

Nations and Nationalism roundtable discussion on Chinese nationalism and national identity

Framing statement

The literature on Chinese nationalism is vast and contentious. In his article titled ‘A flawed perspective: the limitations inherent within the study of Chinese nationalism’, published by *Nations and Nationalism* in 2009, Allen Carlson identifies two opposing arguments in the English-language literature on the subject: the first arguing that Chinese nationalism pushes Chinese foreign policy in a more assertive direction and the second maintaining that, conversely, Chinese nationalism has been misconstrued and exaggerated and erroneously linked to ‘China threat’ theories. Carlson claims that both these positions are empirically unsubstantiated not only because they analyse nationalism in inadequate ways but also, and more importantly, because a focus on nationalism is in itself inherently constraining and even distorting. He suggests that rather than simply redressing flaws within the Chinese nationalism scholarship, a more radical intellectual move is needed, mainly shifting focus away from nationalism towards the notion of ‘national identity formation’. Such conceptual reframing will, according to Carlson, enable scholars to understand how both leaders and the general public in the People’s Republic of China define their position in world politics better than they would by continuing to focus on nationalist politics alone.

Anna Costa’s response, published in 2014 in the same journal under the title ‘Focusing on Chinese nationalism: an inherently flawed perspective? A reply to Allen Carlson’, addresses Carlson’s claim that focusing on nationalism inhibits research on Chinese identity politics. She argues that while some of the problems that Carlson identifies do plague the literature on Chinese nationalism, his advocacy of abandoning this focus is unwarranted. Two main shortcomings affect Carlson’s plan: first, it is based on a rather particular understanding of the scope of Nationalism Studies, this perspective leading him to conclude that focusing on nationalism necessarily narrows the gaze of the China watcher. In particular, Costa queries Carlson’s identification of a ‘consensus’ in the extant literature about the dual nature – historical and instrumental – of Chinese nationalism, which tends to conflate not only multiple nationalist discourses with official nationalism but also the *study* of nationalism with the phenomenon itself. Second, Carlson’s proposition to move to an alternative framework – national

identity construction – is problematic because it is advanced on the basis of the same reasons used to justify abandoning nationalism. More specifically, Carlson appears to jettison a broad definition of nationalism while also claiming that once the concept has been more narrowly defined, its analytical scope is also reduced, making it insufficient for understanding the broad spectrum of China's identity politics. Costa points out that a shift to the notion of 'national identity construction' puts the analyst anew in front of the challenge of working with a loosely defined, nebulous concept. Costa suggests maintaining a broad theoretical understanding of nationalism as a multidimensional phenomenon (ideology, political movement, sentiment and so forth), while at the same time cautioning against employing the term *as a whole* in analysis. Rather, scholars will have to focus on specific, constituent dimensions, as done successfully, for one, in existing studies of the nexus between Chinese foreign policy and nationalist protest. Costa defends the continuing validity of using nationalism as a lens for understanding Chinese perceptions the PRC's place in the world.

Following the publication of Costa's article, the two authors have engaged in a further exchange of views regarding the relative merits of channelling the study of collective political identities in China into 'nationalism' and 'national identity' frames. Within this discussion, Carlson has acknowledged the validity of many of the points Costa forwarded in her trenchant analysis of the topic. In addition, he has conceded that a re-orientation away from nationalism to national identity in China could hardly solve all that ails the field. At the same time, Carlson continues to defend as useful the prescription for change that he originally advocated. More specifically, he contends that nationalism is the expression of but one particular form of national identity, and as such, it should not be elevated to hegemonic status within the study of China's collective political identities (yet it appears to have assumed such a throne). For Carlson, national identity is a more expansive concept better suited to capture more than just nationalist voices within China, and therefore less liable to creating naturalized silences than a focus on nationalism alone does.

Costa acknowledges that nationalism does, as ideology, advocate the preeminence of the nation and of national identity, vis-à-vis other levels of identity, such as local, professional, gender, ethnic, religious and so forth. At the same time, nationalism as analytical focus requires investigating and questioning such claim to preeminence. In addition, it is not clear that the alternative notion of 'national identity construction' would solve the problem of excessive focus on the 'national' level. She posits that what is key when employing either nationalism or national identity as analytical tools is awareness of the politics of identity. On this point, Costa and Carlson agree on the importance of accounting for multiple, sometimes conflicting, levels of identity. This synthetic turn creates a bridge between the two perspectives on analytical focus, providing the two scholars with some common ground.

This exchange frames the roundtable discussion on Chinese nationalism and identity hosted by Nations and Nationalism. Working together, Carlson and Costa have elicited contributions from leading experts in the field, with an eye to bringing into the project scholars with different approaches and sub-areas of expertise [ethnic minority-majority relations, nationalism and foreign policy, cultural nationalism and so forth]. The contributors to the roundtable were asked to reflect on, *inter alia*, whether the relevant literature has reached a consensus on the dual nature, historical and instrumental, of Chinese nationalism; on the absence of critical engagement with debates in the broader nationalism field; on the suitability of western scholarship on nationalism and the nation to capture the Chinese reality, where the state institution is central; on how to deepen the discussion on the normative facets of Chinese nationalism, including the relationship between nationalism and liberalism; on the nexus between nationalism and foreign policy; on whether the literature has been overlooking the degree to which nationalism exists in world politics as a singular, relatively homogenous phenomenon as opposed to a diverse set of nationalist movements unfolding over time; and on the benefits of adopting a comparative methodology.

The intention of the roundtable is to give other leading scholars a chance to weigh in on such issues, less as a way of attempting to reach a resolution of the 'nationalism vs. national identity' debate, but more to take stock of alternative ways of grappling with similar issues in their own work. Each contributor, aside from grappling with the main debate of the roundtable – the extent to which 'nationalism' retains validity as an analytical point of focus vis-à-vis alternative constructs such as 'national identity construction' – brings insights in a number of areas that help illuminate both Chinese nationalism and identity. Prasenjit Duara, in his essay 'The temporal analytics of nationalism', makes a compelling case for adopting a historical approach to nationalism and identity capable of accounting for changes and continuity over time. Duara explores two dimensions of nationalism as dependent and independent variable of analysis. When nationalism is to be explained in a particular situation, a combination of durable and mediatory factors needs to be invoked. As an expression of identity politics, it can serve as an independent variable as long as it is understood as a globally operating force pressuring and enabling states to compete internationally.

At the same time, one of the political dimensions of nationalism as identity politics is domestic, a phenomenon explored in depth by James Leibold in his piece 'The minzu Net'. Leibold explores the politically charged nomenclature used by the Communist Party of China (CPC) surrounding the concepts of nation/ethnic group (*minzu*) and nationalism, highlighting policy and conceptual tensions between them. Leibold's piece invites the reader to reflect on the complex nexus of culture, race and national identity. The issue of race, in particular, is tackled by Kevin Carrico and Peter Gries in their piece 'Race, knowledge production, and Chinese nationalism'. Carrico and Gries base

their analysis on a controversy surrounding woodblock prints from Meiji Japan featured on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) homepage in 2006 as part of Dower and Miyagawa's Visualizing Cultures course. This, and the violent reaction by Chinese students that followed, was discussed in a 2015 issue of the MIT newspaper *The Chronicle*. Carrico and Gries focus on both the incident itself and on the subsequent discussion to illustrate both the central role of anti-Japanese feelings in the patriotic education imparted by the Chinese state, as well as the racial thinking in Chinese national identity. As Duara points out, Carrico and Gries demonstrate that nationalism is often unreflectively internalized, even by academics, as a category rather than as object of analysis.

The place of Japan in Chinese nationalism, as well as the take of Japanese scholarship on the subject, is explored in depth by Naoko Eto in her contribution 'Chinese nationalism from the angle of Japan–China relations'. Eto usefully cautions the analyst against assuming that Chinese nationalism (re-) appeared out of thin air in the post-Tiananmen phase, illustrating how both nationalism and its anti-Japanese character were present in CPC politics in the 1980s during the initial stages of Reform and Opening. Discussing the shape Chinese nationalism took in recent years and its impact on foreign policy, Suisheng Zhao's piece 'The study of Chinese nationalism' offers a binary classification of nationalism in state and popular, noting a convergence in time between the two towards greater external assertion. Jessica Weiss's contribution 'Putting concepts into practice' looks to move the discussion past the debate regarding nationalism versus national identity onto greater attention to how concepts are operationalized and measured.

The composition of the roundtable derives its strength from contributors whose regional expertise is matched by their varied disciplinary background in history, sociology, social-psychology, anthropology and international relations. One limitation is that, with no scholar from Nationalism Studies proper, the resulting collection of essays does not extensively engage with the theories of nationalism and with standard debates in the field such as the issue of 'dating' the nation and nationalism, and the merits of the objective/subjective, and civic/ethnic dichotomies. Yet, some of the contributions do grapple with the issue of identifying the chronological progression of contemporary Chinese nationalism (see for instance Eto), and the roundtable's very theme adds to the broader Nationalism Studies debate a dichotomy of sorts – the nationalism vs. national identity approach – with some criticizing it as obsolete (see for instance Weiss). The roundtable's overwhelming focus on the Chinese case is also due to a lack of comparative referents in the form of discussions of nationalism elsewhere. In light of this, and as an avenue for future collaborative efforts, including scholars from Nationalism Studies proper as well as scholars with different area studies backgrounds has the potential to greatly enrich the discussion.

It is our hope that readers will thus gain some insight into the state of the art of the field and that the roundtable may serve as a compass for orienting

oneself among the many existing debates, as well as future directions, of the study of contemporary collective political identities in China.

ALLEN R. CARLSON* and ANNA COSTA**

*Cornell University

**The University of Hong Kong

The temporal analytics of nationalism

I appreciate the invitation of the guest editors of this volume calling for methodological reflections on the study of nationalism, which are, indeed, long overdue. To explore the extent to which the Chinese case represents or departs from nationalism in general is as good as any other point to begin to examine nationalism as an analytical concept. I hope to grasp the conceptual underpinnings of nationalism within a historical framework. The historical framework is essential because nationalism – and, as we shall see, not only nationalism – is changeable as both an object of inquiry and as causal factor.¹

Indeed, the case of nationalism as a concept is not vastly different from the fate of other analytical concepts in the human sciences. Concepts such as nationalism, identity, class, state, empire, globalization, community, firm, market, etc. are extensive in scope and require further specification to serve as analytical categories to grasp particular outcomes. Typically social scientists have tried to specify these conceptions for useful purposes (as have each of our guest editors). Thus, to return to nationalism, analysts have tried to see it as a dependent or independent variable, or that which needs to be explained (*explanandum*) and that which contains the explanation (*explanans*) – either as cause or more weakly, as antecedent or necessary condition.

These analytical categories, however, are taken from the natural sciences where they are often fruitfully deployed to understand relatively stable or patterned phenomena permitting predictable outcomes. I believe the social sciences have not been able to sufficiently adapt these categories to the different epistemological conditions of social activity arising from different objective, semi-objective and subjective conditions lacking the same kind of stability and repetitive patterns of physical phenomena. Our categories emerge from categories of practice and often from categories of intellectuals and actors engaged in historical transformations or emergences. While ‘deconstruction’ has had a distinctly mixed reception in the social sciences, it has revealed that the source concepts bear the mark of their time and need to be recognized if not entirely overcome by the analyst.

The historian-philosopher Reinhart Koselleck sought to differentiate ‘mere words’ from historical concepts by noting the latter’s capacity to carry within themselves a plenitude of meaning across time and context (Koselleck 2004: chapter 5). For the same reason, these concepts are also saturated with diverse meanings indexing historical changes and aspirations. Translated into social science categories, the independent and dependent variables as well as the scientist

who supposedly controls them are subject to change in time and variation in space that can easily confuse the understanding of the outcome. Of course subsidiary control variables may also be applied, but often the larger number of controlling variables can reduce the scope and significance of the explanation.²

Indeed, the advance of complexity paradigm in the sciences has also moved some scientists and philosophers of science away from the simplicity of explanatory laws to complex feedback loops which affect the initial conditions of observation. Among some circles identified with scientist philosophers such as Stuart Kauffman, Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, there is a return to the ideas of A N Whitehead and others we might call *process* philosophers. Process philosophy basically assumes that the primary ontological categories should be terms for *occurring* entities. A radical subject-object differentiation obscures the process whereby both subject and object are in process of being made or re-made (Seibt 2012: 17).³

Yet, I don't believe this should lead us to a simple notion of 'constructionism'. Rather from a historian's perspective, the most important flaw of social sciences categories is that they do not permit a sufficiently differentiated view of how institutional and social processes change even as they are able to reproduce some element of identity and continuity. Neither constructionist nor deep structural theories have an adequate understanding of process. There are degrees of variability in different social phenomena which need to be grasped not from a structural perspective but *in terms of their speed and pace of change* in any given time.

Simple structural analyses which posit a deep abiding structure that explains surface variability reproduce the type of dualism that retains the idea of a knowing subject of unchanging truth (in the structural principle, e.g. mode of production or rational actor). Nor is everything an equalizing act of construction. Different institutions, complexes and networks express different rates of change because of their different constituents and the socio-technical ecologies in which they are embedded. In other words, they possess different *temporalities*.

Let us explore nationalism as an *explanandum*. From historical experience, the most abiding aspect of nationalism that could serve as a definition is, to my mind, the self/other form where the communal self is represented by the state whether in reality or aspirationally. Indeed, nationalism is the *ur* form of mass identity politics. I have discussed the historical antecedents of this form in the confessional communities of Reformation Europe when church, state and subjects became rolled into one as a chosen community (see Duara 2014: chapters 1 and 5). The secular sovereign nation emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, only after the confessional polity and the accompanying disciplinary revolution enabled the successful formations to become competitive in global capitalism.

While the national community retained the self/other identity form of confessional communities, the nation-state translated the holy compact into what Gellner had called the congruence of state and culture (Gellner 1983). The ecology that sustains this durable form from the early nineteenth century has of course to do with the system of nation-states and the competitive goals that have been its most necessary condition for over two centuries. While the

fundamental *raison d'être* for the nation-state is competition, this identitarian polity is mediated by a host of other forces such as religion, language, political regime, historical relations, etc. in any particular situation. At the same time, the institutions of the capitalist competitive order have not always been the most durable formations; consider, for instance, the period of Soviet and Maoist socialism. But I believe Maoism itself needs to be grasped within a world-order of competitive states that ultimately pushed China towards capitalism.

For most analysts of China or other particular societies, the factor of greatest interest may well be the mediatory forms we have specified: regime type, historical memory, lineage ideology, etc. These are factors that explain and sustain nationalism not from the outside, but from within the national institutional order. In order to determine the temporality and variability of these social forces, we will surely need to understand them in their structural role or assemblage. But we also need to examine how they respond to globally and regionally circulatory forces. Thus, among others, I have argued that the principal mediatory form of Chinese nationalism changed in accordance with the change in China's place in the international order during the 1980s: simply put, from a Maoist socialist state to globally participating market society. It changed gradually from the socialist model of the civic nation-state that was built, however rhetorically, on the fraternity of nationalities within and socialist and third-world internationalism abroad to an ethnic model of privileging the culture of the Han majority. In practice, this shift was also facilitated by the need to attract powerful overseas Chinese capitalist networks based on Chinese culturalism and Confucianism. At the same time, the relative weakness of development in the western regions and among the ethnically marginalized communities also fostered the ethnic minority nationalism that we are witnessing on a daily basis today.

While there are many other factors in the shift – as well as counter-policies designed to maintain national integrity – I believe that we need to understand the durability of this shift to ethnic nationalism. What are the internal and external factors that contribute to its persistence and under what conditions can it subside? From an external perspective, to what extent does the intensification of capitalist circulations and volatility in the neo-liberal era contribute to an intensification of nationalist reactions – in a speeded-up version of Polanyi's dual movement towards the global market and a bitter reaction against it? To what extent does this depend upon the peculiar structure of power within China where the Party controls both the economy and the political system? There is an entire agenda here that needs to be explored.

Let us now turn to nationalism as an explanatory and causal factor. Here, too nationalism operates at various levels of depth and durability. Consider how starting from the nineteenth century, the nation-state and nationalism as the political model of every 'civilized' society was circulated around the world from the Atlantic seaboard. In China, it was first forced on the empire through the Unequal Treaties (the nation-state was, at least rhetorically, the

normative model for equal relations); by the turn of the century, the nationalist model was enthusiastically adopted by the modern sectors of society; and by the 1930s, nationalism became an important foundation for communist mobilization and revolutionary victory.

We can hardly grasp nationalism as a simple causal factor in the case of nationalism as *explanans* either. As one of the most important forces in the modern world, it functions at a variety of different levels and in an assortment of roles and links. At perhaps the most enduring level it operates – often pre-reflexively – as a globally circulating force demanding that states and organizations imitate, adjust or adapt to the competitive standards and norms produced by the most advanced nation-states. Note how, despite the much-publicized differences between the political society of China and the West, the middle-class and consumer society of China is converging with the West in very many respects based on these adoptions and adaptations.

Historically, I have argued, nations tend to form themselves continuously from standards, norms and practices of economically more advanced nations; but they also misrecognize these adoptions and celebrate their alleged uniqueness and timeless identity. While during the Cold War and earlier, nationalisms and the new states utilized this duality to protect their citizens and markets from multi-national and imperialist powers, since the end of the Cold War (which took place by the early 1980s in East Asia), nation-states have become much more collaborative with global capitalism formations.

At a more variable level, nationalism may operate as an ideological element, to legitimate government strategies and plans or to provide cover for other interests or identities. In these cases, the explanatory status of nationalism can range from strong to very weak. What Allen Carlson calls ‘national identity formation’ (as an explanatory factor) represents what I would call a strong ideology because it engages the institutions and symbols of the state and society to foster loyalties and mobilize for particular goals. In China where the state is increasingly reliant on such national identity formation, the durability of such a formation depends on the capacity of the state to deliver on the promise of progress and the credibility of its claims. Weaker explanations arise when various actors – including non-state actors – appeal to nationalism as an ideal and promise to make claims of justice for their causes.

It is at this level, however, that it is difficult to identify nationalism – or even national identity formation – as simply a causal factor because it becomes implicated with many other motives, identities and interests among a complex set of actors. Indeed, one may not be able to deploy nationalism in most of these cases as an explanation; rather, it functions here as a frame of reference to order priorities and claims of different actors. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that it functions as a framework precisely because of its deep embeddedness in the world of nation-states.

Given the increasing entrenchment of the system of nation-states over the last centuries, is there no possibility for it to change its basic colours? I believe that the possibility of change lies within the contradictions of the system (to use

Maoist terminology). The rapid erosion of economic borders in recent decades has produced the globalization of the production system as well as the collective ravaging of the global environment. Interdependence has become increasingly necessary to manage the continued production of wealth (the global supply chain), but much more importantly, the survival of the planet. China has finally begun to recognize the importance not only of national but also collective arrangements to manage this survival. It has signed and will be pressured to sign many more agreements to contain the effects of climate change. These agreements also signify incremental modifications to the notion of national sovereignty as we have known it. What kinds of changes these might make to the bed-rock system of nation-states remains to be seen.

PRASENJIT DUARA
Duke University

Endnotes

1 Many of the ideas developed here may be found in a fuller form – albeit in a different context – in my book, *The Crisis of Global Modernity* (see especially chapter 3).

2 Although speaking principally to practitioners of intellectual history, Koselleck developed a historical method which we may apply to the understanding of analytical concepts as well, particularly since there is a continuum between the categories of practice and analytical concepts. Koselleck's method of *Begriffsgeschichte* entails the synchronic and diachronic analyses of powerful historical concepts and the ordering of their changing meanings in order to grasp a concept apart from its particular context. In such a way, a historical concept can attain a generalizability which is nonetheless, derived from its historical condition. We may also use the method to distinguish different temporalities to be found in the more durable concepts (Koselleck 2004: chapter 5).

3 Process philosophy – the philosophy of becoming – is a relatively minor tradition in Western philosophy traceable to Heraclitus (c 535–475 BCE), but which counted many important continental philosophers in the twentieth century, including Henri Bergson, Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze as well as the American Pragmatists and some analytical philosophers like Whitehead. For a more detailed account of the relationship of process philosophy to Asian philosophies, see Duara (2014: chapter 4).

The *minzu* net: China's fragmented national form

Nets are for catching fish; after one gets the fish, one forgets the net. Traps are for catching rabbits; after one gets the rabbit, one forgets the trap. Words are for getting meaning; after one gets the meaning, one forgets the words. Where can I find people who have forgotten words, and have a word with them? Zhuangzi, Ch. 26

From its origins as a distinct genre of academic enquiry in Europe and America during the 1980s and 1990s, the study of 'nationalism' has been a highly contested pursuit, with many of the debates over its meaning and significance appearing in the pages of *Nations and Nationalism* and countless other academic

journals. Unsurprisingly, additional conjurations arise when we seek to translate this discourse into another language and civilisational context like China.

Rather than seeking to rescue 'Chinese nationalism' from heretical interpretations or reframe it conceptually, I would like to suggest a deeper and more robust engagement with the heteroglossia of nationalism: its multi-voiceness. Group-making, that is, the contingent and variable *processes* of framing what 'group' matters, is foundational to both human societies and *homo academicus*, and it is difficult to imagine a world without racial, ethnic and national schemata, irrespective of one's normative stance. In what follows, I briefly trace the etymology and slipperiness of this group-making process as it relates to the polysemic concept of *minzu* (民族, nation/race/people/ethnic group, etc.) in modern China.

The promiscuous nation

To my mind, the Carlson–Costa debate highlights the fundamental promiscuity of nationalism as a fluid constellation of ideologies, appellations, political movements and emotive sentiments. The search for belonging is fundamental to the human condition, but its protean character can be extremely difficult to pin down analytically. Throughout modern history, nationalism has formed consummate marriages with a range of disparate ideologies/ideas (from liberalism to fascism) and around groups at different spatial and temporal scales (from ancient tribes to global citizenries). These complex mediations produce different types of nationalism – civic, ethnic, cultural, racial, religious, diasporic, to name but a few – that scholars have long attempted to categorize and study.

No single discipline or set of methodological tools can hope to come to terms with such a mercurial phenomena. Instead, different academic traditions have sought to indigenise nationalism: reframing it with their own idioms, assumptions, research methods and working hypotheses. The end result is a heuristic chameleon that helps to explain both the continued appeal of nationalism as well as the differences of opinion between Carlson and Costa, as well as the doyens of nationalism studies Ernest Gellner and Anthony D. Smith.

Carlson and Costa both approach Chinese nationalism from the perspective of international relations/international studies, with its chief concern about how sovereign states and institutions relate to one another globally, or in this case, how China and its 'national identity' operates on the world stage. Yet, this is only part of the story of Chinese nationalism. What happens if we alter the referent and scale of nationalism in China?

Things look different when we move away from a distinct and undifferentiated 'China' toponym and 'Chinese' ethnonym, and instead examine the instability and multivocality at the core of these super-signs. My intellectual engagement with Chinese nationalism has come through a deeply multidisciplinary interrogation of *minzu*. My book *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism* (2007) sought to demonstrate how the boundaries of modern Chinese subjectivity are shaped not only by the 'foreign Other' (USA, Japan, Europe, etc.)

but also a more familiar ‘domestic Other’, the so-called barbarians that are today China’s ‘ethnic minorities’ (*shaoshu minzu* 少数民族).

These sorts of ‘boundary-spanners’, Allen Carlson (2009: 30) argues, complicate our understanding of Chinese nationalism, as have studies of diasporic Chinese nationalism (Callahan 2003; Barabantseva 2011), peripheral nationalisms of the Chinese frontier (Wang 2001), cyber-nationalism (Wu 2007) and even the multiple sub-ethnic nationalisms that haunt and fragment the majority Han category (Mullaney et al., 2012; Joniak-Lüthi 2015).

If we return to the written language in which Chinese nationalism is articulated, we quickly discover a linguistic-cultural anxiety underpinning its existence, study and politics. In Chinese, nationalism can be rendered as either *aiguo-zhuyi* 爱国主义 – the ism (*zhuyi* 主义) of loving the state (爱国), or as *minzu-zhuyi* 民族主义 – the ism of the people’s clan (民族). These concepts are now specific to the Chinese context, yet entered via a complex ‘translingual encounter’ that must be carefully unpacked by scholars working across-languages and cultures (Liu 2004; Bilik 2014; Dirlik 2015).

In the PRC today, the two terms are often used interchangeable. Yet *aiguo-zhuyi* is more frequently employed as a gloss for the sort of outwardly focused patriotism that was on display during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. In contrast, *minzu-zhuyi* is an acutely ambiguous and inwardly divisive concept. This is due to the lack of agreement on which ‘clan’ or ‘group’ (*minzu*) is the appropriate focus of the people’s loyalty and attention across the last century. In other words, the search for *minzu* came before the founding of the nation in modern China and any external expressions of patriotism.

The minzu chameleon

Liang Qichao, arguably modern China’s most formidable intellectual, was the first to use the term nationalism, when he encountered the ideas of the German jurist Johann Kaspar Bluntschli in 1901 while living in exile in Japan during the dying days of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Liang was enthralled by Bluntschli’s notion that a strong, united *volk* (people/nation/race, or *minzoku* in Japanese) was crucial for survival in the modern world, yet he lamented that *minzu*-ism, as he rendered it in Chinese, had yet to reach an embryonic form in China. Liang followed his mentor Kang Youwei in calling for the ‘Chinese people’ to rally around the Manchu Qing emperor in order to construct a modern constitutional monarchy like Meiji Japan (Wang 2003).

Others had a less inclusive image of the Chinese nation/race. The fiery teenage activist Zou Rong insisted the ‘furry and horned Manchu race’, among other nomads, were not a part of neither the Han nor Chinese *minzu* (like many others, he often transposed these terms), and thus, they needed to be overthrown and even annihilated in the name of purity. Throughout the early twentieth century, Chinese officials and thinkers alike employed the *minzu*

referent to mark their own people/nation/race and distinguish it from unwanted outsiders (Leibold 2007).

Yet the *minzu*'s boundaries remained contested, with frequent discussion over who was in, who was out and even how many *minzu* existed. Early Han leaders of Republican China (1912–1949) insisted on uniting all the peoples and territories of the former Qing empire in opposition to the 'foreign' *minzu*, with Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek and even Mao Zedong employing the term *Zhonghua minzu* (中华民族) to express this collective sense of nationhood. Yet this sentiment was not shared by many of the indigenous populations (Tibetan, Muslim, Mongol and others) that lived along the vast and remote frontiers of Qing China.

The rise of communism in China muddied the waters further, packing additional meanings and confusion into the *minzu* idiom. Communist intellectuals like Li Weihuan and Fan Wenlan were tasked with sinicizing the vast and internally diverse discourse on nationalism in Europe, and more particularly, Stalin's 1913 definition of the nation (*natsiya*) as a historical category unique to 'the epoch of rising capitalism'. Did this mean that semi-feudal, semi-colonial China had no nation(s)?

Hardly, rather Mao declared China a 'multi-*minzu*' (多数民族) country with both 'complete *minzu*' like the Han majority and a range of 'incomplete' and 'backward' *minzu* like the Hui, Mongols, Tibetans, Miao and others. Yet the debate did not end here, as the *minzu* appellation was made to work overtime in glossing a range of terms which now existed as a part of the global literature on nationalism and the 'national question' (民族问题).

At a 1962 conference in Beijing, the Chinese Communist Party formally declared *minzu* (or 'nationality', as it came to be translated into English) as the official and only acceptable locution for a range of distinct Russian, German and English terms (Lin 1963), and by 1979, the PRC arrived at its now axiomatic *minzu* taxonomy: fifty-five minority nationalities plus the Han nationality which together comprise a single super-*minzu*, the Chinese nationality. The result is an odd sort of calculus, Thomas Mullaney (2004: 197) contends, which can be rendered as: $55 + 1 = 1$.

Liberating minzu from the nation

This semiotic overburdening led some Chinese intellectuals to call for the introduction of a new theory and vocabulary for clarifying China's national composition after the death of Mao and China's reform and opening-up. With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, there were renewed fears that the existing formula, which placed too much emphasis on minority identities at the expense of a shared national identity, was out of balance with the needs of a modern nation-state. What was required, some intellectuals insisted, was a new language for narrating the nation, one more in keeping with the way identity is discussed in the West rather than in China or Russia.

As early as 2001, Peking University Professor Ma Rong began employing the neologism *zuqun* 族群 (ethnicity/ethnic group) to describe China's internal

ethnic diversity, while arguing that *minzu* should be reserved for the collective unity of Chinese nation. This would avoid the ‘conceptual confusion’ of employing *minzu* for both individual ethnic groups, like the Han and Tibetans, and the singular Chinese nation.

‘Otherwise’, Ma wrote (2007: 202), ‘we might seriously mislead English-speaking readers into thinking these [ethnic] groups are independent political entities who have the right to carry out “national self-determination” and establish their own independent “nation-states”’. Others, however, disagreed, insisting that the shift from *minzu* to *zuqun* would undermine the legitimacy of non-Han identities, suggesting that it was the first step in scaling back minority rights and autonomy enshrined in the PRC Constitution.

This seemingly small conceptual problem has evolved into an acrimonious and as yet unresolved debate over the future direction of *minzu* policies in China (Leibold 2013). Some warn that the PRC will follow the Soviet Union in ethno-national collapse unless it adopts a ‘second generation of *minzu* policies’. In place of the first generation of policies that were indiscriminately copied from the USSR, China should join the ‘global norm’ and adopt a ‘melting pot formula’, where state policies and institutions encourage, rather than hinder, natural inter-*minzu* mingling and fusion.

Opponents argue that any rethinking of *minzu* theory and policy would lead to ‘ideological chaos’ and political and social upheaval. Open the *minzu* box, they assert, and you will unleash a Pandora-like set of contradictions that will undermine the co-operation, solidarity and trust central to solving social problems in a multi-*minzu* country such as China.

In 1998, the State Nationalities Affairs Commission (中国民族委员会) begrudgingly altered its English name to the State Ethnic Affairs Commission (Zhou 2010: 491-92). Yet since then, many now argue that *minzu* is best left untranslated, as is the case with the Minzu University of China (formerly the Central Nationalities University), and in keeping with the way the term is used in some of the foreign scholarship on China. The term *minzu*, Professor Ming Hao (2012) of Minzu University argues, is unique to China, and its complex meanings cannot be encapsulated in any single English term, or any other language for that matter.

In China, what Confucius first termed the ‘rectification of names’ (正名) is an explicitly political act, and these nomenclature wars signify the intractable ambivalence at the heart of China’s national form. Like the multiple meanings behind *minzu*, Chinese nationalism is an unstable basket of contested ideas and identities. What one sees depends on where one is standing. Context is everything.

Escaping the Hutongs

This rather torturous digression down the *minzu* path reminds us of the importance of scale and perspective in any rigorous intellectual pursuit. The ‘*minzu* turn’ in Chinese studies has helped to create a distinct sub-discipline of minority studies, enabling us to view China in new and interesting ways. Yet, like the

study of Chinese nationalism internationally, one can easily get lost in the narrow alleyways (*hutong* 胡同) and lose sight of the way categories, practices and processes of identity formation flow (often rapidly and nearly always synchronously) across space and time.

Just as those who study Chinese nationalism on the global stage often miss the subterranean fractures on which China's 'external face' is built, those who study ethnic minorities and ethnic identities inside China, like myself, can easily overlook the complex ways in which locally embedded identities interact with larger frames and codes like China, Chinese and Chinese-ness.

Rather than treating these rubrics as independent variables, we need to consciously dialogue with a range of different disciplines and viewpoints, seek out comparative examples and boundary-spanning actors that confuse as much as they illuminate. 'Ethnicity, race, and nationhood are fundamentally ways of perceiving, interpreting, and representing the social world', Roger Brubaker (2004: 17) reminds us. 'They are not things *in* the world, but perspectives *on* the world'. Nets rather than fish.

JAMES LEIBOLD
La Trobe University

Race, knowledge production and, Chinese nationalism

In 2006, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) homepage briefly featured woodblock prints from Meiji Japan that were part of John Dower and Shigeru Miyagawa's *Visualizing Cultures* open course. One print depicted Japanese soldiers decapitating Chinese prisoners during the 1894-1895 First Sino-Japanese War. Dower is the preeminent scholar and critic of both American and Japanese racism and dehumanization during and prior to the Pacific War, and the course explicitly critiqued the 'race feeling' that animated wartime Japanese propaganda prints (Dower 2008: 1-2).

MIT's Chinese students were outraged, however, at MIT's reproduction of the image. Word spread quickly in Chinese cyberspace. Miyagawa's phone was soon ringing off the hook, and his e-mail account was deluged with hate mail and even death threats (Gleitzman 2006). MIT was forced to temporarily remove the course from their website. Several dozen MIT professors signed a brief letter defending their colleagues and academic freedom, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* wrote a piece about the tempest focusing on the hate mail and its threat to open intellectual inquiry.

In 2015, a special issue of *Positions: Asia Critique* included over a dozen essays revisiting the controversy nine years later. Remarkably, only one, by William Callahan, addresses the anti-Japanese nationalism in China that provided the critical context for the students' rage. Instead, editors Wang Jing and Winnie Wong and most other contributors direct their ire at MIT, its professors and *The Chronicle*. Wang Jing (2015: 168, 168, 172) repeatedly

accuses them of ‘racializing’ the incident. Winnie Wong (2015: 99, 100, 103) claims that MIT was engaging in ‘civilizing violence’ to ‘discipline’ its Chinese students. Tani Barlow (2015: 124) racially profiles the names of the 52 MIT professors who signed the 2006 letter, concludes that they were mostly white and insinuates racism. Zhou Kui (2015: 56) is more direct, accusing the MIT professors of being ‘haunted by a modern-day scenario of “yellow peril”’.

The silences in the 2015 *Positions* issue are equally deafening. The students’ racialized assumptions about Dower and Miyagawa’s identities and sinister motives are ignored. The hate mail and death threats are excused – to criticize student extremism in 2006, Shao Qin (2015: 46) claims, would trivialize Chinese wartime suffering in 1894–1895. The vital context of anti-Japanese nationalism, protest and violence in 2003–2005 China (see Gries 2005) is disregarded. And MIT and its professors’ reasonable, measured response to fundamentally unreasonable demands from MIT’s Chinese students is recast as racist American aggression against China, another insult to Chinese national pride.

While acknowledging the significance of broader processes of national identity construction, events like the MIT controversy highlight the continued relevance of nationalism as an ideology, with unexpected repercussions not only for contemporary Chinese politics and society, but indeed for politics and societies the world over. Given that words matter, how do we position ourselves? And how do we assess the positionings of others without falling into the same simplistic caricatures upon which nationalism thrives?

Based in these questions, this brief essay draws upon the 2006 controversy and its 2015 re-litigating to examine the racialized politics of the production of knowledge about Chinese nationalism today. We argue that scholars and scholarship would benefit from deeper reflection upon and open discussion of the issues of identification, control and, most importantly, racial taboos in the study of nationalism in China. Just as Orientalizing or infantilizing China inhibits understanding, so reflexive identification with Chinese nationalists impedes the study of Chinese national identifications. Scholars need to be both empathetic and critical in their positioning.

Identification and control

Identities are invariably implicated in studies of Chinese nationalism. The 2015 *Positions* issue reexamining the MIT controversy is short on context but bursting with political identifications. For example, James Farrer (2015: 72) transforms the widespread ‘anti-Japanese racism’ and ‘militant Chinese nationalism’ that he observed firsthand on the streets of Shanghai in the spring of 2005 into righteous ‘anti-Right Japanese demonstrations’ in his title. He thus identifies himself with a minority of ‘moderate internationalists’ in the crowd and sweeps the predominant anti-Japanese racism he describes in his article under the rug. In ‘How Chinese are you? Or, it could have been me’, *Positions* academic editor Tani Barlow similarly documents her search for an

'internationalist' position in the 2006 nationalist outburst at MIT. In such analyses, we learn less about the topic at hand than we do about the aspirational identifications of the authors.

Other *Positions* contributors identify even more instinctively with their nationalist subjects. Zhou Kui (2015: 51) associates so reflexively with the Chinese students that she uses the phrase 'anti-Japanese patriotism' uncritically, failing to question how loving China has come to require hating Japan. Wang Jing (2015: 168, 173) first accuses the *Chronicle* and her MIT colleagues of aggressive Orientalism. She then, however, engages in culturalist clichés, describing herself as engaged in a 'culturally embedded' strategy to 'diffuse hostility behind closed doors'. She thus taps into an Occidental discourse of Chinese 'harmony' (*he*) set against American 'hegemony' (*ba*), reproducing the very epistemologies of difference she claims to abhor.

When context is provided in the *Positions* articles, the MIT controversy of 2006 is generally attributed to a 'Cold War' mentality and racism on the part of the American academy and media. Such critiques provide a feel-good narrative of identification with the Chinese student 'activists' and the Chinese victims of Japanese aggression with whom the authors can identify in comfort and self-congratulation, making their voices heard against American and Japanese imperialism. Such positioning may be emotionally gratifying for some, but they do not further our understanding of either the 2006 MIT controversy or Chinese nationalism more broadly.

Only Callahan (2015) emphasizes the Chinese context of post-Tiananmen 'patriotic education' and the PRC state media's role in the production of anti-Japanese discourse. The other *Positions* articles largely ignore the increasingly strident demonization of the Japanese race as 'devils' (*guizi*) in the PRC's educational system (Zhao 1998) and violent racialized representations of Japanese in the television, movie and video game industries (Lam 2013; Nie 2013). Many Chinese MIT students were enraged because they assumed that Professor Miyagawa, by right of his Japanese sounding name, identified with, enjoyed, and endorsed the woodblock prints of executed Chinese prisoners. This remarkable belief cannot be understood apart from their socialization in the PRC into a view of Japan as a fascist state perpetually frozen in time in 1945: a topic safely removed from the analyses of most *Positions* authors.

Behind the spectre of 'Japanese militarism' (Miyagawa), furthermore, stands the presumed American puppet-master (Dower). The two MIT professors thus formed the perfect imperialist villains for this Chinese nationalist saga. Such narratives not only deny the very real democratization and reflection upon its past that have occurred in postwar Japan but also delegitimize any understanding beyond the emotionally charged Chinese nationalist narrative. Furthermore, such narratives dehumanize their Japanese targets, laying the psychological foundations for conflict – decidedly *not* the lesson we should be learning from World War II.

At issue is not so much the violent images themselves, as Callahan (2015: 132) perceptively notes, but the question of 'who controls knowledge production and distribution'. The protesting students, outraged at Miyagawa's

participation in the project and questioning his motives, assumed that by right of their national identities only they as Chinese should control the representation of this history. This is a fundamentally anti-intellectual and essentializing position, yet it combines easily with the political correctness and identity politics currently predominant among many in the intellectual left worldwide.

Just as the Chinese state's criticism of Japan's hateful nationalism of the past ironically produces a hateful anti-Japanese nationalism in the present, Dower and Miyagawa's critique of the racialized nationalism of imperial Japan ironically activates a racialized Chinese nationalism against Japan and America. To move beyond this destructive nationalist echo chamber, studies of Chinese nationalism should acknowledge and challenge the essentializing and controlling assumptions of Chinese self-knowledge and self-description, which render critical perspectives as 'misunderstandings' at best and 'Orientalism' and 'Cold War ideology' at worst – and label internal Chinese dissenters from hegemonic nationalist narratives as 'race traitors' (*Hanjian*).

Race and taboo

There are many taboos in China studies: the 'three Ts' of Tiananmen, Tibet and Taiwan are the best known. Yet no taboo is more diligently policed than the subject of racism in Chinese nationalism. Despite revealing studies on racism in China (e.g. Dikötter 1992, Barmé 1995, Cheng 2011, Cheng 2014), scholarship on Chinese nationalism remains largely silent on the issue.

By contrast, race is central to many charges of Orientalism in China studies. In her re-presentation of the 2006 MIT controversy, we have already seen how Wang Jing points her finger at MIT and its faculty for 'racializing' the Chinese student protestors. At the same time, she downplays the students' own blatant racial stereotyping of Miyagawa and Dower, as well as the hateful rhetoric and threats that this racial thought produced.

Hateful rhetoric and behaviours can also be seen over the Tibet issue, seeking to silence all who deviate from hegemonic Chinese narratives. In spring 2008, Cornell anthropologist Kathryn March received hate mail from Chinese students for screening a documentary about Tibet. Such racial thinking is equally clear in the case of Duke's Grace Wang, attacked as a 'race traitor' for urging dialogue between sparring Chinese and Tibetan protestors that same spring. For her embrace of reasoned dialogue, Wang was anonymously lambasted in Chinese cyberspace as 'the ugliest overseas student' and told she should be burned alive.

Chinese racialized nationalism thus targets perceived enemies both near (e.g. Uyghurs, Tibetans and Mongolians), afar (e.g. Taiwanese, Japanese and Americans) and within (*Hanjian*). It involves both a complex and troubling process of national identity construction – and nationalism in the ideological sense of a vision that fundamentally shapes yet also distorts one's understanding of the world. Studies of Chinese nationalism should acknowledge and challenge its racialization and racism, which is far too often swept under the rug.

Perspective taking and the study of Chinese nationalism

We conclude by suggesting that scholars of Chinese nationalism would do well to embracing perspective taking as a vital tool in the study of Chinese nationalism. To understand any nationalism, scholars should stand in the shoes of the nationalist and try to get inside their hearts and minds. Only then can we begin to understand the sources and consequences of national identifications.

Seeking understanding through perspective taking, however, implies neither identification nor the slippery slope of moral relativism. We can seek understanding without agreeing with racist beliefs or condoning racist behaviours. Scholars seeking to understand the behaviour of MIT's Chinese students in 2006 can seek to understand the incident from their perspective, immersing themselves within the narrative of 'anti-Japanese patriotism' that they were socialized into back in China. Indeed, one cannot understand Chinese nationalism today without engaging evolving Chinese narratives of the 'Century of Humiliation' and its impact on Chinese collective self-esteem in the present (Gries 2004). Understanding these narratives and their depiction of Japanese as 'devils' (*guizi*) does not, however, require agreeing with that view or condoning all too familiar and widespread anti-Japanese invective.

The 2015 *Positions* re-litigation of the 2006 MIT controversy is emblematic of the predominance of identification and the failure of perspective taking in many studies of Chinese nationalism today. Rather than balancing their analysis on the Chinese students' perspective by also viewing the incident from the Liberal perspective of MIT, its faculty or *The Chronicle*, editors Wang and Wong and many other *Positions* contributors reduce the issue to racism, Othering those who they felt had Othered them. Tragically, although they clearly sought to right a perceived wrong, a failure of empathy led to the reproduction in their volume of the very epistemologies of difference they sought to overcome.

KEVIN CARRICO and PETER H. GRIES
The University of Oklahoma

Chinese nationalism from the angle of Japan-China relations

Japan has been recognized as the primary 'other' in Chinese nationalism, and as a result, Japanese society has long been facing the questions of why the existing hostility between China and Japan has not decreased over the years and of how Japan can co-operate with China. In Japan, the body of research on these issues has been conducted in the Japanese language because it is mainly produced in response to a high domestic demand to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese nationalism. Several insights provided by such body of research could, if shared with a broader scholarly community, benefit international research on the subject also.

From my standpoint as a Japanese researcher, I contribute to this roundtable discussion by pointing to relevant findings by Japanese academics. There are two main points that I discuss in my paper. The first pertains to the importance of understanding Chinese nationalism in the decade of the 1980s in order to be able to analyse its subsequent waves; the second point pertains to the multi-faced nature of 'Chinese nationalism' in relation to multiple political identities. To begin with, I briefly overview key characteristics of the Japanese research environment and subsequently explore more in depth the two issues outlined above.

Research trends in Japan

Japan has faced political and social tensions over the 'history issue' since the 1980s. Since then, several bilateral exchange projects were launched with the financial support of government-affiliated committees (e.g. The Japan–China Friendship Committee for the 21st Century, started in 1984), of the private sector (e.g. the Sasakawa Japan–China Friendship Fund, established in 1989) and of a number of universities. Under such circumstances, it was natural for Japanese academics to start expressing wariness about Chinese nationalism from a relatively early stage. It was in 1993 that Professor Yujiro Murata of the University of Tokyo published an article entitled 'The current state of Chinese nationalism' in an influential Japanese magazine, *Sekai [The World]*. Murata contextualized the rise of Chinese nationalism against the background of the political situation of the time including an explanation of why the Communist Party of China became ideologically dependent on 'nationalism', referred to as 'patriotism', as well as of the political nature of Chinese nationalism (Murata, 1993). In the 2000s, with the resurfacing of anti-Japanese movements in China, the Japanese discussion of Chinese nationalism developed rapidly in response to the pragmatic social demand to understand Chinese hostility towards Japan.

Existing studies on the subject by Japanese scholars take three main research perspectives. The first, from the viewpoint of political science, is to analyse how Chinese nationalism affects China's policy towards Japan, i.e. the link between nationalistic rhetoric and foreign policy. Especially since the 2000s, alongside deepening historical disputes between Japan and China, a growing number of increasingly high-quality research projects has been undertaken. Numerous studies have also been conducted from the second type of perspective, which consists in historical examinations with concerns regarding contemporary Japan–China relations in mind. These studies try to unravel the puzzle of Chinese nationalism by focusing on its formation during the end of the Qing Dynasty until the end of World War II. The third perspective tackles nationalism from the standpoint of Social and Cultural Studies, identifying features of Chinese nationalism that are allegedly unique products of China's political culture and tradition.

Evaluation of the 1980s

My first proposition is that the transformation of Chinese nationalism in the 1980s should not be overlooked. As Carlson points out in his article, many recent publications maintain that the Tiananmen Square incident and the end of the Cold War marked the beginning of the revival of Chinese nationalism. However, as Ma Licheng detailed in his recent study (Ma, 2012) and as Zheng (1999), Zhao (2004) and Hughes (2006) also pointed out, Chinese intellectuals have been discussing the national political system and China's national image at least since the 1980s. According to Ma, the turning point in Chinese contemporary political thought was 1978, when Deng Xiaoping revealed his Reform and Opening policy under socialism. In light of this, it is extremely important to understand China's official discourse of the 1980s in order to correctly interpret the patriotic education campaign implemented from the 1990s and the related historical narrative, both in place to this day.

The new national discourse of the 1980s can be relatively easily grasped by considering Japan–China relations. The first dispute over Japanese history textbooks occurred in 1982, and the first anti-Japanese demonstrations took place in 1985 against the visit to Yasukuni Shrine by Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. As can be seen from these instances, the surge of popular nationalism did not suddenly explode in the 1990s.

On the political aspect of nationalism, the introduction by Deng Xiaoping of the 'Patriotic United Front' tactics in the late 1970s was crucial for cultivating official nationalism. The purpose of this 'United Front' was to bring unity to a society that had lost cohesion during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and to prime it for the ideological message of authorizing a market economy under socialism (Eto, 2014a). In the promotion of the 'United Front', Hu Qiaomu, one of the most influential Communist Party of China (CPC) ideologues of the time, recommended reviewing the history of the anti-Japanese war so as to reinforce 'patriotism' and building the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall and the Museum for Commemorating the Victory of the Chinese People's Resistance against Japan in *Lugouqiao* (the Marco Polo Bridge) (Eto, 2014b).

It can therefore be seen that the 'history' problem in China began, politically, in the 1980s. Allen Whiting examined anti-Japanese demonstrations in 1985 to see whether it was the first case since Mao Zedong's death that mass demonstrations challenged the Party and government's authority, even though it is possible that public sentiments were used for the top leaders' power struggle (Whiting, 1989). This interpretation, popular among Japanese researchers, is also present in the report compiled by the Advisory Panel for the Abe administration in August 2015, stating that 'the basis of anti-Japanese education in China, which still continues now, was laid during this period (note: the 1980s) under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping' (I am referring to The Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and World Order in the 21st Century). I would like to insist that one cannot begin to understand the structure of post-1989 Chinese nationalism without

observing closely the discussions that were allowed and those that were suppressed in official speeches during the 1980s.

How to deal with the multiplicity of 'Chinese nationalism'

The second issue I raise concerns identity. With the rise in economic inequality in Chinese society, the attribution of the 'national' has become multi-layered and authorities have begun emphasizing official political identities in order to control this multifaceted 'nationalism'. The experience of Japan, and Japan–China relations in particular, provides some valuable insights towards clarifying the politics of identity.

According to multiple surveys, Chinese public sentiments towards Japan continuously improved from 2006 to 2010, while nationalism continued rising as testified by the enthusiastic international movement of Chinese protecting the Olympic torch in 2008. This case shows that the simple logic whereby 'the surge of nationalism promotes anti-Japan feelings' is deficient. In order to analyse this puzzle, I have classified the centripetal force of Chinese official nationalism according to four core political identities: the 'Chinese nation', socialist state, developing country and great power.

Over the years, Japan has born at least four 'roles' in the context of Chinese nationalism corresponding to these four identities. The first role, and probably the most focused on, is that of 'militarist' power that once invaded and wrecked China. This image is the reflection of the official historical narrative, led by the CPC, according to which the 'Chinese nation' stood up against the Japanese militarists to win the great victory, which is also the starting point of the current 'great revival of the Chinese nation'. The second role is that of Japan as a member of 'the West'. Not only during the Cold War era but even now, the CPC demonizes alleged 'machinations' by a notional West to 'westernize and divide' (*xihua fenhua*) China so as to protect the Communist one-Party dictatorship. The third role is that of Japan as an economic partner that supports Chinese development by providing financial aid and technological transfer. The fourth role is that of Japan as a strategic opponent that contributes to the ongoing anti-China encirclement effort thereby helping American expansion in Asia.

My taxonomy is effective in examining the dynamism of Chinese nationalism since the variation in the strength of Chinese anti-Japan sentiment was explained by the balance of the four identities mentioned above. In this regard, the discourse about Japan can be an indicator of how Chinese nationalism has shifted. In 2006, for example, the Chinese government adjusted its national narrative on history to emphasize more the aspect of victorious rather than invaded nation. This adjustment was part of China's identity as great power and also consistent with the assertion of the doctrine of 'Peaceful Development' (*heping fazhan*). In concomitance, authorities partly curbed popular anti-Japan sentiment. Similarly, despite the observed rise of 'patriotism' in the 1980s, Chinese public opinion was comparatively mild towards Japan because the identity of 'developing country' in need of Japan's economic co-

operation, such as Official Development Assistance (ODA), was dominant. This dependence offset public anti-Japan sentiments in the 1980s (Eto, 2014b).

I believe that it is necessary to choose an appropriate taxonomy depending on which aspects of nationalism one wishes to discuss, and such pragmatic approach may partially answer the question of the analytical framework referred by Carlson and Costa. In what follows, I illustrate how the notion of national identity can be effectively employed for purposes of analysis. In fact, approaching the study of China through the lenses of national identity holds the potential to highlight some significant characteristics of the political discourse under the Xi Jinping regime, even though 'national identity' as an analytical category cannot be a panacea for all issues.

An identity-led approach may assist us in answering questions related to the claims of the 'Chinese Dream' formulation, such as whether it has state power or national identity at its core, or how Chinese national identity is linked to the reconstruction of state identity as a 'great power'. In addition, reflecting on identity involves dealing with the thorny notion that the 'Chinese nation' (*zhonghua minzu*) might contrast with individual ethnic identities within China, or even be different from China's national identity as understood in political science. The 'Chinese nation' understood politically is a collective notion that includes not only the 'Chinese people' (*zhongguo renmin/zhongguo gongmin*) who hold the nationality of the People's Republic of China but also overseas Chinese and people in Taiwan, thus transcending the count of Chinese citizens within the national borders of the PRC.

In contemporary China, the meanings attached to the attributes 'national' and 'patriotic' continue to change significantly. It is a challenge for scholars of Chinese nationalism to build an analytical framework concise and flexible enough to capture this change. Hopefully, in the future, there will be other meaningful attempts to develop research on Chinese nationalism.

NAOKO ETO

Institute of Developing Economies, Japan Trade Organisation (IDE-JETRO)

The study of Chinese nationalism: theoretical engagement, empirical testing and influence on Chinese foreign policy

The central controversies in the exchange between Allen Carlson and Anna Costa include whether the burgeoning literature on Chinese nationalism is isolated from or has contributed to the general literature of nationalism and if the study is rigorous enough to help understand and explain the rise of nationalism in China and its influence on China's foreign policy behaviour. As one of the first scholars to study Chinese nationalism after its reemergence in the 1990s as an integrative ideology to compensate for the demising communism and to have been part of the scholarly debate about the foreign policy

implications of Chinese nationalism, I would like to make a contribution to this useful exchange.

Theoretical engagement

To address the issue in the Carlson–Costa debate of whether nationalism in China has been studied in isolation from the emergence of nationalism in other states and from theoretical debates occurring in the broader literature of nationalism, I would like to place the study of Chinese nationalism in the context of the evolution of Contemporary China Studies as an area studies field.

For about half a century during the Cold War period, most scholars of China Studies were influenced heavily by the so-called Sinology tradition developed in Europe in the nineteenth century. This tradition takes China as an isolated case and emphasizes the significance of its unique history and culture in understanding contemporary China while ignoring the social science research methodology and comparative approaches in the study of China. As a result, most of the prominent ‘old hands’ of Sinology studied China in isolation from the studies of other countries, focusing on China’s uniqueness or Chineseness to understand Chinese society, politics, economy and foreign policy.

This situation has been changing since the study of contemporary China as an area studies field in many North American universities began to be integrated into social science disciplines/departments in the 1980s. This change was largely due to two developments. One was the opening of China, which has brought about the new opportunity of field research and the availability of a wealth of data to conduct systematic analysis. The second development was that an increasing number of China scholars were being trained in social sciences departments of universities, mostly in the US. As a result, a variety of social sciences approaches and methodologies started to be applied to Contemporary China Studies. Witnessing such new development, Michel Oksenberg observed that ‘China has been increasingly understood in a comparative context rather than as a unique phenomenon’. (Michael Oksenberg, 1993, p. 332).

Chinese nationalism reemerged after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, a contention that I discuss in more depth in the following paragraph. From the very beginning, some scholars of Chinese nationalism have tried to follow the trends in Contemporary China Studies engaging with theoretical debates in the broader literature of nationalism and conducting comparative studies. For instance, my book *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (2004) engaged with the fundamental debate in the broader Nationalism Studies literature about whether Chinese nationalism is primordial or contextual, identifying two opposite schools of thought on the rise of Chinese nationalism. The first group, comprised mainly of Chinese scholars, takes a primordial position and argues for a national identity that is constant in time, claiming that modern Chinese nationalism is a spontaneous

response to the external humiliation and its content is unchanging and deeply rooted in the Chinese historical experience.

The second group, instead, composed mainly of Western observers, takes a contextual or instrumentalist approach, interpreting the rise of Chinese nationalism as originating from the manipulation of the Chinese government and therefore situational in content. Taking an approach that tempers primordial positions with a careful measurement of instrumentalism, my book reveals that while Chinese national consciousness has a deep historical root, Chinese nationalism is a modern phenomenon and its content has been subjected to the manipulation of different political forces, including but not only the Chinese government (Suisheng Zhao, 2004). Most Western scholarly works on Chinese nationalism have accepted this position and therefore contributed to the general literature of nationalism by providing a parameter that Chinese nationalism was more contextual rather than primordial in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. But most Chinese scholars are not convinced and have insisted on the primordial contents of Chinese nationalism, largely due to their politically motivated intention to defend and justify Chinese foreign policy, which has become increasingly nationalistic.

In addition, the research by Wenfang Tang and Benjamin Barr both engages with a number of influential theories of nationalism connected to several disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, and also provides a comparative perspective. By using the same questions contained in the 2003 Survey on National Identity conducted by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), which included 40,000 respondents from thirty-five countries and regions but not China, Tang and Barr produced the 2008 China Survey, a project of the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M University in collaboration with the Research Center for Contemporary China (RCCC) at Peking University. The Survey included a multi-stage stratified random survey containing 3,989 respondents from seventy-five Chinese counties and county-level urban districts distributed among seven official geographic regions. A wealth of data was collected allowing to compare Chinese nationalism with its counterpart in thirty-five other countries (Wenfang Tang and Benjamin Barr, 2012).

Empirical testing

A related issue raised in the Carlson–Costa exchange is whether scholars of Chinese nationalism have done rigorous empirical testing of the conventional wisdom that Chinese nationalism has been on the rise since the early 1990s to explain any particular foreign policy outcome. Unsurprisingly, Carlson approaches the study of Chinese nationalism more as a science than as an art, in line with the current trend of social sciences research in academia. I have nothing against the trend, but I believe that there is merit in employing multiple methodologies in social science research, particularly in Contemporary China Studies as an area studies field. There include, among others, rigorous

quantitative methods, the historical approach, field observation and documentary research.

One example of using a variety of methodologies to study Chinese nationalism is again Wenfang Tang and Benjamin Barr's article, which provides quantitative measurements to prove the rise of nationalism in China in the 2000s from a comparative perspective. Their research found that China showed the highest level of nationalism in comparison with the other twenty-five countries, with a score of 80 out of 100 in their survey. The top ten countries, in addition to China, include the USA (76), Canada (75), Australia (75), South Africa (73), New Zealand (73), Venezuela (72), Japan (72), the Philippines (71) and Austria (71). With the caveat that since these countries represent very different political systems, different cultural traditions and different continents, these high levels of nationalism have their own reasons in each country and should therefore be analysed within their own national contexts, they produced three explanatory theories for the rise of Chinese nationalism: functionalism, which emphasizes the importance of economic development and education; culturalism, which attributes nationalism to cultural myths and historic memories; and constructivism, which focuses on elite political design.

Their tests show a mixed picture of the functionalist and culturalist theories but provide the clearest and most straightforward support for the constructivist assumption. In other words, the Chinese nation-state is an imagined multi-ethnic community constructed by the Communist Party. Using nationalism as a variable to examine the impact of nationalism on people's political attitudes, they find that nationalism in contemporary China serves as a powerful instrument in impeding public demand for democratic change (Wenfang Tang and Benjamin Barr, 2012).

Nationalism as a variable to explain Chinese foreign policy

Another controversy is how to categorize the types of Chinese nationalist sentiment and whether such typology is static and timeless enough so as to be employed as independent variable to explain Chinese foreign policy behaviour. China scholars have indeed made efforts to conceptualize and categorize different types of Chinese nationalism, but they have not treated these concepts as static or timeless. Instead, these types are useful variables to help locate and understand the evolution of Chinese nationalism and explain their influence on Chinese foreign policy. Taking a side in the debate to cautiously explore the limits of Chinese nationalism and ask if Chinese nationalism was affirmative, assertive or aggressive after its reemergence in the 1990s, I once argued that the Chinese government practised a pragmatic nationalism to control its expression based on a sober assessment of China's domestic and global challenges and tempered by diplomatic prudence War to bolster faith of the Chinese people in a political system in trouble and hold the country together during the period of rapid and turbulent transformation from a communist to a post-communist society after the end of the Cold. This position differed

from those scholars who held that Chinese nationalism at its reemergence was a reckless and aggressive new nationalism making Chinese foreign policy inflexible.

Revisiting the debate in the context of China's increasingly confrontational and assertive behaviour in recent years, I have re-conceptualized my position to argue that while the Chinese government made effective efforts to control the expression of nationalism and Chinese foreign policy was therefore not dictated by the emotional nationalistic rhetoric before 2008, it has become increasingly reluctant to constrain its expression and more willing to follow the nationalist calls in confrontation against the Western powers and its neighbours. This strident turn is in part because the government is increasingly responsive to public opinion as the average Chinese finds a growing number of ways such as the social media to express her nationalist feelings and put pressure on foreign-policy makers. But more importantly, this turn is due to the convergence of Chinese state nationalism and popular nationalism. Enjoying an inflated sense of empowerment supported by its new quotient of wealth and military capacities, the Chinese state has become more willing to live up to popular nationalist expectations in defending and expanding the country's core interests.

These developments have complicated China's diplomacy, creating a heated political environment which is hardening China's foreign policy (Suisheng Zhao, 2013). Some other scholars also regard Chinese nationalist sentiments as an evolving phenomenon, thereby using different concepts to characterize them at different times. For example, Christopher Hughes suggests that Chinese nationalism took a 'geopolitical turn' in 2008, 'shaped by many of the ideas that characterized geopolitical thinking in Germany and Japan in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries' (Christopher Hughes, 2011, p. 602).

My typology of Chinese nationalist sentiments has also been evolving. While my 2004 book presented three types of Chinese nationalism, i.e. liberal, ethnic and state nationalisms, based on the driving forces behind them at the time. In my 2013 article, I no longer use liberal nationalism but popular nationalism instead because Chinese nationalism has been driven since then mostly by two forces from two opposite directions: top-down by the incumbent state elites and bottom-up by the populist societal forces. In addition, I found that although the distinction between state nationalism and popular/liberal nationalism was clear during Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao years, a convergence of state and popular nationalisms has been occurring as an increasing number of people in the state corridors of power find themselves sharing the views of popular nationalists. Such convergence was catalysed by a favourable tilt in the global balance of power resulting in increasingly confidence on the part of China in its ability to deal with the West and settle territorial disputes on its own terms. Leaders in Beijing have therefore become more willing to proactively shape the external environment, rather than passively react to it, and forcefully safeguard China's national interests rather than compromise on them.

Final words

It does not seem to me that moving beyond the concept of nationalism to refocus on national identity construction would be a solution to the so-called flaws and inherent limitations in the study of Chinese nationalism. Nationalism and national identity are two related but different concepts. National identity is a concept especially useful to investigate the collective sense of self of a people, while a focus on nationalism highlights what the *political* loyalty of the Chinese people centres on, be it the state, ethnicity or territory. Coming to terms with national identity formation in China today does not require us to move beyond the frame provided by the study of nationalism. The study of Chinese national identity construction is, therefore, not an alternative to, but rather a complementary perspective on, the study of Chinese nationalism.

SUISHENG ZHAO
University of Denver

Putting concepts into practice: a call for measuring and explaining variation in Chinese nationalism

In the rich and vast literature on Chinese nationalism, there has been far more attention paid to tracing the contours of nationalism and national identity than to teasing out their consequences. Rather than continue to debate the intrinsic merits of nationalism, national identity, or alternative constructs, a critical next step for the field is to operationalize these concepts and see which are useful for understanding empirical patterns in Chinese politics, society, and foreign policy. Just as “‘it is probably best’ to avoid the temptation to concoct better ‘formal definitions’ and instead ‘look at what culture does,’” as Gellner notes, so should research on Chinese nationalism(s) invest in understanding their causes and consequences rather than further definitional refinements (Gellner 1983, 6-7). In short, further elaboration of conceptual differences between nationalism and national identity should be given secondary importance to clearer specifications of existing concepts and more rigorous research designs to evaluate how and why they vary across space and time.

There is no shortage of important and pressing questions that research on Chinese nationalism can and should address. In his original 2009 article, Carlson posits a number of them, including: Is nationalism in China on the rise? Is it making China more combative in the international arena? Is a focus on nationalism the most effective intellectual framework for understanding how those living within the People’s Republic of China (PRC) are defining their position in contemporary world politics?

In discussing whether nationalism in China is “on the rise,” analysts must clearly define appropriate measures of nationalism or national identity. Is it

the popularity of books like “China can say no” or “Unhappy China”? Is it the increased frequency of nationalist street protests, such as the 1999 protests against the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia, the 2005 protests against Japan’s bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, or the 2012 demonstrations over Japan’s purchase of three islands in the East China Sea? Is it the intensity or pervasiveness of popular affinity for the nation, belief in the superiority of the Chinese nation, or perceptions of identity difference with citizens of other nations? (Johnston & Stockmann 2007) Is it the salience of a singular, exclusive national identity over other, mutually overlapping, boundary-spanning identities? (Carlson 2009, 30) Different metrics may be better suited to different theoretical constructs, whether of nationalism or national identity. Such operationalizations are a necessary step towards heeding Carlson’s original call for more “empirical substance” in the debate over whether nationalism in China is rising.

There is ample room for scholars to follow up on the insights generated by the large literature on defining different strands of nationalism – what Carlson terms a vast “naming project.” How has the prominence of different types of nationalism – whether defensive, confident, assertive, pessimistic, liberal, state, or ethnic – varied over time, space, age, education, ethnicity, and gender within China? In addition to rigorously evaluating whether and what types of nationalism in China are rising, declining, or staying more or less the same, we should also strive to disentangle the causal factors behind this variation. How do political and socioeconomic variables at the subnational level – such as the concentration of college students, migrant workers, and unemployed graduates, alongside the longevity of local party leaders in office – affect overt expressions of nationalism, as in the anti-Japanese demonstrations that swept Chinese cities in August and September of 2012? (Wallace & Weiss 2015).

Rather than continue to debate whether nationalism and national identity in China is a primarily top-down or bottom-up phenomenon, a productive next step would be to ask how, when, and with whom are state narratives most persuasive. How effective is state mythmaking at shaping individual perceptions? Conversely, under what conditions is bottom-up nationalism able to influence official narratives and decision-making? More careful attention must be paid to the mechanisms by which nationalism is said to affect to China’s international behaviour. On what issues, through which channels, and under what circumstances do popular sentiments prevent an insecure leadership from showing flexibility in diplomatic negotiations? How do grassroots nationalists navigate the “political opportunity structure” to evade repression? What kinds of fissures within the government create openings for nationalist intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and activists to attract elite allies and market their ideas? How have different types and displays of Chinese nationalism affected foreign perceptions and behaviour towards China?

Carlson notes that “existing attempts within the literature to treat nationalism as an independent variable in China’s foreign relations are far from

convincing” (Carlson 2009, 25). While Costa cautions that this critique is too sweeping, she also acknowledges that “it can hardly ever be used on its own and to explain everything” (Costa 2014, 104). Nationalism may be a necessary but partial explanation for any given historical event or foreign policy strategy. But to understand the conditions under which it is likely to influence Chinese (or any other state’s) foreign policy, more discerning research designs are necessary to assess its independent (or conditional) effect. Depending on whether the desired level of analysis is at the national, local, or individual level, such designs may range from qualitative process tracing and counterfactual historical analysis to matched comparisons and survey experiments at the local and individual level.

In tracing the effects of nationalism, we must also consider factors that may *curtail* rather than amplify the effects of nationalism on state behaviour. In post-Mao China, nationalist, anti-foreign street protests in China have been repressed more often than they have been permitted (Weiss 2014). Grassroots mobilization over nationalist causes has often been nipped in the bud by government leaders seeking international flexibility and diplomatic reassurance (Weiss 2013). Insecure leaders who fear nationalist challenges to official narratives are as likely to shut them down as to pander to them.

Internationally, a surge in popular nationalism might not translate into increased combativeness. Whether grassroots nationalism manifests itself online or in the streets, sensitivity to popular opinion is likely to vary over time and under different leaders. And popular sentiments might affect government foreign policy behaviour in ways that run counter to conventional wisdom. A surge of popular confidence and attachment to the nation could give elites more leeway to show magnanimity and openness to compromise, while a surge in feelings of national humiliation might instil caution in leaders who fear that a foreign policy crisis could underscore the government’s weakness and inability to prevail over foreign rivals. Ultimately, these and other conjectures need to be subjected to careful measurement and evaluation.

Scholars of Chinese politics and history have provided a wealth of insight into the texture and history of Chinese nationalism and national identity. To answer questions of change over time (e.g. Is nationalism rising?) and causation (e.g. Is popular nationalism responsible for Chinese foreign policy assertiveness?), further efforts to operationalize these concepts, theorize their relationships to one another, and measure how they vary across time and space are needed. One approach to understanding variation in nationalism is to use extant survey research to evaluate conventional arguments about “rising nationalism” in China (Johnston) and the extent to which narratives of victimhood and pride find expression in public opinion (Dickson & Woods).

To evaluate whether popular nationalism might be constraining Chinese foreign policy choices, another approach is to use survey experiments to evaluate how nationalist narratives, public statements, and foreign provocations affect domestic approval of the government and support for the use of force in foreign policy crises (Dafoe & Weiss). Fear of popular disapproval could shape the

government's policy choices – but under what conditions? One is the government's sensitivity to public opinion, which itself may vary over time. Another condition is that a tough foreign policy will not backfire by forcing a confrontation that ultimately reveals the government's weakness. A third factor is the efficacy of state censorship, propaganda, and media guidance at managing public opinion, which may short-circuit the connection between popular nationalism and foreign policy. To draw out the connections between nationalism and Chinese foreign policy thus requires a great deal more research into how these popular sentiments vary with the domestic and international context and the mechanisms and conditions that make Chinese elites particularly sensitive to popular sentiments.

JESSICA C. WEISS
Cornell University

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