Construction of Chinese Nationalism in the Early 21st Century

Domestic Sources and International Implications

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Chinese Nationalism and its Political and Social Origins

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Using the 2008 China Survey, this paper examines Chinese respondents' feelings toward their country and how such feelings are related to their democratic values. First, it compares Chinese nationalism with that of 35 countries and regions in the 2003 National Identity Survey. Second, it looks at the origins of Chinese nationalism as embedded in the social and political characteristics of individuals. Third, it further examines the impact of nationalism on people's political attitudes. The findings show that nationalism in contemporary China is better predicted by the political and economic characteristics of an individual rather than cultural attributes, and that nationalism serves as a powerful instrument in impeding public demand for democratic change.

Theories of nationalism

Nationalism is one of the most powerful forces of collective action, even though it is a relatively modern phenomenon that followed the birth of the nation-states in Europe.[1] As a topic, nationalism connects many disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. There are at least three influential theories of nationalism in the existing literature that we term functionalist, culturalist, and constructivist. While these labels may oversimplify the three theories described below, they nonetheless summarize the central focus of each, allowing us to test the importance of the central mechanisms of what drives nationalism.

Ernest Gellner articulates a functionalist theory of nationalism. For Gellner, economic development and modernization create the need for unified knowledge through standardized education. The cultural and linguistic diversity in traditional agrarian societies disintegrates as a result of this educational standardization within the state. The modern and standardized educational system creates social mobility between classes, a homogeneous high (literate) culture, and thus a common national identity which is imposed and protected by the nation-state in order to more smoothly

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1. This seems to be the majority view among scholars, although disagreement does exist. For example, Anderson instead argues that nationalism first arose in the Americas before manifesting in Europe; see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

make the transition to a modern, developed economy.[2] The drive to modernize society into the ideal of the nation-state ultimately results in the creation of the nation: thus Gellner arrives at the conclusion that 'it is nationalism which engenders nations, not the other way round'.[3] According to this view, nationalism and its result—the nation—are functional necessities for economic development.

The Gellnerian view of functional nationalism is challenged by one of Gellner's students, Anthony D. Smith, who focuses more strongly on the cultural origins of nationalism. Smith argues that the functionalist view may be useful in industrial societies, but it fails to explain nationalism in pre-industrial, non-industrial, and post-industrial societies.[4] For him, nationalism is derived from pre-modern origins, such as kinship, religion, belief systems, and common historic territories and memories, and is thus defined as 'ethnosymbolic' or even 'primordial'.[5] In contrast to Gellner's modernist approach, we can characterize Smith's view as premodernist: Smith sees most nations as having deep historical roots in ancestry, culture, shared history, and so forth. While modernization does work to bring about the idea of the nation, this does not mean that premodern nations did not exist, nor that nations are created out of thin air during industrialization. States harness *existing* ethnic and cultural identities through symbols, and the better a state can do this the better it can legitimate itself.[6]

Finally, the constructivist view argues that nationalism is a product of elite manipulation of mass publics. Many authors have noted that national identities are constructed through printed national languages that can connect people speaking different dialects.[7] According to Benedict Anderson, the rise of the printing press was a critical element in the advent of nationalism, because for the first time, people were able to imagine those who could read their language as members of their nation.[8] In a separate but compatible vein, Paul R. Brass specifically emphasizes the role of

2. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

4. Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

5. Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, 2nd edn (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983). For the culturalist school, also see Anthony D. Smith, 'The nation: real or imagined?: the Warwick debates on nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism* 2(3), (1996), pp. 357–370; Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Stuart Hall, 'Ethnicity: identity and differences', in G. Eley and R. G. Suny, eds, *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996); Michael Keating and John McGarry, 'Nations without states: the accommodation of nationalism in the new state order', in M. Keating and J. McGarry, eds, *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Joshua A. Fishman, 'The primordialist–constructivist debate today', in Daniele Conversi, ed., *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 83–91; Donald L. Horowitz, 'The primordialists', in Conversi, ed., *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World*, pp. 72–82.

6. Although Smith is possibly the most well-known premodernist, many authors make stronger claims than he against modernists. For other examples of premodernist arguments for earlier origins of the nation, see Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Pierre van den Berghe, 'Race and ethnicity: a sociobiological perspective', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1(4), (1978), pp. 402–411.

7. Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1953); Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1995); Samuel Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs* 72, (Summer 1993), pp. 22–49.

8. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

political elites and their manipulation of cultural symbols in the building of ethnic and national identities.[9] In contrast to culturalists like Smith, these constructivists see national identities as fluid and malleable. Unlike functionalists like Gellner, however, constructivists tend to emphasize elites' ability to *purposefully* manipulate national identity, through the use of symbols, often in order to bolster the legitimacy of the existing political order.[10] Thus, while certain elements of modernization like media technologies are important in the building of national identity, constructivists, unlike functionalists, do not see nationalism as a necessary functional response to modernization, but as the result of the influence of elites who have incentives to create and maintain a particular national identity.[11]

Nationalism in China

On 1 October 1949, Mao announced to the world that the Chinese people had finally stood up after repeated foreign invasions since the middle of the nineteenth century. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Chinese communist movement in the first half of the twentieth century is just as much a nationalist movement, and the communist victory in 1949 is just as much a victory of Chinese nationalism as a victory of communism. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was able to defeat the Nationalist Party (Guomindang or GMD) largely due to its ability to appeal to the sentiment of public nationalism. During the first three decades of communist rule, Marxist ideology went side by side with nationalism.

Since the late 1970s, however, Marxism has been replaced by economic pragmatism, and nationalism has served almost exclusively as the ideological instrument for political mobilization. This was especially true after the 1989 government crackdown on protests in Tiananmen Square and elsewhere. The CCP launched a nationwide campaign to promote nationalism, and anti-Western sentiment grew during the 1990s.[12] In the past decade nationalist protests have been staged in response to several events, most of which concern China's relations with the US and Japan. Many researchers have recognized the renewed importance of popular nationalism in China in the recent years.[13]

9. Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991).

10. *Ibid.*; John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982).

11. For useful syntheses of different theories of nationalism, see Stephen Cornell, 'The variable ties that bind: content and circumstance in ethnic processes', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19, (April 1996), pp. 265–289; and George M. Scott, Jr, 'A resynthesis of the primordial and circumstantial approaches to ethnic group solidarity: towards an explanatory model', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13, (April 1990), pp. 147–171.

12. Zhao Suisheng, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

13. Peter Hays Gries, Qingmin Zhang, H. Michael Crowson and Huanjian Cai, 'Patriotism, nationalism, and China's US policy: structures and consequences of Chinese cultural identity', *The China Quarterly* 205, (March 2011), pp. 1–17; Bruce Gilley and Heike Holbig, 'The debate on party legitimacy in China: a mixed quantitative/qualitative analysis', *Journal of Contemporary China* 59, (March 2009), pp. 339–358; Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction*; Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics and Diplomacy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); Peter Hays Gries, 'Popular nationalism and state legitimation in China', in Peter Hays Gries and Stanley Rosen, eds, *State and Society in 21st Century China* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); He Baogang, 'China's national identity: a source of conflict between democracy and state nationalism', in Leong H. Liew and Shaoguang Wang, eds, *Nationalism, Democracy and National Integration in China* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Guo Yingjie, 'Barking up the wrong tree: the liberal–nationalist debate on democracy and identity', in Liew and Wang, eds, *Nationalism, Democracy and National Integration in China*; Zheng Yongnian,

The study of Chinese nationalism often does not fit neatly into the study of nationalism more generally. First, China was never fully colonized, which sets it apart from most other developing countries, both in East Asia and in other parts of the world. Second, China as a state has inherited the legacy of an empire. In stark contrast to the modal case of nationalism developing as a reaction to the oppression of an empire, China is an empire-turned-nation, or as Lucian Pye has called it, 'a civilization pretending to be a nation-state'.[14] Despite its historical uniqueness, however, we believe that it is fruitful to consider China as one case of the broader phenomenon of nationalism. While the history of each country may have unique attributes, states always have an interest in promoting national identity, and we should be able to compare individual-level measures of national pride across national borders.

Scholars of China have identified many types of nationalism, such as ethnic nationalism, liberal nationalism, state nationalism, pragmatic nationalism, elite nationalism, mass nationalism, and so on.[15] In this paper, we focus on public nationalism or mass nationalism. Specifically, we measure public nationalism by four questions related to national identity in the 2003 Survey on National Identity, conducted by the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP).[16] The questions are as follows:

(1) I would rather be a citizen of my country than of any other country;
(2) The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like my country;
(3) My country is a better country than most other countries; and
(4) It makes me proud when my country does well in international sports.

The 2003 ISSP National Identity Survey contains valuable information on the above four questions for more than 40,000 survey respondents from 35 countries and regions, but for some reason it missed China. Fortunately, we were able to include these questions in the 2008 China Survey, which is a project run by the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M University, in collaboration with the Research Center for Contemporary China (RCCC) at Peking University. The multi-stage stratified random sample contains 3,989 respondents from 75 counties and county level urban districts scattered across the seven official geographic regions of the country.[17] The

Footnote 13 continued
Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, *Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaoyu Shishi Gangyao* [*Guidelines for Patriotic Education*], (1994), available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2005-03/16/content_2705546.htm (accessed 1 April 2009).

14. Lucian W. Pye, 'How China's nationalism was Shanghaied', in Jonathan Unger, ed., *Chinese Nationalism* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), p. 109.

15. For a description of this phenomenon, see Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction*, ch. 1.

16. See www.issp.org for more information.

17. In the multi-stage stratified random sample, 75 counties and county level administrative districts (primary sampling units or PSU) were selected from seven geographic regions which divide the entire country. The total population in each region is proportionate to the number of counties randomly drawn from that region. Two townships and township level administrative districts (secondary sampling units or SSU) were randomly drawn from each PSU. Two half-square minutes (HSM) of altitude and longitude were randomly selected within each SSU. Spatial square seconds (SSS, 90 × 90m) were selected based on the population density in each HSM. Twenty-five dwellings were randomly selected from each HSM based on the list of all dwellings from each SSS. A total of 5,525 target respondents were selected from the selected dwellings using the Kish Grid method. Among them, 3,989 completed the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 72.2%.

25-page questionnaire includes nearly 600 questions contributed by a team of researchers in political science, economics, sociology, and communication. For the purpose of this study, the 2008 China Survey provides rich information on national identity and attitudes toward democracy (see Table A1 in the Appendix for further details). We will draw most of the analysis from this survey for the rest of the paper.

To begin, we examine how the Chinese respondents answered the four questions related to national identity (see above) in the 2008 China Survey. For each question, the respondents could choose from strongly disagree (0), disagree (1), neither disagree or agree (2), agree (3) and strongly agree (4). We converted this 0–4 scale into a 0–100 feeling thermometer by dividing the scale by four and multiplying it by 100. Zero means no identification and 100 means the strongest possible identification.

In Table 1, the findings were corrected (weighted) with the information on age and sex from the 2000 population census. In other words, weighting based on the true population characteristics is necessary to correct any error due to sample bias. The results show that the average levels of the feeling thermometers were 61 (the world would be a better place if other countries were more like my country), 73 (my country is a better country), 85 (rather be a citizen of my country), and 90 (proud if my country does well in international sports).

Though the levels of national identity seem quite high, we need to compare China with other societies to determine the relative degree of nationalism in China. To do so, we combined the four highly correlated questions into a feeling thermometer index with factor analysis.[18] The index ranges from 0 to 100 in both the 2008 China Survey and in the 2003 ISSP National Identity Survey, which contains the same four questions in 35 countries and regions. The results of the cross-society comparison of nationalism are shown in Figure 1.

When measured by the four survey questions, China shows the highest level of nationalism among all countries and regions, with a score of 80 out of 100 (Figure 1). The top 10 countries, in addition to China, include the US (76), Canada (75), Australia (75), South Africa (73), New Zealand (73), Venezuela (72), Japan (72), the Philippines (71), and Austria (71). It is difficult to detect any common traits among these countries since they represent very different political systems, different cultural traditions, and different continents. At least among the top 10 countries that demonstrated the highest levels of nationalism, these high levels of nationalism seem to have their own reasons in each country and should be further analyzed within their own national contexts.

At the low end of Figure 1, however, the patterns seem to be easier to discern. Nationalism tends to be low mostly in European post-industrial democracies, particularly in Switzerland, the Netherlands, West Germany, France, Sweden, and Norway. This is somewhat counterintuitive since Europe, according to most scholars, is where modern nationalism originated, and many would expect these industrial societies to show a high level of nationalism.[19] One possible explanation is post-materialism. In these post-industrial societies where survival values have been replaced by self-expression values or post-materialistic values, national identity is

18. The correlations among the factors are not shown here. Please contact the authors for this information.

19. Inkeles's theory of modernization is one prominent example; see Alex Inkeles, 'National differences in individual modernity', *Comparative Studies in Sociology* 1, (1978), pp. 47–72.

Table 1. Nationalism in China (weighted)

	Feeling thermometer (max = 100)	Observations
Proud if my country does well in international sports	90	3,682
I would rather be a citizen of my country	85	3,687
My country is a better country	73	3,589
If other countries were more like my country	61	3,249
Nationalism (four items combined)	80	3,076

Source: 2008 China Survey.

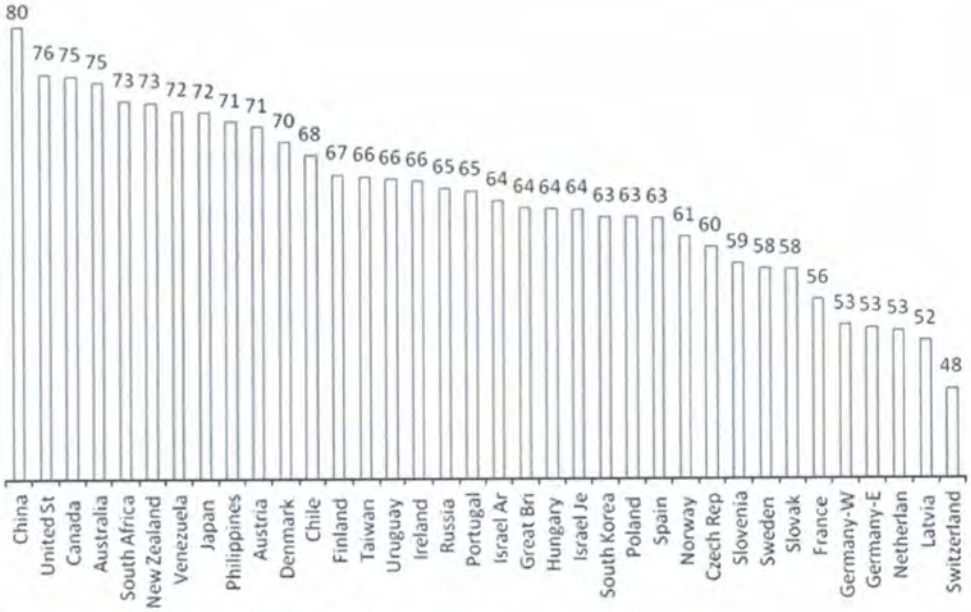

Figure 1. Nationalism: an international comparison.
Note: Nationalism is an imputed factor index of four survey questions (see Table 1). The scale ranges from 0 to 100.
Source: National Identity Survey II, International Social Survey Programme, 2003, and 2008 China Survey.

likely to be replaced by individual identity.[20] Another explanation may be found in the rise of a broader European identity corresponding to the adoption of the euro and the gradual institutional strengthening of the European Union.

Another group of countries that showed weak feelings of nationalism in Figure 1 are the new democracies in Europe, including Latvia, East Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic. Researchers have shown that civic values and

20. Ronald Inglehart, 'Postmaterialist values and the shift from survival to self-expression values', in Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

nationalism evolved together in Central and Eastern Europe, which contributed to the downfall of communism and to democratization,[21] yet these countries were among the lowest in levels of national identity. One possible explanation lies in the distinction between elite nationalism and popular nationalism. While elite nationalism may be instrumental in democratization, popular nationalism may be more closely linked to government performance and economic conditions.

In short, it seems easier to explain at a general level why national identity is weak than why it is strong. In order to understand why China is the most nationalistic country among all the selected countries and regions, we need to further examine the individual characteristics that contribute to the sentiment of nationalism.

Sources of Chinese nationalism

As discussed at the beginning of this paper, we examine three general theories about why nationalism rises: (1) functionalism, which emphasizes the necessity of nationalism under economic development and education; (2) culturalism, which attributes nationalism to cultural myths and historic memories; and (3) constructivism, which focuses on elite political design of national identity.

In this section, we will test these broad theories by examining the individual characteristics of the Chinese respondents in the 2008 China Survey. Though these theories apply mainly to the historical roots of nationalism, they lead to corollary hypotheses at the mass level. The functionalist hypothesis, which associates nationalism with economic development, predicts higher levels of nationalism among the more educated, urban residents, and higher income earners. To test the functionalist theory, we will look at how individual education, urbanization, and income influence people's feeling of national identity. Education is coded as no education, primary school, junior high school, senior high school, college, and above. Urbanization is measured by urban and rural residents and rural migrants living in urban areas. Income is measured by the following question: compared to the average household income in this county/city/district, at what level do you feel your household income is situated from 0 to 10? Zero through 2 are coded as low income (low), 3 through 5 are coded as middle income (middle) and 6 through 10 are coded as high income (high).

To test the theory of culture as the origin of national identity, we use the respondent's ethnic background. The 2008 China Survey contains such information on the respondents, including the Han majority (han), the Huis (hui) and the Uyghurs (wei)—both Muslim minorities, the Manchu minority (man) which used to rule China under the Qing empire (1644–1911), the Mongol minority (mengu) in the north which ruled China under the Mongol empire in the thirteenth century, southern minorities including Yi, Zhuang, Tujia, Hani, and Dai (eth_south), and other unidentified groups (eth_oth). The culturalist hypothesis, since it sees nationalism as a function of ethnic identity, expects the Han majority to show stronger nationalism than the minorities, particularly more than the religiously and linguistically

21. Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski, 'Civil society and democratization', in Dalton and Klingemann, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*.

distinctive groups such as the Huis, the Uyghurs, to a lesser extent, the Mongols and the Manchus, who both have their own written languages.

Finally, to test the constructivist theory of political imagination, we use two items: communist party membership and age. Party members (ccp) are more indoctrinated by the official rhetoric and should demonstrate more nationalism than non-members (public). Age is divided into four groups depending on when the respondents turned 18: 1949–1965 (socialism), 1966–1977 (the Cultural Revolution), 1978–1989 (reform), or 1990–2008 (post-reform). The socialist generation includes those 59 and older, the Cultural Revolution generation ages from 47 to 58, the reform generation is aged between 36 and 48, and the post-reform generation includes those 35 and younger.

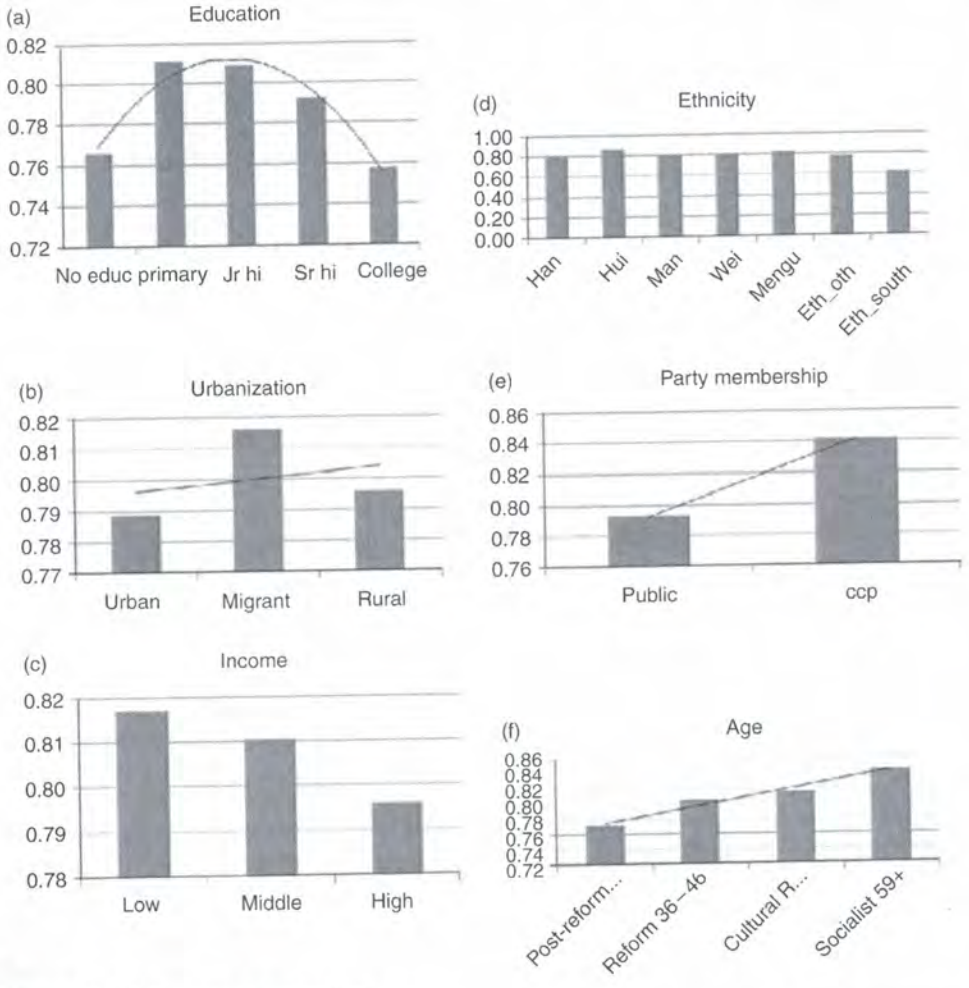

Figure 2A–F. Sources of nationalism.
Note: See Appendix, Table A2 for a multivariate regression analysis with all the above variables.
Source: 2008 China Survey.

The older generations have experienced more 'political construction' by elites, and should show more nationalism than the younger generations.

The findings show a mixed picture of the functionalist theory. In Figure 2A, education does not have a straightforward effect on nationalism. Rather, people at both ends (no education and college education) show low levels of nationalism, and those in the middle (primary and middle school) are the most nationalistic. In Figure 2B, urban residents have the lowest level of nationalism, lower than both rural residents and rural migrants. Although rural migrants showed higher levels of nationalism than rural residents in Figure 2B, this difference disappeared when other individual characteristics were taken into consideration, such as age, education, income, ethnicity, and gender (Table A2 in the Appendix). In other words, in the multivariate analysis, urban residents were less nationalistic than both rural residents and rural migrant workers, and there was no statistically significant difference between the latter two groups.

In Figure 2C, income has a negative effect on nationalism as low income earners show more nationalism than the middle and high income groups. However, the high income group becomes more nationalistic than the middle income group in the multivariate regression analysis when other demographic variables are included in the equation. The real effect of income on nationalism seems to be U-shaped with both low and high income groups demonstrating stronger feelings of nationalism than the middle income group. Except for the high income group, none of these findings provides strong support for the functionalist theory of nationalism. The fact that the middle income urban residents with college education are less nationalistic seems to suggest that these groups are less likely to be affected by political mobilization and may possess more self-expression values.[22] Further tests with different measures and methods are needed before we can rule out the functionalist hypothesis. While functionalist theory might explain how nationalism developed in its infancy, it may be less powerful as an explanation of contemporary nationalism at the mass level.

Figure 2D shows the impact of ethnic background on nationalism. Interestingly, the linguistic and religious minorities such as the Huis, the Manchus, the Uyghurs, and the Mongols show just as high levels of nationalism as the Han majority. This seems to suggest that nationalism in China is not defined by the Confucian tradition which is only popular among the Hans. Rather, it is a trans-cultural concept that can be shared by different ethnic groups. In their study of nearly 1,600 high school students in Xinjiang and Tibet, Tang and He found that the high degree of national identity among China's religious and linguistic minorities was partially created by the officially sponsored affirmative action programs.[23] Ethnic minorities in these regions are willing to accept Chinese nationalism when and only when they enjoy a high degree of cultural and religious autonomy. Thus, at least in the current context, the culturalist theory does not explain the development of nationalism in China.

22. Inglehart, 'Postmaterialist values and the shift from survival to self-expression values'.
23. Tang Wenfang and He Gaochao, *Separate and Loyal: Ethnicity and Nationalism in China* (Washington, DC: The East–West Center, 2010).

As expected by the constructivist hypothesis, communist party members are more nationalistic than the public (Figure 2E). Also as expected, age has a positive effect on nationalism. The socialist and the Cultural Revolution generations are more nationalistic than the reform and the post-reform generations. These findings seem to provide the most clear 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. However, the different political socialization of these generations is not the only way to explain this finding, which may also indicate a life-cycle effect, in which a person more strongly identifies with the nation-state as he or she grows older.

These results seem to contradict the much-publicized phenomenon in China of 'angry youth' (*fenqing*), but in actuality our findings help us to put this phenomenon in a larger context. The angry youth are typically urban, and include not only nationalist Chinese netizens, but also those young Chinese who take to the streets in nationalist protests, usually against a country perceived as an adversary to China. Protests in both China and Japan concerning the dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands are just one example of this in recent years.[24] While these angry nationalist youth are quite visible in the news media, the findings presented here suggest that they are outliers who are not representative of the broader population of youth in China. This is not to say that the *fenqing* are not important, but among everyday Chinese, the young are actually less nationalist than older generations.

The findings in this section also suggest that, in the future, Chinese nationalism is likely to experience a two-stage change. In the first stage, it is likely to maintain its high level as the rate of illiteracy continues to drop and as the communist party continues its campaign for nationalism. In the second stage, nationalism is likely to decline as more people receive college education, as the more nationalist older generation fades away, and as more and more rural residents become urbanized. Thus while Chinese nationalism may stay at a high level, we have reason to expect it to ebb over the long term as China continues to modernize.

The political consequences of Chinese nationalism

There is no consensus in terms of what direction nationalism would lead China's political democratization. There are roughly three views in the existing studies on the role of nationalism in regime change. The first is that nationalism simply serves as an instrument to strengthen regime stability. In the post-Mao ideological vacuum, Chinese leaders promoted nationalism as a substitute to Marxism–Leninism and Maoism, and claimed the CCP's representativeness of the national interest. According to this view, Western pressure on China for democratic change would only backfire because it only intensifies feelings of nationalism and may push China into political consolidation among the different elite groups within the state and between the state and the public.[25] Similarly, in post-Soviet Russia,

24. Other examples from recent history include protests over the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 and the collision of the US spy plane with a Chinese fighter jet in 2001.

25. Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China*; He, 'China's national identity'.

researchers found that popular support for reform declined when popular nationalism rose.[26]

The second view portrays nationalism as a destabilizing factor and leads to national disintegration. In this view, nationalism leads to heightened awareness of ethnic identity in a multi-ethnic state like China, which threatens national unity and political stability.[27] Perhaps this idea of nationalism as a 'double-edged sword' is best expressed by Susan Shirk: 'what the Chinese leaders fear most is a national movement that fuses various discontented groups—such as unemployed workers, farmers, and students—under the banner of nationalism'.[28] Shirk regards nationalism as dangerous for political stability in two ways: as an instigator of protests that can turn against the state when officials tell protestors to desist, and also as possibly the only issue that can unite separate groups of people with diverse grievances against the state. Under this interpretation, strong popular nationalism is a bad sign for political stability.

Finally, others contend that nationalism promotes democracy. According to this argument, the core of nationalism is self-determination and the formation of a common identity which goes beyond parochial interests. It is in this context of nationalism, defined as self-determination and a shared community, that democracy has emerged in modern times.[29] Wang Shaoguang has further argued that modern Chinese nationalism since the early twentieth century was rooted in the concepts that were consistent with democracy, such as the acceptance of all ethnic groups in China, the desire for self-determination and emancipation from Western colonial exploitation, individual dignity and integrity, and economic development through contact with the outside world.[30]

A variation of this view which connects nationalism with democracy is that popular nationalism reflects public opinion. The Chinese government runs the risk of losing regime legitimacy which is based on its claim to nationalism. When faced with foreign aggression, the Chinese government often takes a tough stand under the pressure of popular nationalism, resulting in its compromise with public opinion.[31] These authors all emphasize the importance of nationalism in China's political process. Their different views on the role of nationalism in China's political change call for a further test of the impact of popular nationalism in pro-democratic values and attitudes.

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26. Arthur H. Miller, William M. Reisinger and Vicki L. Hesli, 'Understanding political change in post-Soviet societies: a further commentary on Finifter and Mickiewicz', *American Political Science Review* 90, (March 1996), pp. 153–166.

27. Ge Jianxiong, 'Minzu zhuyi shi jiuguo lingdan?' ['Is nationalism a panacea to save the nation?'], *Yazhou Zhoukan* [*Asia Weekly*], (26 April 1996), p. 14, cited in Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China*, p. 110; Wan Jun, 'Xin shiji Zhongguo Gongchandang chuantong hefaxing ziyuan mianlin de tiaozhan' ['Challenges for the traditional resources of legitimacy of the CCP in the new century'], *Kexue Shehuizhuyi* [*Scientific Socialism*] 3, (2003), pp. 30–33, cited in Gilley and Holbig, 'The debate on party legitimacy in China', p. 350.

28. Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 62.

29. Guo, 'Barking up the wrong tree'.

30. Wang Shaoguang, 'Minzuzhuyi yu minzhu' ['Nationalism and democracy'], *Gonggong Guanli Pinglun* [*Public Management Review*] no. 1, (2004), available at: wen.org.cn (accessed 22 March 2009).

31. Gries, *China's New Nationalism*; Gries, 'Popular nationalism and state legitimation in China'; Joseph Fewsmith and Stanley Rosen, 'The domestic context of Chinese foreign policy: does "public opinion" matter?', in David M. Lampton, ed., *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform 1978–2000* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

Specifically, we will test the long-term and short-term effects of nationalism. The short-term effects include public demand for democracy, civil disobedience, and trust in the Beijing government. For long-term effects, we will examine the role of nationalism in support for market capitalism and on social and political tolerance. If nationalism leads to positive political change, it should have a positive effect on the demand for democracy and on civil disobedience, but a negative impact in trusting the authoritarian single-party Beijing government. Further, it should also have a positive influence in support for market capitalism and in social tolerance. On the other hand, if nationalism promotes the political consolidation of the current authoritarian political system, it should discourage support for democracy and civil disobedience, but promote trust in Beijing. It should further discourage support for capitalism and social and political tolerance.

We use questions in the 2008 China Survey to measure pro-democracy sentiment, civil disobedience, trust in Beijing, support for capitalism, and social and political tolerance. Pro-democracy sentiment (*prodemo*) is an imputed factor index of the respondents' *disagreement* with the following statements:

(1) public demonstrations can easily turn into social disturbances;
(2) a system with just one main party is most suitable to China's current conditions;
(3) public demonstrations should be forbidden;
(4) if everybody does not share the same thinking, society can be chaotic; and
(5) if a country has multiple parties, it can lead to political chaos.

Civil disobedience (*civdisobey*) is an imputed index based on the respondents' *disagreement* with the following items:

(1) never evading taxes;
(2) always obeying laws and regulations; and
(3) willing to serve in the military.

Trust in Beijing (*trustbj*) is based on a single question: how much do you trust the leaders in the central government?

Support for capitalism (*procap*) is an imputed factor index of the respondents' *disagreement* with the following two statements:

(1) market competition is harmful to social stability; and
(2) social stability will be harmed if the economy grows too fast.

Table 2. Nationalism and regime change (OLS coefficients)

	prodemo	civdisobey	trustbj	procap	tolerance
Nationalism	−0.357***	−0.258***	0.437***	−0.119***	−0.203***

Note: Other independent variables included in the equations but not shown: age, party membership, education, family income, family income squared, urbanization, ethnicity, and gender (see Appendix, Table A2).
Source: 2008 China Survey.

Social and political tolerance (*tolerance*) is an imputed factor index of the respondents' acceptance of political dissidents, prostitutes, homosexuals, and drug addicts.

All variables have the same scale ranging from 0 (minimum) to 1 (maximum) (see Table A1 in the Appendix).

In Table 2, nationalism shows a strong anti-democratic, pro-authoritarian, and anti-capitalist tendency. When nationalism increased from the minimum (0) to the maximum (1), support for democracy decreased by about 36%, civil disobedience decreased by about 26%, trust in the authoritarian government increased by 44%, support for market capitalism decreased by 12%, and social and political tolerance also decreased by 20%. The effects of nationalism are independent of other individual characteristics, including age, party membership, education, family income, urbanization, ethnic background, and gender. If nationalism is measured differently, e.g. elite nationalism, it may play a positive role in democratization. As long as nationalism is measured by the four survey questions in Table 1, it clearly hinders the development of democracy and civil society, and promotes the legitimacy of the current authoritarian political system in China.

Conclusion

Four findings in this study can be highlighted. First, China has one of the highest levels of popular nationalism in the world. Second, Chinese nationalism is not so much rooted in its cultural tradition as in the imagined multi-ethnic community designed by the communist party. Third, nationalism in China is likely to decline over time as levels of urbanization and education continue to increase. Fourth, nationalism has a strong effect on regime stability and legitimacy. It also prevents the public from demanding liberal political change. The negative effect of nationalism on the demand for democracy confirms earlier studies which have shown that nationalism was designed by the CCP to maintain its legitimacy.[32]

Many people in Western democracies believe that China will become a democracy if the West keeps pushing for it. The West does so by offering support for anyone who wants to challenge the communist party's rule, such as financing the separatist movements in Tibet and the Muslim region of Xinjiang, hosting the religious dissident group of Falungong which is banned in China as a cult, and awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the political dissident Liu Xiaobo.

Unfortunately, the not-so-glorious past of these Western countries made it possible for the Chinese communist party to portray the current effort to criticize China's human rights violation as another attempt to gang up on China and keep it divided and weak, as they did in the nineteenth century. Through the education system and government propaganda, Chinese people are constantly reminded of the cruel Western invasion of China in the nineteenth century: how the British and American companies made their fortunes through the opium trade, and how the British, French, and other European powers violently suppressed the Boxer Rebellion which resisted Western religious indoctrination. Such historical memory inevitably fuels

32. Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China*.

nationalism, resentment, and a sense of hypocrisy among the Chinese people when they listen to the same countries that used to bully their ancestors more than 100 years ago tell them what to do today.

In 2009, a Paris auction at Christie's sold two bronze heads for US$40 million. The bronze heads of a rat and a rabbit were part of a 12-animal fountain based on the Chinese zodiac. They were constructed around 1750 for the imperial gardens of the Old Summer Palace in Beijing, and later looted by the British and French invaders in the nineteenth century. The Chinese government tried to halt the auction and demanded the return of the looted relics. The French owner of these bronze heads responded by saying that he would give them back if China would 'observe human rights and give liberty to the Tibetan people and welcome the Dalai Lama'.[33] In the Chinese government's mind, yielding to this demand would be equivalent to allowing Tibet to become independent, which is not negotiable. The auction went on and the relics were sold to an anonymous bidder. A few days later, this mysterious bidder surfaced after he surprised the world by refusing to pay for the bronzes. He was Cai Mingchao, a Chinese collector and auctioneer: 'I think any Chinese person would have stood up at that moment ... I was merely fulfilling my responsibilities'.[34]

The above story shows that criticism of China's human rights violations by industrial democracies is often perceived in China through the lens of nationalism.[35] Such a nationalistic response in China creates a dilemma for those outside. On the one hand, few Western democracies and human rights organizations would want to stop criticizing the authoritarian regime and pushing it to change. On the other hand, continued political pressure from outside seems to further fuel nationalism, which ironically serves the CCP by diverting the public demand for democratization.

33. Steven Erlanger, 'China fails to halt sale of looted relics at Paris auction', *The New York Times*, (26 February 2009).
34. Mark McDonald, 'Chinese bidder says he will not pay for looted bronzes', *The New York Times*, (2 March 2009).
35. Gries, *China's New Nationalism*; Gries, 'Popular nationalism and state legitimation in China'.

Appendix

Table A1. Summary statistics

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Nationalism	3,076	0.81	0.16	0	1
Prodemo	3,991	0.34	0.17	0	1
Civdisobey	3,991	0.19	0.16	0	1
Trustbj	3,782	0.76	0.24	0	1
Procap	3,102	0.53	0.24	0	1
Tolerance	3,316	0.56	0.19	0	1
Age < 35	3,991	0.27	0.44	0	1
Age 36–46	3,991	0.29	0.45	0	1
Age 47–8	3,991	0.22	0.41	0	1
Age > 59	3,991	0.23	0.42	0	1
Ccp	3,991	0.08	0.28	0	1
Edno	3,946	0.16	0.37	0	1
Edprimary	3,946	0.35	0.48	0	1
Edjrhi	3,946	0.30	0.46	0	1
Edsrhi	3,946	0.12	0.32	0	1
Edcollege	3,946	0.07	0.25	0	1
finc07imp	3,981	0.19	0.19	0	1
finc07sqr	3,981	0.08	0.13	0	1
h5 (class)	3,803	4.32	2.06	0	10
Urban	3,991	0.18	0.39	0	1
Rural	3,991	0.69	0.46	0	1
Migrant	3,991	0.12	0.32	0	1
Han	3,991	0.85	0.35	0	1
Hui	3,991	0.01	0.12	0	1
Wei	3,991	0.02	0.14	0	1
Man	3,991	0.02	0.13	0	1
Meng	3,991	0.00	0.04	0	1
Ethsouth	3,991	0.05	0.22	0	1
Ethoth	3,991	0.04	0.20	0	1
Female	3,991	0.52	0.50	0	1

Source: 2008 China Survey.

Table A2. Full models for Figures 2A–2F and for Table 2

	Nationalism	prodemo	civdisobey	trustbj	procap	tolerance
Nationalism		−0.357***	−0.258***	0.437***	−0.119***	−0.203***
Age < 35	−0.050***	0.026***	0.025***	−0.076***	0.015	−0.018
Age 36–46	−0.027***	0.024***	0.018**	−0.061***	0.02	−0.029**
Age 47–58	−0.019***	0.01	0.013	−0.016	−0.02	−0.015
59 +						
CCP	0.030***	−0.020*	−0.012	−0.019	0.024	−0.050***
ed = 0						
Edprimary	0.023***	−0.021**	−0.031***	0.009	0	−0.015
Edjrhi	0.028***	−0.030***	−0.031***	−0.01	0.016	−0.023*
Edsrhi	0.01	−0.019	−0.036***	0.017	0.053**	−0.006
Edcollege	−0.024***	0.049***	−0.041***	0.02	0.066***	0.041**
finc07imp	−0.232***	0.067	0.180***	−0.108*	−0.025	0.098*
finc07sqr	0.273***	−0.079	−0.220***	0.182**	0.117	−0.144*
Rural	0.014***	−0.017**	0.041***	0.016	−0.02	0
Migrant	0.020***	−0.032***	0.025**	0.009	−0.030*	−0.017
Urban						
Han	0.183***	−0.027*	−0.049***	−0.110***	0.042*	0.047**
Hui	0.224***	−0.029	−0.063**	−0.054	0.138***	−0.002
Wei	0.161***	−0.017	−0.037	0.047	0.070*	−0.044
Man	0.175***	−0.039	−0.094***	−0.100***	0.076*	−0.015
Meng	0.202***	−0.008	−0.085	−0.079	−0.073	0.126
Ethoth	0.150***	−0.032	−0.022	−0.107***	0.064*	0.037
eth_south						
Female	0.002	−0.012*	−0.006	−0.003	−0.018*	−0.003
Constant	0.653***	0.674***	0.414***	0.537***	0.579***	0.702***
Observations	12,012	3,042	3,042	2,958	2,631	2,643
R-squared	0.116	0.151	0.113	0.107	0.037	0.051

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.
Source: 2008 China Survey.