (1998, 184) observes, for lack of a better alternative, the reliance on patriotism as unifying ideology is most likely to continue in the future.

As discussed in previous sections, historical consciousness in China, especially people's pride over its ancient civilization (chosen glory) and their collective memory about the "one hundred years of humiliation" (chosen trauma) have

greatly contributed to shaping the Chinese national identity. The Chinese during the traditional period viewed their country as the “Central Kingdom.” However, Chinese national pride had been deeply wounded as a result of China’s humiliating experience with the Western and Japanese incursions. Therefore, as Chen (1996) suggests, the restoration of the nation’s central position on the world scene has thus become the most profound and active factor in shaping China’s modern and contemporary history. The content of history and memory not only defines group goals and missions but also leads many Chinese to interpret the world through lenses defined by this particular purpose. Many Chinese people today are extremely proud and zealous of China’s recent new achievements, such as the return of Hong Kong and Macao, the manned space flights of 2003 and 2005, and Beijing’s successful bid of hosting the Olympic Games in 2008. However, in the domestic discourses, the country’s new glories have always been intensively discussed and compared with China’s old traumas. These events were celebrated particularly because they have served to put an end of the past humiliations, as people believed. New accomplishments and growing confidence can sometimes serve to activate, not necessarily assuage, people’s historical memory of past humiliation.

Much of the recent discussion regarding China revolves around the government’s national strategy of a “peaceful rise.” However, what China should modernize in this process is not only its financial system and highway network, but also its historical education and propaganda apparatus. Many say that China can rise peacefully only after it has changed from a Communist dictatorship to a multiparty democracy. However, without liberation from the compelling complex of historical myth and trauma, even a multiparty democracy could lead China toward a dangerous development. A nationalist leader could easily use history and memory issues as tools of mobilization or these issues could, in turn, generate conflicts between a new democratic China and the country’s old enemies. Furthermore, we should not forget the brutal internal conflicts Chinese people have experienced during the recent 100 years, including the civil wars, revolutions, mass violence, and famines. Many of the historical truths of these domestic conflicts and violence are still concealed; the official explanations are still the master narrative. Given that the ruling party’s legitimacy has been built upon distorted “historical contributions,” as well as the fact that the politics of history and memory in China have provided the Party the instrument for its mobilization, China’s genuine democratization may only start with the disclosure of historical truths.

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