

Introduction

A SCHOOL OF THOUGHT in the late 1980s predicted that the post-Cold War world would be an end point of mankind's ideological evolution and that liberal democracy would be universalized as the final form of human government. Indeed, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, communist ideology largely completed its historical tour of duty as a force for political change. However, the decline of communism did not lead to the universalization of liberal democracy. Nationalism, instead, was on the rise. Almost at the same time as Francis Fukuyama was expounding the triumphs of liberal democracy, Zbigniew Brzezinski called upon the West to pay particular attention to the "rising tide of nationalism" in the communist world: "The ongoing crisis of communism within the once homogeneous Soviet bloc is likely to define itself through increased national assertiveness and ever rising national turmoil."¹ Peter Alter, a European scholar, also suggested that "after the collapse of communism it is realistic to assume that nationalism will continue to be a universal historical principle decisively structuring international relations and the domestic order of states well into the next century."² Their warnings unfortunately came to be largely warranted.

Indeed, the end of the Cold War has precipitated an epidemic of rising nationalism that has aroused ancient hatreds and territorial conflicts in many parts of the world. The emergence of nationalism in the post-Cold War world, as in earlier eras, was "expressed both in the challenge to established nation-states and in the widespread reconstruction of identity on the basis of nationality."³ Nationalism, in this way, inspired two broad categories of state-seekers. Old state-seekers sought to reestablish preexisting states, brought down the multinational Soviet empire, and caused turmoil in other countries. New state-seekers directed nationalist sentiment to the construction of entirely new nation-states in central Asia and threatened the very survival of

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established nation-states in the Balkans. Although nationalism has inspired state-seekers, it has also been instrumental for “state-retainers.” It has been the case that incumbent political elites use nationalism as an emotional glue to hold the multinational communist state of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) together during the turbulent transition to the postcommunist era.

This development contrasts with the prediction that nationalism would soon be overwhelmed by the leveling effect of economic and technological globalization, the future world would no longer be contained within the limits of nation-states, and state sovereignty would not likely continue to be the distinguishing principle of political organizations. Recurring nationalist conflicts have shown that there is no immediate prospect of transcending nationalism, either as a principle of legitimization or as the basis of political organization. In spite of growing economic interdependence and consequent changing political values, nationalism has remained a salient phenomenon and has served to legitimate the politics of nations, however repressive or exploitative they may be. Although it is too early to say that nationalism is an enduring anachronism within the world of modernity, it is certainly true that “the national question is still a virulent, poisonous one.”⁴

As long as the national question continues to structure political struggles and the nation-state remains the primary sovereign political structure, nationalism will be an indispensable subject of historical and social science analysis. Although the literature on nationalism was already enormous, the resurgence of nationalism has aroused new interest in the enduring and complicated subject. The literature on nationalism, like the literature on any other complex topic in the social sciences, has been characterized by many controversies and has been beset with much conceptual confusion. Benjamin Akzin called the literature on nationalism a “terminological jungle.”⁵ Arthur N. Waldron complained, “capturing nationalism in a theory has proved to be a difficult task.”⁶ Peter Alter described nationalism as “one of the most ambiguous concepts in the present-day vocabulary of political and analytical thought.”⁷ Thomas Metzger and Ramon Myers claimed that nationalism “has so far eluded the definitional exercises of scholars.”⁸ Although the upsurge of new interest in nationalism may have clarified or revealed much more than earlier scholarship did about this important phenomenon that dominated human affairs for a good part of the nineteenth and the entire twentieth centuries, it has certainly raised more questions and controversies for study at both the empirical and conceptual levels.

This book is not an exercise in the definition of nationalism in general; rather, it grapples with nationalism in a single but enormous country—China—that has struggled to construct a modern nation-state and to find its rightful place in the modern world. It is an attempt to shed light on the most pernicious, relentless, and tenacious political phenomenon in that country.

Nationalism as a modern concept was introduced from Europe and Meiji Japan by seasoned Chinese political elites in the late nineteenth century to regenerate China and remained a central theme of twentieth-century Chinese politics. However, there was a conspicuous lack of interest in Chinese nationalism in both the Chinese and Western scholarly communities for many decades. Luo Houli surveyed Chinese-language literature on nationalism and discovered that only a handful of Chinese books and articles on the subject were published before the 1980s and that most of them appeared in the last two decades of the twentieth century.⁹ Lucian Pye in his 1993 survey of Western literature on nationalism in China found that, as a whole, Chinese nationalism remained poorly understood and inadequately studied. Although it was commonplace for scholars to treat nationalism as one of the most important forces in the emerging states of the postcolonial world in the 1950s–60s, the study of China was generally not included in this great intellectual endeavor. Because China at the time was vigorously engaged in pursuing its quest for a Maoist utopia, most Western scholars found Maoism to be distinctive, if not peculiar, and characterized Chinese communism by its internationalism rather than nationalism. To them, Marxism appealed to the proletarian revolution throughout the world and such an appeal should have little to do with nationalism. China specialists were also happy to accentuate the uniqueness of China and preferred not to put the study of China into a comparative context. Thus, the study of Chinese nationalism was not developed at a time when it was a popular subject in political science and other disciplines in the social sciences.¹⁰

During the early years of the PRC, only a few scholars systematically studied the Chinese communist revolution from a nationalist perspective. Benjamin Schwartz was one such pioneer. In his landmark book of 1951, he argued that Mao Zedong did not follow Marxist and Leninist dogma, but instead created a unique model of peasant revolution with nationalistic features. Chalmers Johnson was another leading scholar who systematically linked Chinese communism and nationalism. In his classic 1962 study of Chinese communist-led peasant resistance during the Sino-Japanese War, Johnson sought to uncover the origins of communist power in China. Chinese nationalism began to receive a great deal of scholarly scrutiny only after its resurgence in the post-Cold War era. This belated but serious interest produced a scholarly debate over several important issues.

Although Chinese nationalism was largely a twentieth-century phenomenon, nationalism in general was hardly quiescent in modern world history. It was, arguably, the most powerful idea and nearly universal sentiment affecting national and international politics for centuries during the modern era. As Joseph S. Nye categorically stated, “nationalism proved to be stronger than socialism when it came to bonding working classes together, and

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stronger than capitalism that bound bankers together.”¹¹ Peter Alter also claimed that “nationalism is a political force which has been more important in shaping the history of Europe and the world over the last two centuries than the ideas of freedom and parliamentary democracy, or, let alone, of communism.”¹² The power of nationalism came from the fact that it “locates the source of individual identity within a ‘people,’ which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity.”¹³

Where did this powerful force come from? This is a complicated and controversial question. As Michael Robinson has indicated, “most theories focus on nationalism’s power to transform societies, but its origins and mechanics remain too complex to encompass in a single formulation.”¹⁴ Indeed, there has been very little consensus even on the meaning, let alone the origins, of nationalism. The main differentiation is between primordialism and instrumentalism. Primordialism argues for an essentially unchanging national identity consisting of certain “givens” of social existence into which one is born, and which determine one’s group loyalties. People with certain shared physical and cultural characteristics form an intrinsic awareness of their collective identity and come to psychologically identify with the nation-state. The traditional loyalties vested in this identity give rise to very strong common sentiments, which are the irreducible bedrock on which common interests and claims tend to be based. Accordingly, nationalist loyalties can be viewed as essentially emotional and “inherently irrational or extra-rational in the sense that they supposedly violate or transcend considerations of self-interest.” Russell Hardin regarded “primordial, atavistic, inconsistent, and other motivations not intended to serve either the individual or the group interest as irrational. . . . Individual motivations to serve the group- or national-level interest more or less independently of immediate individual costs and benefits are extra-rational.”¹⁵ As an essentially unchanging sentiment, in the primordialist view, nationalism is not merely a modern phenomenon since rudimentary nations and proto-nationalism existed in the premodern world. As George L. Mosse asserted, “nationalism existed in most European nations during the Middle Ages.”¹⁶

By contrast, instrumentalism argues that primordial attachments are contingent and subject to manipulation. Nationalism, therefore, is explained as a result of essentially self-interested behavior, and nationalist consciousness is seen as a consequence of the historical context in which some interests or political forces successfully imagined a political community or national history and persuaded people of artificially shared origins that they were indeed one people: a nation. This process had the effect of removing differences within the political community and replacing them with a common, hegemonic order of signs, symbols, and values. This approach emphasizes

the subjective nature of nationalism, as expressed by Benedict Anderson's conception of "imagined national communities" and Eric Hobsbawm's conception of "invented national traditions," and rejects any idea that nationalism is primordial. From this perspective, narratives of nationalism, including interpretations of nationalistic symbols like the Great Wall of China, are invented histories or traditions. Hobsbawm categorically stated that "the nation, with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest, all rest on exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate and always innovative, if only because historical novelty implies innovation."¹⁷ Although Anderson did not go so far as to state that the primary significance of nationalism lies in its supposedly instrumental, functional role, he did maintain that in an age in which cosmically rooted religion declined, nationalism provided a quasi-religious center of meaning for vast multitudes. Nationalism is thus situational. The construction of a nation and consequent nationalism is a rational choice of political entrepreneurs in response to specific circumstances. Rational means that people act in a manner that accords with their own self-interest. Though it is possible for individuals to be mistaken about what constitutes their interests, rational individuals always act according to their perceived interest. Their identification with such things as ethnic groups is not primordial, or somehow extra-rational in its ascendancy of group-over-individual interests, but is rational because it is in their interest. To a certain extent, instrumentalism was supported by modernization theorists who connected the emergence of nationalism to the "great transformation" of modern time. According to Ernest Gellner, for much of history, villages, city-states, feudal settlements, and dynastic empires were far more pervasive political units than nation-states. Only after the nation-state was constituted in modern Europe did nationalism come into existence, either as an expression of an existing nation-state or as a challenge to it on behalf of a future state.¹⁸

Nationalism has played both constructive and destructive roles in modern history. John L. Comaroff and Paul Stern made a useful distinction between the "inward-directed sentiments" that hold a nation together and the "outward-directed sentiments that heap hostility upon others."¹⁹ As inward-directed sentiments, nationalism once appeared as a doctrine to express a political desire for national independence among people who believed they had a common ancestry or a common political destiny in a territory particularly identified with their history, an idea around which the modern nation-state system was created and remained intact. It also functioned to free many nations from alien rule, served as the ideological underpinning of anticolonial movements, and contributed to modernization. As outward-directed sentiments, however, nationalism, especially its extreme versions that were associated with racist arrogance and ignorance, has been a driving force

for collective yearning and aggressive posturing in the name of the nation, responsible for many human tragedies in modern history. Hans Kohn claimed that the history of nationalism represented a progressive degeneration from rationality into a kind of madness as it consumed its own legitimacy in violence, war, and messianic authoritarianism.²⁰ Although some scholars have criticized Kohn's view as "both Eurocentric in the extreme and also heavily focused on the special experience of Germany and Italy,"²¹ the prevailing image of nationalism in the post-Cold War world has remained negative. Nationalism has often been regarded as an emotional and irrational manifestation of primordial sentiments, fueling the destructive warfare of the first half of the twentieth century and the bloody and tragic ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans after the end of the Cold War. A new nationalism, or "a nationalistic universalism" as Hans J. Morgenthau called it, has been seen as particularly dangerous for a state strong enough to impose its will on others and hence a source of international aggression and confrontation in the late twentieth century.²²

However, a direct link between nationalism and international aggression is by no means automatic. In the discussion of nationalism, aggression and warmongering have often been taken for granted. The extensive attention paid to the rise of Chinese nationalism in the 1990s, and the alarm that it generated, illustrate this assumption. Indeed, as communist ideology has gradually lost its grip, the Chinese Communist Party has rediscovered the utility of nationalism. "In place of the revolutionary legitimacy of Marxism-Leninism, the regime substituted performance legitimacy provided by surging economic development and nationalist legitimacy provided by invocation of the distinctive characteristics of Chinese culture."²³ As a result, the nationalist conception of China as a nation-state with interests that must be protected and advanced in competition with those of other nation-states has replaced the old conceptions of class division and communist internationalism. Furthermore, the nationalist conception is now shared by the communist state and its liberal critics. The resurgence of Chinese nationalism has alarmed Western observers who believe nationalism can be destructive. They are particularly concerned about what the awakening of the "hidden dragon" may mean for the world and worry that China, with the spectacular growth in its economic and military capacities, may try to regain its ancient glory by taking an aggressive posture toward its neighbors and Western powers.

Is this concern well founded? To seek answers to this controversial but crucially important question, this book conducts an empirical study of Chinese nationalism by tracing its origins and the major forces that shaped its content and by investigating its ramifications for China's foreign policy behavior. In particular, this book tries to find answers to the following impor-

tant questions: What are the sources of Chinese nationalism? Is the content of Chinese nationalism eternal and objective or contextual and situational? Is Chinese nationalism an emotional and irrational sentiment that transcends considerations of self-interest or a rational choice of political forces based on calculations of their self-interest? What have been the different roles of major political forces, namely, the authoritarian state, liberal intellectuals, and ethnic groups, acting out of self-interest, in the construction of Chinese nationalism? Is Chinese nationalism an “inward-directed sentiment” that holds the nation together or an “outward-directed emotion” that will become a destructive force?

Taking a historical approach to the study of Chinese nationalism that tempers primordialism with a careful measure of instrumentalism, this book is composed of seven chapters in addition to this introduction. Chapter 1 presents theoretical debates on the issues of Chinese nationalism and lays out the analytical framework of the book. Chapter 2 places Chinese nationalism in a historical context in order to explore the political and intellectual struggles that brought about nationalist consciousness in China. Chapter 3 traces how the competing nationalist programs of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang or KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) shaped the emergence of Chinese nationalism. Chapter 4 focuses on the relationship between personal and national rights in Chinese nationalist discourse, and in so doing seeks to illuminate the evolution of liberal nationalism and its challenges to state nationalism. Chapter 5 examines the challenges ethnic nationalism presents to the myth of the unitary Chinese nation-state and the instrumental policy responses of the communist state. Chapter 6 elaborates on the content of a state-led nationalism by an in-depth case study of the patriotic education campaign of the 1990s. Chapter 7 analyzes the foreign policy ramifications of Chinese nationalism.