

The Impact of Chinese National Identity on Sino-U.S. Relations

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The Chinese Party-state's warnings about the danger of Western ideas appear with increasing frequency. Whether the target is "constitutional democracy," the "rule of law," "universal values," "judicial independence," or "color revolutions," the refrain is becoming familiar. These are "erroneous" notions in the public discourse of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which not only threaten CCP rule, their advocacy by Chinese is evidence of traitorous conduct, and their support by U.S. officials or on the Western-led internet must be resisted for bilateral relations to proceed successfully. Such admonishments are consistent with the CCP's official ideology and reflect the national identity currently espoused by CCP leaders and propagated in the increasingly tightly controlled media and academia. They have had a negative impact on the Sino-U.S. relationship, and are likely to continue to do so even as President Donald Trump remains largely silent on China's human rights record and concentrates on "America First" economically and on tough talk about pressuring China regarding issues such as Taiwan, the South China Sea, and North Korea.

This chapter proceeds from the assumption national identity can be seen as a stable but changing foundation for international relations with the capacity to survive major conflicts between nation-states, and as a source of differences and conflicts between nations. It is also a valuable resource for enhancing a nation-state's soft power, which, as well as tangible benefits it can offer others, might give the latter more incentive to pursue good relations. Thus, other things being equal, nation-states with compatible or overlapping national identities are more likely to establish and maintain good relations with each other than those with incompatible identities.

Part of the construct of Chinese national identity is its images and representations of the United States. The prevailing Chinese narrative about the country and its people has changed over the years, especially under the influence of various kinds of nationalism. Contrary to common perceptions and opinions in the Chinese- and English-language scholarship and mass media, Chinese nationalism has not invariably strained China's relations with the United States or any other country, but has at times contributed to good relations. It is erroneous to assume that nationalism necessarily hampers bilateral relations; the right question to begin with is how various kinds of nationalism affect international relations. Much depends on the goals of ideological nationalist movements. According to Anthony Smith, all such movements seek to retain or maintain national identity, national unity, and national autonomy.¹ It should be added, however, that while unity and autonomy are usually well-defined, identity is often varied and contested, and that various kinds of nationalism – even within the same nation-state – may not seek to retain or maintain the same national identity.

To put Chinese nationalism in perspective, it is worth stressing that this momentous movement metamorphosed over and over again, and Chinese national identity has been deconstructed and reconstructed repeatedly in this process. It is readily admitted that Chinese national identity does not affect every aspect of China's international relations and that it has often been trumped by conflicts of national interest, but its impact grows when peace prevails and cannot be ignored even during conflicts. Sino-U.S. relations improved dramatically while the CCP moved away from Marxism-Leninism and upheld a political nationalism that sought to reconstruct the authority of the state and rejected Chinese cultural traditions. Under President Xi Jinping, however, bilateral relations have deteriorated as a result of a concatenation of contributing factors. One of these is China's rapidly growing economic and military power as well as unprecedented competition between the two countries. Of critical significance is the CCP's shift from political nationalism in the post-Tiananmen era and, particularly since 2013,

its endorsement of cultural nationalism, which has facilitated the construction of a new, resincized national identity with far-reaching implications for Sino-U.S. relations.

This can be traced to show how the current nationalist discourse under Xi Jinping has emerged. As the “China Dream” has become more clearly defined, the urgency has grown to contrast what is constructed as the national identity of China with what is contrasted with it, centered on images of the United States. As Trump takes the reins of U.S. power, it is increasingly possible to observe further clarifications as to how Chinese identity relates to Sino-U.S. relations. This chapter reviews the impact of national identity during the early reform era (1978-1989) and in the aftermath of June Fourth (1989-2012) before concentrating on the era of Xi Jinping. It looks closely at the response to the Trump transition to power. Finally, it discusses lessons for the governments of China and the United States in relation to possible trajectories of Sino-U.S. relations during the rest of Xi’s tenure in office.

A PRO-AMERICAN NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE EARLY REFORM ERA

David Shambaugh is right to note that the phrase “beautiful imperialist,” one of the most memorable in the literature on Sino-U.S. relations, nicely captures the ambivalence—admiration and denigration—that distinguishes China’s perceptions of the United States.² He is also right to attribute ambivalent Chinese images of the United States to recurring cycles of amity and enmity that have characterized Sino-American relations since the late nineteenth century. Between 1978 and 1989, however, amity predominated in Sino-U.S. relations, and the two countries enjoyed the best bilateral relations in recent memory despite intermittent wrangling over China’s most favored nation status, human rights abuses by the Party-state, and American arms sales to Taiwan.

The beginning of “reform and opening-up” in 1978 nearly coincided with the normalization of diplomatic relations between the PRC and the United States. In fact, the latter marked the beginning of the PRC’s openness to the West and resulted in a flurry of state-to-state and people-to-people interactions, which facilitated mutual understanding as never before. It led to large-scale people-to-people interactions for the first time since 1949, and immense interest in Western knowledge and Western countries more broadly. More and more Chinese people became increasingly exposed to American ideas, values, and practices. Contact with the United States contributed to what Chinese academics and media commentators commonly referred to as a “crisis of faith,” which was initially a loss of faith in the ideology of the Party-state and eventually evolved into a loss of faith in Chinese cultural traditions as well. The crisis emerged as the myth about the superiority of state socialism and China’s political system was shattered. At the same time, the false image of the United States—a capitalist country where ordinary people suffered exploitation and lived in poverty—became discredited too. The myth could no longer be sustained as Chinese realized that the U.S. was actually much more modern, prosperous, vibrant, free, and attractive than socialist China, contrary to what they had been told.

Untenable was the state-defined national identity of the Chinese as a new species of “socialist men and women with socialist consciousness who are cultured and love working.” It is hard to tell how many Chinese genuinely identified themselves as such even during the Mao era, but there is no doubt that many, including CCP leaders and Party-state officials, abandoned that identity together with state socialism, although they were obliged not to renounce either

openly. Those who detached themselves from the socialist identity and Maoism were eager to embrace the United States as a source of inspiration and a model for emulation, and those who embraced it all the more resolutely rejected state socialism, Maoism, and everything else that made up the official Chinese identity. Of course, the Maoist case obliterated discussion of any alternative, while the insurgent identity pursuit growing in the 1980s came against a robust push back from much of the leadership, which controlled most of the media and already was struggling to impose a national identity more antagonistic toward the West.

The struggle for a reform-oriented national identity facilitated better relations with the United States. It was intellectuals who spearheaded the project instead of Party-state leaders, who continued to be constrained by ideological dogma irrespective of the Party's repeated calls for the "emancipation of the mind." The unofficial national identity that gained currency in academia and the mass media in the 1980s incorporated Western ideas and values and included the United States in China's positive reference group, but it deliberately excluded traditional Chinese values. This and the socialist identity of the Mao era were both characterized by wholesale anti-traditionalism. What set the two apart is the belief, on the one hand, that the end will be achieved by the means of state socialism, and on the other, unshakable faith in Westernization.

The controversial TV series *River Elegy (Heshang)*, which was broadcast on China Central Television (CCTV) in 1988, sparked a debate in China and overseas about Chinese traditions and modernity, Westernization, and love of country. The blunt message of the series was that current obstacles to reform and modernization had deep roots in Chinese polity, society, and culture. Chinese traditions must be rejected in total. The dragon, the symbol of Chinese ancestry, was condemned as outmoded authoritarianism. The Great Wall, the symbol of historical continuity, was depicted as a manifestation of close-minded conservatism. The Yellow River, the cradle of Chinese civilization, was said to symbolize unmitigated violence. Confucianism, the mainstay of the Chinese cultural tradition, was blamed for failing to give China "a national spirit of enterprise, a system of laws, or a mechanism of cultural renewal, but a fearsome self-killing machine that, as it degenerated, constantly devoured its best and its brightest, its own vital elements." The "ugly, despotism-engendering Yellow Earth and Yellow River" were urged to surrender to the "beautiful and great blue Ocean" beyond it that bore science and democracy on its waters.³

The series' message was publicly unacceptable to the Party-state as a whole. The top leadership was divided about the series and its message. General Secretary Zhao Zhiyang tacitly endorsed it, and President Yang Shangkun recommended that cadres, Party members, and PLA officers and soldiers should watch it for the purpose of "emancipating the minds."⁴ But Vice President Wang Zhen slammed it in fury for its offensive comments on the CCP, the Chinese nation, and Chinese civilization.⁵ Though the reformers were backing the series' critique of traditional Chinese identity, they were really targeting conservative mindsets among Party-state cadres, which impeded "reform and opening-up." Party traditionalists, in contrast, were not so much defensive of Chinese civilization as they were against the reformers' liberal inclinations. Though they refrained from arguing outright against better relations with the United States and the West, they continually cautioned against being oblivious to American ploys of "peaceful evolution"—a warning that was repeated with paranoia in the aftermath of the Tiananmen events of 1989.

The warning reflected a double ambivalence that pervades late modernizing societies vis-à-vis the collective Self and the foreign Other, namely the admiration of the foreigner with strenuous opposition to his domination, and consciousness of inferiority of the indigenous tradition with a determination to reassert one's strength.⁶ However, the CCP differs from many other late modernizers in that its ambivalence toward the United States has manifested itself primarily in ideological terms. As the debate about socialism and capitalism was discouraged under Deng Xiaoping and as Chinese socialism was redefined time and again in the reform era, the ideological conflict between the Chinese Party-state and the United States had in effect narrowed down to restricted civil liberties under the CCP. From Deng to Xi, ideological opposition to American foreign policy has invariably centered on the legitimacy and security of CCP rule.

It has been possible for China's modernizers, whatever their political persuasion, to overcome any hatred for foreign Others by persuading themselves that they are learning from them in order to defeat them (*shiyi zhiyi*). In the case of the United States, there has rarely been widespread hatred toward the country and few psychological barriers to learning from the Americans or establishing good bilateral relations, for China has never suffered the same humiliation as at the hands of Great Britain, Russia, and Japan. Sino-U.S. cooperation during World War II became one of the most popular themes in Chinese films and TV dramas during the eras of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. In the post-Mao era, it is hard to find depictions in literature, art, and cinema or on TV of American atrocities during the Korean War or representations of the United States or Americans which incite hatred. There was much admiration for the United States even during the Mao era, captured in the image of "beautiful imperialist." The term "imperialist" had become essentially irrelevant to the reformers within the CCP and advocates of Westernization in society. Not only had the United States ceased to be a threat to China, it had become a model for emulation and an object of admiration. America, and the West as a whole, caught the Chinese imagination. The goodwill of the reformist leadership was reciprocated by the United States, which welcomed and supported China's "reform and opening-up" not just because China was strategically aligned with it against the Soviet Union but also because it was moving away from communism and beginning to embrace capitalism and American values. Still, though the top leaders rejoiced over the enormous benefit from normalization, entrenched notions of a clash between the socialist and capitalist camps were not erased easily from the Chinese communist psyche. These notions gained currency again in the wake of the Tiananmen events, affecting Sino-U.S. relations dramatically.

AN ANTI-AMERICAN NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE AFTERMATH OF JUNE FOURTH

From 1978 to mid-1989 there were no major incidents which heavily damaged Sino-U.S. relations and forced a re-imagining of perceptions of the Chinese Self and foreign Other and a re-evaluation of prevailing visions as to what China ought to be and how it should relate to the United States or other Western countries. Student demonstrations on Tiananmen Square and across the country, the government's crackdown, and the comprehensive international sanctions on China changed the trajectory of identity politics in the country. Sino-U.S. relations have been strained further as enmity surges as a result of continual friction over such events as the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the collision of a Chinese F-8 fighter with a U.S. Navy EP-3 spy plane near Hainan.

The historic Tiananmen events marked an upheaval along three interrelated fault lines: between conservatives and reformers within the Party, between the Party-state and the emerging forces of society, and between China and the outside world, particularly the United States.⁷ China moved away from open identification with the United States. Conservatives within the Party-state hierarchy gained support from the top leadership and began to dominate the Party's political agenda and propaganda after Zhao Ziyang was ousted. The new leadership's diagnosis of the students' movement was that waning patriotism amongst young Chinese bred widespread discontent with China's political status quo and "foreign worship," and that "evil foreign forces" intent on the "peaceful evolution" of China took advantage of and encouraged the discontent through mass popular media, such as the VOA, CNN, and Radio Free Asia. Though the CCP had been warning Party-state cadres of the danger of the United States and Western imperialists subverting socialist China by peaceful means, the danger was not fully grasped until the Tiananmen events.

Against this backdrop, China's U.S. watchers felt compelled to refrain from challenging negative perceptions of the United States. Some research institutes shelved analysis supporting a more conciliatory U.S. policy.⁸ Those who continued to favor better relations with the United States or promote liberalization were condemned by some as "lapdogs."⁹ Many came to believe that the U.S. strategy was to contain China's development and prevent its rise in international affairs, constructing a "fan-shaped" structure centered on the U.S.-Japan axis and U.S. alliances with Australia, South Korea, Taiwan, and ASEAN, and radiating to China, North Korea, and the Russian Far East,¹⁰ and that a clash between China and the United States was inevitable.¹¹ The popular image of the United States in the 1990s was also negative. A survey conducted in 2000 revealed that the overwhelming majority of the respondents considered it and Japan to be China's main threats, with 78 percent agreeing that the United States had hostile intentions against China.¹² Such findings must be reconciled though with the large number of Chinese students who continued to crave American products, especially Hollywood movies, and opportunities to study in the United States. The Chinese leadership under Jiang Zemin was eager to seize every opportunity for mending relations with the United States, and it downplayed "peaceful evolution" again as soon as international sanctions had been lifted and Sino-U.S. relations were normalized. The term was rarely mentioned in the official media during the Hu and Xi eras.

What had more impact on Chinese national identity was the CCP's prescribed remedy to waning patriotism amongst Chinese youth. The remedy was to instill love for the Party and country and to foster a nation-wide "patriotic education campaign." In the campaign, the Party-state included love for Chinese cultural traditions as an essential component of patriotism, in addition to love for the CCP and love of socialism. Before long large numbers of books about traditional Chinese culture, ranging from classical literature and philosophy to divination and *fengshui*, appeared in bookstores, and renewed interest in China's cultural heritage spread across the country. The CCP had embraced cultural nationalism, allowing its advocates to articulate their version of national identity publicly for the first time since the Cultural Revolution.

Two groups of cultural nationalists were particularly articulate in this period: Confucians and postcolonial cultural critics. They both sought to subvert the socialist national identity of the Mao era and the Westernization discourse of the 1980s and to construct an authentic Chinese identity. The former focused on "cultural Chineseness." Their objective was to reconnect with the Confucian orthodoxy as a way of identifying the nation with its cultural essence and setting

it back on track from the socialist and Westernizing abrasions. For the postcolonial nationalists, the central task was resistance to the hegemonic power of “Western knowledge of China” and the construction of a truly Chinese identity.¹³ They criticized discourse that had relegated China to the position of the West’s “backward” and “exotic” Other, and thus induced China to anxiously remake itself in the West’s image.¹⁴ To project modernity as an absolute universal was to ignore the fact of power relations and cultural hegemony. In order for China to restore its Chineseness, so goes the argument, the hegemonic knowledge of the West and the “Western-centred modernity” must be “deconstructed.”¹⁵ What the postcolonial nationalists wanted to reconstruct was a new culture, which would differ from the type of universalism that Western countries sought to impose on the rest of the world. They celebrated the emergence in the post-Tiananmen era of a new national consciousness or an awakening of the Chinese Self in defiance of the colonized identity as an “Other” of the West.

Few took the Confucians, the postcolonial critics, and other cultural nationalists seriously when they gained prominence in the 1990s. Indeed, though they helped keep Westernizers in check in conjunction with the Party-state, they were ideologically alienated from officialdom and failed to win official endorsement; their influence scarcely extended beyond Chinese academia and received little popular support; and they lost much of their discursive legitimacy with the restoration of normal relations with the United States from the mid-1990s and the Party-state’s renewed emphasis on external openness. Still, the anti-Western “nativism” and cultural nationalism which informed the postcolonial critics’ reconstruction of Chineseness and the Confucians’ advocacy of traditional values are evidently entrenched and remain resilient. These ideologies have been carried on and gained prominence again in the era of Xi Jinping. A result of Xi’s promotion of Chinese cultural traditions is the convergence of political and cultural nationalism and the emergence of a wave of cultural nationalism, which have no parallel since the Opium Wars. The new integrated nationalism, which seeks, at the same time, to maintain China’s political identity, unity, and autonomy and to identify the Chinese nation to itself by returning to its cultural traditions, has gained discursive hegemony.

THE PROMOTION OF A SINICIZED NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE ERA OF XI JINPING

Official Discourse of De-Westernization and Re-Sinicization

China’s new integrated nationalism finds better expression in Xi’s “China Dream” than anywhere else. Foregrounded in the dream, when he launched it in the State Museum on November 29, 2012, were economic, military, and political dimensions encompassing national strength and prosperity to be achieved through “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” while culture took a back seat. Though “cultural construction” was designated as a principal task, it was not clear then what cultural revival meant and what kind of culture would fit the dream. Xi and Party theoreticians have gradually clarified these questions in the past five years. In its current form, Xi’s “China Dream,” is the imagined identity of China as an emergent superpower catching up with the United States not only in economic, political, and military terms but culturally as well.

At the heart of the discourse is a two-pronged strategy, namely political de-Westernization and cultural re-Sinicization. The former is an ideological defense that is designed to counter

the influence of “universal values” detrimental to the CCP’s grip on power and to maintain the political identity of the Party and the state. Delegitimizing Western political ideologies is also a way of undermining the discursive and moral advantage of the United States and Western countries over China in ideological debates. Re-Sinicization serves the same purposes and aims more broadly to maintain China’s cultural identity, unity, and autonomy so that the revitalized national spirit will at the same time propel the “China Dream” and manifest national revival. Neither de-Westernization nor re-Sinicization, to be sure, is Xi’s initiative; both were Party-state policies under Jiang and Hu. But there is a difference: Xi is taking the CCP’s political ideology and cultural Chineseness more seriously than any other Party leader since Mao and adding more substance to both than any of his predecessors in the post-Mao era.

To the surprise of analysts and commentators who anticipated greater political liberalization under the new leadership, Xi affirmed unequivocally the Party-state’s ideology and reiterated his unwavering commitment to its political system and socialist road.¹⁶ A key message he has been hammering is that reform is not meant to transform the identity of the Party or the state but to perfect and develop China’s socialist system, that the CCP will continue to adhere to the socialist road instead of returning to old policies of closure and dogmatism or being led astray by heretical ideologies.¹⁷ He has repeatedly warned the Party against the evil intentions of hostile forces inside and outside China who cast reform as the transformation of China’s political system into a Western political system and against the danger of China being “Westernized and divided” (*xihua he fenhua*).¹⁸ Unlike Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao before him, Xi does not beat around the bush with his opposition to “universal values,” American-style democracy, and Western political systems or models of development. *People’s Daily*, for the first time in the reform era, has now chosen to publicly engage with Western democratic theories and practices and to elaborate on why China does not need, and will be badly served by, Western political systems.¹⁹

Xi’s de-Westernization offensive is by no means empty rhetoric, as was often the case during the eras of Jiang and Hu. He has taken concrete measures to retain the CCP’s leadership in the ideological field and to tighten political control over expression and academic research. One such measure is draconian disciplinary action against Party members who oppose its “four cardinal principles” or engage in “bourgeois liberalization.”²⁰ At the same time, the educational authorities have stepped up de-Westernization and political-ideological indoctrination in Chinese universities and schools. Education Minister Yuan Guiren articulated the Party-state’s de-Westernization policy more explicitly than any other official in his comments that school teachers and academics should guard against the infiltration of Western ideas and that Chinese universities should never allow textbooks promoting Western values to appear in China’s classrooms.²¹

Above all, Xi’s political de-Westernization campaign is geared toward maintaining the identity of the CCP and PRC and ensuring the security of Party rule. The result of Westernization that Chinese leaders envision is not just the Party’s loss of power and socialism’s defeat by capitalism but also national disintegration, as happened in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. It is not surprising, then, that the CCP treats the identity of the Party and the state as a matter of life and death and has stepped up efforts at containing American and Western influence, especially in the mass media, educational system, and people-to-people relations involving NGOs and critical Western academics.

Still, Xi's de-Westernization is largely confined to the domestic arena, where ideological hegemony must be maintained and Western influence contained in order to secure Party rule. Ever since the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, Chinese leadership has refrained from engaging in an ideological war in the international arena while trying to prevent, in varying degrees, foreign influence from having negative effects in the country, choosing instead to concentrate on practical matters such as trade and economic, political, military, and cultural cooperation. For that reason, Trump's economic pragmatism and his apparent lack of interest in promoting democracy and human rights suit the Chinese leadership perfectly. Trump is not using human rights as a bargaining chip in advancing American interest in trade. So far, he and his team have mentioned human rights in relation to China only once in public.²² However daunting the challenge of dealing with Sino-U.S. differences over currency manipulation, trade imbalances, the South China Sea, and North Korea may be, it is less thorny for the leadership than "human rights diplomacy." Chinese leaders are no longer reminded to their chagrin that they are on the wrong side of history and, therefore, must mend their ways, which entails the relaxation of political-ideological control over expression, association, and religious beliefs.²³ Indeed, the leadership is now off the ideological hook and under less pressure than under previous American administrations to make compromises on human rights and political liberalization or undertake systemic reform with the potential to alter the identity of the Party and the state. It has gained a welcome opportunity to consolidate the identity of the CCP and PRC and to promote official Party ideology more aggressively in internal and external propaganda without having to worry about ideological confrontation with the American government.

That in part explains the general sense of relief among PRC commentators that Trump, a pragmatic businessman who is more interested in making business deals than promoting American values, won the election instead of Hillary Clinton, an advocate of democracy and human rights.²⁴ That sense of relief gave way to grave concerns after Trump threatened to review America's one-China policy and Tillerson's comments in Congress on blocking Chinese access to artificial islands in the South China Sea. But those concerns vanished after Xi's visit to the "Southern White House," which was reported in the Chinese media as a success since the two sides had cleared the uncertainties in bilateral relations, defused the tension over Trump's threats, and agreed to develop normal relations on the basis of "non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation."²⁵ While it is not clear how the Trump administration understands "mutual respect," for Chinese leaders the term means, above all, refraining from criticizing the Chinese government for human right abuses or government policies and actions. Even if Trump becomes more critical of China on human rights, open ideological confrontation between the two governments has ended.

The cultural turn of Xi's "China Dream" became visible a year or so after he came into power. He promoted "excellent" Confucian thoughts and values during his visit to Qufu – Confucius' hometown – on November 26, 2013, and attended the anniversary of Confucius' birthday on September 24, 2014. The themes of the Politburo's 12th and 18th group study sessions were China's cultural soft power and traditional Chinese statecraft. Xi deplored the "de-Sinicization" of China during his visit to Beijing Normal University on Chinese Teachers' Day in 2014. The first series of National Learning textbooks for Party and government officials was published on June 15, 2015. Officials at all levels are now required to attend "study sessions" at Party schools and state administration colleges. The Ministry of Education released

“Guidelines on the Teaching of Traditional Chinese Culture” in the schools and universities on April 1, 2014. More recently, Xi has added “cultural confidence” to the “three confidences” that the CCP wishes to boost – “ideological confidence,” “confidence in the [socialist] road,” and “confidence in the [socialist] system.”

The reasons for the Party-state’s unprecedented promotion of traditional culture can be seen from Xi’s speech in Qufu.²⁶ First, since every country and every nation have their own historical traditions and deep-rooted cultures, the basic national conditions differ, and so do their models of development. Second, the spiritual pursuit of the Chinese nation is rooted in Chinese culture and the latter gives the nation rich nourishment and enables it to survive and thrive generation after generation. Third, Chinese culture is the Chinese nation’s unique advantage and its richest source of soft power. And fourth, socialism with Chinese characteristics is deeply rooted in the fertile soil of Chinese culture. In other words, a central aim of his promotion of traditional culture was to legitimize and justify China’s current political system by portraying both as a natural outgrowth of cultural traditions and history. Xi also pointed to the connection between cultural traditions, on the one hand, and national spirit, national identity, and soft power, on the other. The need for tapping cultural resources arises from the Party-state’s recognition that it is more likely to derive soft power from Chinese values than from Marxism, Sinicized or not, or from state socialism with or without Chinese characteristics not just because of the dwindling credibility and attraction of Marxism and state socialism but also because of the CCP’s loss of faith in core Marxist and socialist principles.

It is possible to see the Party-state’s cultural strategy as a sign of a rising superpower, which looks to foster a new national spirit and identity and to cultivate a higher level of cultural confidence and soft power that match its emergent and aspired status. Part of the cultural strategy is the export of culture, which has become a prominent component of foreign policy and an increasingly aggressive “go-out” strategy in the past decade. Coupled with the cultural strategy is intensified efforts to enhance China’s discursive power, or the “right to speak” (*huayu quan*), in the international arena. Not only is the government becoming more assertive in justifying its chosen model of development in its expanded external-oriented propaganda (*waixuan*), but it is increasingly proactive in changing rules of the game in the international market. The new foreign policy prompted Obama to stress that the United States, instead of other countries like China, should write the trade rules and call the shots, that other countries should play by the rules that America and its partners set, and not the other way around.²⁷ It is consistent with “America First” to ensure that America and its allies set the rules, and it is inconceivable that Trump will be able to bring about fair trade for America as he understands it without setting the rules accordingly. Thus, Sino-U.S. competition on this front is likely to continue and escalate under Trump and Xi.

A more immediate and urgent task for the Party-state, however, is to address its disadvantageous position in the international community, or to solve the problem of China being a target of criticism. A common perception pervading China’s social media is that Mao saved China from being bashed around (*aida*), Deng put an end to starvation (*ai’e*) in the country, and the problem for Xi to solve is international criticism of China (*aima*). It is hard to ascertain whether the popular perception has any impact on the government’s foreign policy, but there can be no doubt that its continued emphasis on mutual respect in international relations is motivated by the desire to avoid criticism and that tackling criticism is a top priority in foreign policy. It is apparent too that a rising China will become increasingly intolerant of international criticism and have more effective economic, political, and diplomatic means of silencing criticism.

Academic Critiques of American Cultural Imperialism and Colonialism

As a result of the convergence of political and cultural nationalism in the Xi era, the voices of officialdom and academia have become harder to distinguish than at any other time since 1978. This is coupled with tighter political control over expression, which has induced greater conformity among intellectuals to the Party line, encouraging larger numbers to support and repeat the line in the mass media and academic journals. It is apparent at a glance that the point of the media commentaries and academic publications is not so much to disseminate the findings of original or innovative research as to declare loyalty to the Party and reinforce the Party line by justifying it, substantiating it, and securing its hegemony. Hence, in contrast to the 1980s or even the 1990s, it is now difficult to find publicly articulated views which speak favorably of American values. Instead, scathing critiques abound even in unofficial media and academic journals.

Critiques related to Chinese national identity typically concentrate on “American-style democracy,” “color revolution,” “universal values,” “American cultural imperialism,” “American cultural colonialism,” and “American cultural hegemony.” Their political thrust resonates with the frontal assault on “peaceful evolution” which was sustained through most of the Mao era and swept across the Chinese media and academia again in the wake of June Fourth, while their cultural assumptions are consistent with the postcolonial criticism of the 1990s. The authors unanimously equate “color revolution” or democratization advocated by the West with “peaceful evolution” and dismiss “universal values” as nothing more than American and Western values; they also treat, without any critical analysis, the prevalence and popularity of American culture in China as manifestations of American cultural hegemony, American imperialism or colonialism; and they go on to assert that the cultural hegemony of the United States and the West is the ideological foundation and root cause of “color revolutions.”²⁸ The uniform conclusion is that Western ideological infiltration, through peaceful evolution, democratization, color revolutions, human rights diplomacy, or the dissemination of American or Western values under the name of “universal values,” is designed to sabotage China’s political system and transform the identity of the CCP and the PRC.

Yu Haijun, Zhang Huichun, and Zhao Yuying’s recent article, which exemplifies the tone and reasoning of those critiques, is worth quoting at some length. In their words,

U.S.-led Western countries impose their cultural hegemony on our country, first and foremost, through distorting and denigrating its socialist cultural production. Western intellectuals “demonize” China’s socialist culture, describing it as “ignorant” and “inferior,” and they spread all kinds of “China threat” theories, smear our country’s image, undermine its international reputation, and create tension between China and other countries. Meanwhile, Western intellectuals instill capitalist ideologies into China’s cultural production and provide cultural support to the advancement of Western interests. Through well-developed mass media, they export their values to our country, harp on the superiority of their “democratic” political systems and the universality of their political outlooks and lifestyles, and imperceptibly spread Western capitalist ideologies to every aspect of daily life in our country so that our people are attracted to Western culture, identify with it and imitate it. Consequently, the socialist nature of Chinese culture is being gradually eroded and the Western conspiracy of subverting and controlling China is likely to succeed.²⁹

Similar critiques can be found in a large number of publications. A subject search in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure on “*xifang wenhua baquan*” (Western cultural hegemony), “*wenhua diguozhuyi*” (cultural imperialism) and “*wenhua zhiminzhuyi*” (cultural colonialism) published between 2013 and 2016 brought up 1271, 251, and 203 articles respectively.

Such cultural hegemony, imperialism, and colonialism do not just undermine the “ideological security” and identity of the CCP and PRR but also challenge and erode the identity of the Chinese nation. Western lifestyles and cultural practices, propagated through cultural products ranging from television drama, Hollywood movies, music, arts, and food and drinks, encourage acceptance of and identification with Western value systems and lead to apathy to Chinese beliefs, values, and practices as well as a sense of cultural inferiority and lack of individual and collective confidence.³⁰ In this view, the Chinese are no longer who they are, as their own way of life and values give way to Western ways and values. Erosion of national identity means the nation’s loss of self-respect, self-confidence, cultural autonomy, cultural unity, and spiritual connection with its rich past.

The common recommendation ensuing from these critiques is heightened vigilance and resistance combined with intensified patriotic education and the re-education of Chinese in cultural traditions. In this, Party-state officials and intellectual elites, be they inside or outside the establishment, are largely agreed, although it is hard to know whether they are truly convinced about cultural imperialism or colonialism, or whether they are merely toeing the Party line. It is also hard to know how many of China’s political and intellectual elites are genuinely committed to the current identity of the Party and the state and the re-Sinicization of national identity. Nevertheless, so far as public discourse is concerned, officials and academics agree that American and Western influence must be contained and Chinese cultural traditions promoted so that the Party, the state, and nation will retain their own identity.

CONCLUSION

Chinese images of the United States since the late 1970s have rarely been clear-cut but are characterized by ambivalence in response to recurring cycles of amity and enmity in Sino-American relations. Yet, the causes of ambivalence and the sources of amity and enmity have varied greatly. Amity in the pre-Tiananmen era was not simply related to the emergence of a pro-American Chinese national identity but also a political nationalism which promoted “reform and opening-up” and sought to strengthen China by working with and emulating the United States, as well as popular admiration for American ways of life. While admiration remains strong in the post-Tiananmen era, America is no longer available as an economic, political, or cultural model for emulation under a new, integrated nationalism that promotes “de-Westernization” and “re-Sinicization.” In contrast, enmity toward America throughout the past four decades has centered on America’s alleged subversion of China’s political system and one-party rule.

The convergence of political and cultural nationalism in the Xi era has had significant ramifications for Chinese perceptions of the United States and its values and for Sino-U.S. relations. The CCP leadership is no longer simply justifying China’s political system and development model on the basis of “national conditions” but also with reference to age-old

Chinese traditions. This is followed by a comprehensive re-evaluation in the official media of political ideologies, political systems, and development models. Hence, “American values” and “models of development” have lost discursive legitimacy in the official discourse. The CCP feels compelled to differentiate China, especially in political and cultural terms, so that its grip on power will not be jeopardized, while unity and identity will be maintained. Consequently, China is becoming increasingly inward-looking and less open politically than at any other time in the post-Mao era. That is not to say that American values have lost their attraction in China; rather, American values might have to be called something else.

Trump’s economic pragmatism and lack of interest in “human rights diplomacy” are already having a significant impact on Sino-U.S. relations and Chinese national identity, and the impact is likely to grow. One effect is reduced tension between governments on ideological grounds. The other is reduced pressure on the CCP and the PRC to alter their identities. The Party-state has been and will continue to be less constrained in promoting its official ideology internally and externally and solidifying the identity of the Party and the state. All the same, ideological differences will continue to have considerable impact on Sino-U.S. relations not least because American politicians, NGOs, and society at large are generally predisposed against China’s one-party rule and the government’s denial of civil liberties. Furthermore, “re-Sinicization” has the potential of pitting Chinese values against American values and American national identity against Chinese national identity. Thus, Sino-U.S. relations will encounter a more fundamental impediment than at any other time since normalization. Mutual trust and cordial bilateral relations will not just depend on reconciling core national interests but also the construction of compatible national identities.

ENDNOTES

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3. River Elegy, (*Heshang*), a six-episode TV series directed by Xia Jun and scripted by Su Xiaokang and Wang Luxiang. CCTV began to broadcast the series on June 16, 1988.
4. China Gate, “Heshang zong zhuangaoren Su Xiaokang tan Zhao Ziyang yu Wang Zhen de quanli zhi zheng,” 2015, <http://www.wenxuecity.com/news/2015/04/29/4228255.html>, accessed January 15, 2017.
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6. Rustow, Dankwart, *A World of Nations: Problems of Political Modernization* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1967) p. 43.
7. Joseph Fewsmith, “The Road to Tiananmen: Chinese Politics in the 1980s,” in Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China: The Eras of Mao and Deng* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 522-33.
8. Philip Saunders, “China’s American Watchers: Changing Attitudes towards the United States,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 161 (March 2000), p. 58.
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10. Wu Chunguang, *Taipingyang shang de jiaoliang: dangdai Zhongguo de haiyang zhanlue wenti* (Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo chubanshe, 1998), p. 125.
11. Yan Xuetong, “Zhongguo de guoji anquan huanjing,” in *Guoji xingshi fenxi bao--1997-1998* (Beijing: Zhanlue yu guanli chubanshe, 1998).
12. Chen Jie, “Urban Chinese Perceptions of Threats from the United States and Japan,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 65 (Summer 2001), pp. 254-66.
13. Zhang Fa, Zhang Yiwu, and Wang Yichuan, “Cong ‘xiandaixing’ dao ‘Zhonghuaxing’ – xin zhishixing de tanxun,” *Wenyi zhengming*, No. 2, 1994, pp. 18-20.

14. Zhang Yiwu, "Chanshi 'Zhongguo' de jiaolue," *Ershiyi shiji*, No. 28 (April 1995), p. 130.
15. Chen Xiaoming, "The Mysterious Other: Postpolitics in Chinese Film," *Boundary*, Vol. 2, No. 24 (1997), p. 130.
16. Xi Jinping, "Zai Zhonggong shibada dierci quanti huiyi shang de jianghua," November 12, 2013.
17. Xi Jinping, "Zai Zhonggong shibada dierci quanti huiyi shang de jianghua" November 12, 2013; "Zai shen bu ji lingdao ganbu xuexi guanche shibajie sanzong quanwei jingshen quanmian chenhua gaige zhuanqi yantaoban shang de jianghua" February 17, 2014.
18. Xi Jinping, "Zai Zhonggong shibada dierci quanti huiyi shang de jianghua," November 12, 2013.
19. See, for example, Zhan Dexiong, "Xifang minzhu hai zhen shi yige wenti," *People's Daily*, April 23, 2012, p. 7; Zhang Chuanjia, Yan Xu, and Chang Peiyu, "Xifang 'minzhu renquan shuchu' huohai renlei shehui," May 25, 2012, p. 5; Zhang Shuping, "Xifang minzhu ying ding de jin piping," *People's Daily*, July 24, 2014, p. 21; Liu Daoqian, "Cong Yingguo tuo Ou kan Xifang minzhu moshi de biduan," *People's Daily*, July 17, 2016, p. 7; Zhang Binghui, Han Bingchen, and Li Yongqun, "Xifang de minzhu kunjing," *People's Daily*, February 14, 2017, p. 23.
20. Article 45 of the CCP's Regulations on Disciplinary Punishment states that those who engage in "bourgeois liberalization" or facilitate the expression of bourgeois liberal views will be expelled from the Party. See the Chinese Communist Party, The Chinese Communist Party's Regulations on Disciplinary Punishment, Xinhua, October 21, 2015.
21. Yuan Guiren, "Guanyu jinyibu jiaqiang he gajin xin xingshi xia gaoxiao xuanchuan sixiang gongzuo de yijian," speech at the Ministry of Education, January 30, 2015.
22. The Trump administration made cursory reference to human rights in relation to China for the first time in the briefing on Trump's meetings with Xi. See Office of the Press Secretary, the White House, "Briefing by Secretary Tillerson, Secretary Mnuchin, and Secretary Ross on President Trump's Meetings with President Xi of China," April 7, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/07/briefing-secretary-tillerson-secretary-mnuchin-and-secretary-ross>, accessed on April 10, 2017.
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24. See, for example, Wang Chong, "China-US relations in the Trump era," *International Understanding*, No. 4, 2016, pp. 14-17; Ma Wensheng, "Telangpu shidai de Zhongmei guanxi," *Gonggong waijiao jikan*, No. 4, 2016, pp. 70-75; Wang Dong and Sun Bingyan, "Telangpu de duihua zhengce qianzhan," *Xiandai guoji guanxi*, No. 12, 2016, pp. 15-23; Jia Qingguo, "Daxuan hou de Meiguo yu shijie," DOI:10.16632/j.cnki.cn11-1005/d.2016.12.006; Liu Weidong, "Telangpu shiqi Zhongmei guanxi yanbian de qianjing," *Huanqiu shishi*, No. 2, 2017, pp. 48-49.
25. Xinhua set the tone about the Xi-Trump meeting by describing it as being "marked by cordiality" and having enabled Xi and Trump to have "cemented their mutual trust, scored many major consensuses, and built up a good working relationship." See Wang Fengfeng and Meng Na, "Spotlight: From Mar-a-Lago, Xi sets course for China-U.S. relations," Xinhua, April 8, 2017; "Xi, Trump pledge to expand win-win cooperation, manage differences," Xinhua, April 8, 2017. Secretary Tillerson had adopted the Chinese government's diplomatic phrases, such as "win-win" and "mutual respect" during his visit to Beijing. See "Remarks before his meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi," U.S. Department of State, March 18, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/03/268515.htm>, accessed on March 20, 2017.
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27. Barack Obama, "The TPP would let America, not China, lead the way on global trade," *The Washington Post*, May 2, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-obama-the-tpp-would-let-america-not-china-lead-the-way-on-global-trade/2016/05/02/680540e4-0fd0-11e6-93ae-50921721165d_story.html?utm_term=.186cbf4c0862, accessed March 21, 2017.
28. See, for example, Zhang Kun, "Dui 'yanse geming' zhong yishi xingtai zuoyong de zai fansi," *Sixiang jiaoyu yanjiu*, No. 10, 2016, pp. 63-66; Yu Haijun, Zhang Huichun, and Zhao Yuying, "Cong Gelanxi wenhua lingdao quan lilun tan woguo yishi xingtai de anquan jingyu yu suqiu," *Xi'an jianzhu keji daxue xuebao*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (February 2016), pp. 21-25; Shen He, "Meiguo wehua baoquan yu 'pushi jiaozhi' zai woguo de chuanbo," *Sixiang jiaoyu yanjiu*, No. 1, 2017, pp. 37-42.
29. Yu Haijun, Zhang Huichun, and Zhao Yuying, "Cong Gelanxi wenhua lingdao quan lilun tan woguo yishi xingtai de anquan jingyu yu suqiu."
30. See, for example, Wang Shasha, "Wenhua zixin heyi biyao," *Laoqu Jianshe*, No. 24, 2016, pp. 40-42; Li Xiaoguang and Feng Dabiao, "Cong Xifang wenhua baquan tanxi Zhonghua minzu wenhuaxing yinhuan," *Xuexi yu tansuo*, No. 4, 2014, pp. 18-22; Yu Bingui and Hao Lianghua, "Quanqihua jincheng zhong de guojia wenhua anquan wenti," *Zhexue yanjiu*, No. 7, 2012, pp. 10-17.