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Introduction

*Dragon Slayers and Panda Huggers*

On 1 April 2001, an American EP-3 surveillance plane and a Chinese F-8 jet fighter collided over the South China Sea. The EP-3 made it safely to China’s Hainan Island; the F-8 tore apart and crashed. Chinese pilot Wang Wei was killed. A few days later, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs called an unusual late-night news conference. Spokesman Zhu Bangzao, his rage clearly visible, declared: “The United States should take full responsibility, make an apology to the Chinese government and people, and give us an explanation of its actions.”1 Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan and President Jiang Zemin soon reiterated this demand. Secretary of State Colin Powell initially responded with equal bluntness: “We have nothing to apologize for.” Viewing the aggressiveness of the Chinese jet as the cause of the collision, many Americans did not feel responsible. As Senator Joseph Lieberman said on CNN’s “Larry King Live,” “When you play chicken, sometimes you get hurt.”2

The impasse was broken after eleven days of intensive negotiations. American Ambassador Joseph Prueher gave a letter to Foreign Minister
Tang: “Please convey to the Chinese people and to the family of pilot Wang Wei that we are very sorry for their loss. . . . We are very sorry the entering of China’s airspace and the landing did not have verbal clearance.” Having extracted an “apology” from Washington, Beijing released the twenty-four American servicemen being held on Hainan Island. In the Chinese view, Jiang, “diplomatic strategist extraordinaire,” had won a major victory. The American spin was quite different. Powell denied that America had apologized, again asserting, “There is nothing to apologize for. To apologize would have suggested that we have done something wrong or accepted responsibility for having done something wrong. And we did not do anything wrong.” The conservative media was not so restrained. The *Weekly Standard* declared the People’s Republic to be “violent and primitive . . . a regime of hair-curling, systematic barbarity.” A *New Republic* editorial asserted that “a non-Maoist tyranny in China is still a tyranny. . . . They are, in short, in transition from communism to fascism.” Chinese nationalism, the *National Review* maintained, is “psychopathological.”

Is China out to settle old scores with the West, or is China seeking to incorporate itself peacefully into the world system? Is China, in other words, an evil dragon or a cute panda? Westerners hold both views. Foreign-policy makers, businesspeople, and academics frequently sing China’s praises. Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger paints a rosy picture of Chinese intentions. “China is no military colossus,” Kissinger argues in the *Los Angeles Times*, and has “the best of intentions.” China, Kissinger insists, can be counted on to pursue its “self-interest” in cooperation—high praise indeed from a proud practitioner of realpolitik. As China’s economic reforms embraced the market, many in the West came to romanticize a business China that was thought to be capitalist, “just like us.” In 1985, after six years of successful economic reforms in China, *Time* magazine even declared Deng Xiaoping “Man of the Year.” Western businesspeople have frequently served Beijing in exchange for access to China’s consumers. Academic China watchers also tend to present a rosy picture of China, rarely speaking out on controversial issues such as human rights. Scholars like Andrew Nathan and Perry Link are the exceptions that prove the rule. Because they have spoken out against Chinese human rights violations, Chinese nationalists and government officials have subjected them to vicious personal attacks, and they have been denied visas to China. For example, Penn State’s Liu Kang, one of the most virulent of China’s anti-American nationalists, viciously attacks Link in his “A ‘China Hand’ Not Welcome in Beijing” section of the best-selling 1996 diatribe *The Plot to Demonize China*. 

2 INTRODUCTION
Meanwhile, an odd alliance of politicians, celebrities, and journalists on the left and right join together in China bashing. On the left, a variety of politicians and actors have avowed a profound concern for Chinese human rights abuses and the fate of Tibet. Nancy Pelosi, congressional representative from northern California, feels so strongly about standing up for democratic values that she frequently joins conservatives in Congress to criticize China. Pelosi even has a special China human rights page on her Web site. Actors have joined the politicians. Living in affluent southern California, but enraptured by Tibetan spirituality, Hollywood celebrities like Richard Gere and Steven Seagal have turned to the Dalai Lama for spiritual guidance and depicted Beijing as a ruthless dictatorship. On the right, a “Blue Team” of conservative hawks has emerged on Capitol Hill to attack “panda huggers” and “Sinapologists.” For example, William Triplett, coauthor of Year of the Rat and Red Dragon Rising, and a former staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, argues that China is a rising power determined to challenge the United States. He maintains that China’s “dictatorial regime” is suppressing “the Chinese people’s yearning for freedom and democracy.” To such dragon slayers, America must stand up for democracy, disciplining an evil and despotic China. The Western media often reinforces this message: journalists stationed in China, harassed by the Beijing authorities, frequently focus on the dark side of life in what they characterize as a land of tyranny.

Some Westerners have even argued both sides. After acquiring Hong Kong’s Star TV in 1993, media mogul Rupert Murdoch declared satellite television an “unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere.” Beijing soon declared war on Murdoch’s News Corporation, pronouncing satellite dishes illegal. Murdoch quickly surrendered, and has been kowtowing to Beijing ever since, first pulling BBC off of Star TV, and then canceling publication of the memoirs of the former British governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten. More recently, Murdoch’s son James has parroted Beijing’s shrill critique of the Falun Gong spiritual movement as a “dangerous . . . cult.”

China, it seems, means very different things to different people. American fears and fantasies about China reveal a great deal about the interests and ideals that shape the American political landscape. They do not, however, teach us much about the real China. Romanticizing and demonizing China, furthermore, dangerously distorts our understanding of Chinese foreign policies. The way that we talk about China influences the ways we interpret and respond to Chinese actions. And the way that
we talk about China also influences the way that the Chinese (mis)understand us. Such trans-Pacific muddles help explain how the United States and China came to blows in Korea (1950–1953) and Vietnam (1965–1973). And a conflict over Taiwan remains a real possibility at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Our China policy debate must, therefore, see beyond such distortions to focus on the real China.

To understand Chinese nationalism, we must listen to the Chinese. This study, therefore, seeks to introduce Western readers to the views of China’s new nationalists. Specifically, I focus on Chinese perceptions of China’s two most important rivals: America and Japan. There is real need for such a study. Recent academic and journalistic accounts have done an admirable job of recounting the American perspective on the United States’ relationship with China. But Chinese perceptions of this relationship are woefully neglected. This book, therefore, will introduce the rarely told Chinese side of the story. The neglected Chinese perspective on Japan and America is found in a wide assortment of Chinese materials expressing nationalist sentiments: movies, television shows, posters, cartoons, but particularly popular books and magazines published in mainland China since the early 1990s. Most of these materials were produced by a “fourth generation” of Chinese nationalists in their thirties. These young Chinese seek to distinguish themselves from their elders, and to make sense of their experiences in the “Liberal ’80s.”

Ironically, the “fourth generation” appears to find the new victimization narrative of Chinese suffering at the hands of Western imperialists appealing precisely because they, unlike older Chinese, have never been directly victimized. The first generation of revolutionaries endured the hardships of the anti-fascist and civil wars of the 1930s and 1940s. The second generation suffered during the Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Great Leap Forward of the late 1950s. And the third generation of Red Guards was sent down to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s and 1970s. The fourth generation of PRC youth, by contrast, grew up with relative material prosperity under Deng Xiaoping and Reform in the 1980s and 1990s. In their 1997 psycho-autobiography The Spirit of the Fourth Generation, Song Qiang and several of his coauthors of the 1996 nationalist diatribes China Can Say No and China Can Still Say No fret over their generation’s materialism: “cultural and spiritual fast food has taken over.” They are envious of the third generation who, “proud of their hardships,” can celebrate them at Cultural Revolution restaurants like Heitudi (“The Black Earth”) in Beijing, nostalgically eating fried corn bread, recalling the good old, bad old days. They then ask, “Are we an
unimportant generation?” In a section entitled “How Much Longer Must We be Silent?”, they lament that “we in our thirties are without a shadow or a sound. . . . It seems that we will perish in silence.” Many of this generation, it seems, have a strong desire to make their mark. And they seek to do so through nationalism.

Many “fourth-generation” nationalists today have self-consciously defined themselves against the “Liberal ‘80s.” Sociologist Karl Mannheim long ago argued that the formative events of youth mark each generation. Late-1980s experiences like the pro-Western “River Elegy” television sensation and Beijing Spring 1989 came at a pivotal time in the lives of Chinese nationalists now in their thirties. Today’s nationalists frequently dismiss the 1980s as a period of dangerous “romanticism” and “radicalism”; they then depict themselves as “realistic” and “pragmatic” defenders of stability and order. During the “May 8th” nationalist protests of 1999, for instance, one group of students demonstrated with a painting of what might best be described as the “Demon of Liberty.” During Beijing Spring a decade earlier, Chinese students became famous for their statue the “Goddess of Democracy.” This self-conscious superimposition of America as demon over America as goddess tells us far more about
changes in the worldview of Chinese youth since 1989 than it does about
the United States.

These and other Chinese voices can help us with the thorny problem
of just what exactly “Chinese nationalism” is. Because it is based upon
analysis of European history, the definition that nationalism arises when
nations seek to become states does not apply very well to China. The
Western view of the nation as a uniquely modern institution is also prob-
lematic in the Chinese context. “China” has four millennia of documented
history, and two millennia of centralized rule. Did it only become a “na-
tion” in the twentieth century? Historian Prasenjit Duara has gone to great

\textbf{Figure 3.} Bad America: The “Demon of Liberty,” 1999.
Students in Canton protest the Belgrade embassy bombing. Source unknown.
lengths to argue that premodern China’s regions were linked to Beijing in a variety of ways, creating a widely shared notion of “China.” Because premodern Chinese shared a common culture, he argues, they were the “first nation.” Other historians disagree, arguing, for example, that local religious practices accentuated regional differences, undermining consciousness of a common “Chinese” identity.

Confucianism presents a further problem to those who want to define Chinese nationalism. One group of scholars holds that Confucianism and nationalism are incompatible: Confucian universalism, which holds that all peoples can become Chinese if they adapt to a Sinocentric civilization, mitigates against the idea of a Chinese nationalism that defines itself in contradistinction to other nations. Other scholars, however, argue that “Confucian nationalism” is not an oxymoron: Confucianism allows for the reinforcement of cultural boundaries when barbarians do not accept Chinese values. The “universal” “all under heaven” (tianxia) can and often has become a closed political community. Historian Lei Yi of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing has used the phrase “‘Sinocentric’ cultural nationalism [‘Huaxia zhongxin’ wenhua minzu zhuyi]” to describe such views. The Confucian world was not “one big happy family” (tianxia yi jia), but extremely Sinocentric, involving a “fierce racism, rejection of other cultures, . . . and cultural superiority.”

Indeed, pride in the superiority of Confucian civilization is central to nationalism in China today. In 1994, Xiao Gongqing, an outspoken neo-conservative intellectual, advocated the use of a nationalism derived from Confucianism to fill the ideological void opened by the collapse of communism. Popular nationalists frequently evince pride in China’s Confucian civilization. The cover of a 1997 Beijing Youth Weekly, for instance, has “Chinese Defeat Kasparov!” splashed across a picture of the downcast grand master. Two of the six members of the IBM research group that programmed “Deep Blue,” it turns out, were Chinese-Americans. “It was the genius of these two Chinese,” one article asserts, “that allowed ‘Deep Blue’ to defeat Mr. Kasparov.” Entitled “We Have the Best Brains,” the article concludes that “we should be proud of the legacy of ‘5,000 years of civilization’ that our ancestors have left for us.” The Communist Party elite seems to concur. In 1995, for example, Vice Chair of the National People’s Congress Tian Jiyun declared that “The IQs of the Chinese ethnicity, the descendants of the Yellow Emperor, are very high.” Confucianism, it seems, does not “thin out” nationalism, but is instead the very basis of China’s new nationalism.

This book avoids such controversies in taking a social psychological
approach to nationalism. As Elie Kedourie noted long ago, nationalism “is very much a matter of one’s self-view, of one’s estimation of oneself and one’s place in the world.” Following social identity theorists, I loosely define national identity as that aspect of individuals’ self-image that is tied to their nation, together with the value and emotional significance they attach to membership in the national community. “Nationalism” will refer to any behavior designed to restore, maintain, or advance public images of that national community.

Because Chinese politics often dictates that “surface and reality differ” (biao li bu yi), the successful interpretation of Chinese materials is no easy task. China’s emperors saw language as a tool of rule. Diction mattered. Two millennia ago, the Art of Writing demonstrated how language could be used to mold popular opinion. For instance, China’s emperors commissioned literati to (re)write official dynastic histories to legitimate their rule. China’s rulers could also be quite ruthless. Emperors from Qin Shi-huang (ruled circa 259–210 B.C.E.) to Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty (ruled 1736–1796 C.E.) are famous for burning books and suppressing free expression. Such actions forced China’s literati to develop the art of “indirection.” Historical allegory—especially critiques of the corrupt practices of past emperors—was and is one form of “indirection” used to chastise present-day politics.

Western-style direct criticism, indeed, came to be seen as vulgar. The reader of Chinese political materials is therefore challenged to listen to “the sound outside the strings” (xianwai zhi yin), relying on a deep immersion in the historical and cultural context of Chinese politics today. Identical events or words can have different meanings in different contexts. The reader must “listen to the sound of the gong” (luo gu ting yin). Is it rejoicing (a marriage), or mourning (a death)? It is striking how often the actual meaning of a diplomatic statement is the precise opposite of what is literally said. Descriptions of China as “inferior” and “great,” for example, cannot be read literally, but must be understood in their historical and political contexts. When tributary missions came to pay obeisance, imperial officials referred to China as “our inferior nation” (bigo) and the tributaries as “your superior nation” (guiguo). They were so confident that China was the undisputed center of civilization (wen-ming) that they could afford the self-deprecation. By contrast, Chinese diplomats under the People’s Republic have routinely referred to China as “great” (weida). These diametrically opposite choices of diction point to an insecurity—central to today’s nationalism—about China’s international status.
Understanding the diplomatic tendency to say the opposite of what is meant helps one interpret China’s relationships with other nations. It was only after reading the phrase “Sino-Japanese friendship” literally hundreds of times in a Beijing library, for instance, that I came to realize that the phrase frequently conceals animosity. Authors irate about Japanese atrocities in China, Japanese “historical revisionism,” or the “revival of Japanese militarism” nonetheless use the phrase in the conclusions of their articles and books. While it is possible to speak of the feelings of both love and hate that many Chinese have for America, it is decidedly not possible to speak about a genuine Chinese “friendship” for Japan. The Chinese viewed the Japanese as the paradigmatic “devils” (guizi) during World War II, and they continue to view them that way today.

This kind of political interpretation requires more than just reading many Chinese books and magazines. A person who wants to do it well must also be sensitive to his or her own cultural standpoint: who you are shapes both what you choose to look at, and how you interpret it. Being a white American male undoubtedly had a major influence on my research experience. As a Caucasian in China, I am seen as a “laowai,” which means “foreigner” or even “Whitey.” Skin color immediately creates a distance between Chinese and Caucasians. The presence of an American presented an opportunity for many Chinese to vent their feelings—positive or negative—about the United States; Sino-American relations is not a subject an American in Beijing can easily avoid. And foreign men are the object of many Chinese nationalists’ anxiety: the recurring figure of China as a raped woman has recently reemerged in nationalist discourse, and many of its young male exponents are enraged by the very idea of white men intimately involved with Chinese women.

As a white American male writing about Chinese nationalism, therefore, I am likely to be the object of a good deal of suspicion. The fate of Geremie Barmé, a white male and one of the West’s most incisive observers of the Chinese cultural scene, is instructive. In 1995 Barmé violated a taboo by publishing an article, “To Screw Foreigners Is Patriotic,” that exposed the racist dimension of Chinese nationalism. Popular nationalist Wang Xiaodong, writing under the pseudonym Shi Zhong, quickly penned a highly critical riposte in which he labeled Barmé an “extremist”—and asserted that Western academics are incapable of “understanding China.” I reject Wang’s claim, as well as the position, advanced by other Chinese cultural nationalists and postcolonial theorists, that white males cannot understand China. Instead, I take comfort in the fact that Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchman with an outsider’s perspec-
tive, produced one of the most astute analyses of American politics ever written, *Democracy in America*. Westerners can understand China, and should seek this understanding.

They cannot, however, do so in isolation. Where possible, I supplement my own readings of Chinese texts with Chinese analyses of the same texts. Fortunately, the recent rise of popular nationalism has engendered extensive Chinese commentary. Numerous psychobiographies of the “fourth generation” of Chinese nationalists have been published. As noted above, the authors of *China Can Say No* and *China Can Still Say No*, which marked the emergence of popular nationalism in 1996, later published a very revealing psycho-autobiography, *The Spirit of the Fourth Generation*. This secondary Chinese literature on Chinese nationalism provides an invaluable source of primary material, against which I have verified and developed my own views.

Perhaps my greatest challenge, however, has been assessing how my Chinese sources relate to each other. Chinese, like Americans, project their fears and fantasies onto our bilateral relations. China has its own fair share of Kissingers and Tripletts—America lovers and America haters. The challenge, therefore, is to figure out how the views of extreme nationalists are accepted by mainstream Chinese. While nationalist views won headlines in 1996–97, they were likely accepted only by a small group of disaffected intellectuals. Following the 1999 American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the 2001 spy plane collision over the South China Sea, however, the propagators of anti-American views are now speaking to a much broader Chinese audience. Meanwhile, in America, two summer 2002 reports painted a dark picture of China’s international activities. The Department of Defense’s (DoD) *Annual Report on the Military Power of the People’s Republic of China* focused on recent Chinese arms acquisitions and the threat they pose to Taiwan. The United States–China Security Review Commission (USCC) then submitted its first annual report to the U.S. Congress, expressing concern that China’s America policy is driven by a coherent set of expansionist goals. The report asserts, for instance, that “China is not a status quo country.” Commissioner Arthur Waldron goes even further, asserting that China’s “wide-ranging purpose” is to “exclude the U.S. from Asia” and “to threaten and coerce neighboring states.”

These developments do not bode well for twenty-first-century Sino-American relations. Words have consequences. Anti-American and anti-Chinese polemics are pernicious: they can easily spiral into mutual dehumanization and demonization, laying the foundation for violent conflict.
Chinese and Americans who paint rosy pictures of the bilateral relationship are irresponsible; we should squarely confront the dangers inherent in a relationship devoid of mutual trust. But it is Chinese America bashers and American China bashers who are the most dangerous. This book, therefore, seeks to present a balanced view of China’s new nationalism—one that both acknowledges its legitimate grievances and recognizes its potential dangers.
8 May 1999. Midnight. In the skies over Belgrade, an American B-2 bomber dropped five two-thousand-pound guided missiles. All five hit their intended target. But it was not a Serbian arms depot, as their maps indicated, but the Chinese embassy. Three missiles exploded near the embassy’s intelligence operations center. And three Chinese—Xu Xinghu and Zhu Ying of the Guangming Daily, one of China’s premier national newspapers, and Shao Yunhuan of the New China News Agency—were killed in the blast. Twenty-three others were injured.

That night in Urumuchi, in China’s far northwest Xinjiang Province, Yue Hongjian was eating dinner when he saw the news of the bombing on Central Chinese Television (CCTV). “I finished dinner with tears in my eyes,” he later wrote, “and then wrote this poem”:

You have gone.
We will think of you
always.
Your work and hopes will be continued.
Please be at ease, my compatriots.
You have gone.
But we will forever, always, think of you.¹

Yue’s poem is no masterpiece, but it is a powerful and pure expression of sorrow over the deaths of three total strangers. Meanwhile, two thousand miles east in Beijing, Su Zhengfan wrote in his diary, trying to express his feelings about the bombing, but found that there was “no way to calm my feelings of grief and indignation.” That same night, on the other side of the Pacific, Zhao Guojun, a researcher at the University of British Columbia, hearing the news, had a lengthy discussion with several of his Chinese compatriots in Vancouver. They agreed that the bombing was of “hostile intent.”² Chinese across the globe spontaneously poured into the streets to protest. Students in America and Europe demonstrated on university campuses and outside city halls and embassies. In Chicago, Chinese nationalists utilized e-mail networks to organize demonstrations on campuses and a joint protest march downtown. Chinese students carried pictures of the “three martyrs” and placards declaring, “Punish the war criminals!” and “Justice must be done!”³ Meanwhile, in Rome, two thousand demonstrating Chinese shouted, “The Chinese people cannot be defeated!”

Back in China, nationalists were busy as well. Protests erupted in over two dozen major cities. The American consul’s residence in Chengdu was firebombed. In Canton, a group of three hundred protestors broke off from the main demonstration to yell slogans in front of a local McDonald’s, such as “Kick American hamburgers out of China!” and “Oppose invasion!”⁴ In Beijing, students from prominent universities took buses to the embassy district on the other side of town to protest outside the U.S. embassy, shouting “Down with hegemonic politics!” Student leaders publicly presented protest letters to American diplomats. Many demanded revenge, chanting “Blood for Blood!” Protestors smashed embassy cars, removed and burned American flags, and threw gas bombs, rocks, and bricks at embassy buildings as soldiers looked on. The U.S. Ambassador to China, James Sasser, along with other American diplomats, was imprisoned inside the American embassy com-
pound for days. Protests were not confined to the streets: Chinese nationalists were also active on the Internet. Deluged by e-mail from China, the White House Web site in Washington, D. C., was temporarily shut down. Cyber-nationalists also hacked into the U.S. embassy’s Web site in Beijing, inserting “Down with the Barbarians!” on the homepage. Dozens of protest sites appeared on personal Web pages, and Chinese-language chatrooms were swamped.

The Communist Party also joined the fray. The China Internet Information Center, an official Chinese government Web site in English, constructed a Web page devoted solely to protesting the Belgrade bombing. The page contained links to translations of Chinese leaders’ speeches, letters from common Chinese, opinion pieces, and a page entitled “International Community Responses.” The latter consisted of links to 159 separate New China News Agency English-language reports—from Bangladesh to Mozambique—of various foreign leaders condemning the NATO bombing. It clearly sought to demonstrate that “world opinion” and “justice” were on China’s side.

In Washington, President Bill Clinton proclaimed the bombing a
“tragic mistake” made because of outdated maps, and extended his “regrets and profound condolences” to the Chinese people. President Clinton’s attempts to telephone President Jiang Zemin in Beijing were repeatedly rebuffed. Secretary of State Madeline Albright visited the Chinese embassy in Washington at midnight to express her condolences—and to discuss the safety of American diplomats in China. In Beijing, Chinese officials rejected the American faulty map scenario as “sophistry,” and declared NATO apologies to be “insufficient” and “insincere.” The Chinese media did not publicize Clinton’s, Sasser’s, or NATO Secretary General Javier Solana’s public apologies until 11 May. Instead, they proclaimed the bombing a “barbaric” and intentional “criminal act.” A People’s Daily op-ed entitled “This is not 1899 China” declared:

This is 1999, not 1899. This is not . . . the age when people can barge about in the world just by sending a few gunboats. . . . It is not the age when the Western powers plundered the Imperial Palace at will, destroyed the Old Summer Palace, and seized Hong Kong and Macao. . . . China is a China that has stood up; it is a China that defeated the Japanese fascists; it is a China that had a trial of strength and won victory over the United States on the Korean battleground. The Chinese people are not to be bullied, and China’s sovereignty and dignity are not to be violated. The hot blood of people of ideas and integrity who opposed imperialism for over 150 years flows in the veins of the Chinese people. U.S.-led NATO had better remember this.8

The Belgrade bombing, in this Chinese view, was not an isolated event; rather, it was the latest in a long series of Western aggressions against China.

The “May 8th” protests marked a high point in a rising tide of popular nationalism in China. The protests may even mark a turning point in Chinese attitudes towards the United States and the current world system. China in the mid- to late 1980s had been notable for a decidedly positive vision of America.9 By the late 1990s, that view had changed dramatically. Perceived American abandonment of Mikhail Gorbachev and Russia after the fall of the Soviet bloc, combined with Beijing’s lost 1993 bid to host the 2000 Olympics (attributed to a devious U.S. Congress), precipitated an early 1990s shift in Chinese attitudes towards the United States. The fiftieth anniversary commemorations of World War II in 1995, the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–1996, and the 1996–1997 fervor over the inflammatory China Can Say No and similar anti-American and anti-Japanese publications solidified the emergence of popular nationalism.10 Following the Belgrade bombing in 1999 and the 1 April 2001 spy
plane collision over the South China Sea, the views of parochial “say no!” nationalists, once thought extreme, gained wider currency among ordinary Chinese. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, a new nationalism had emerged in mainland China.

The Enigma of Chinese Nationalism

How should the Belgrade bombing protests be understood? More broadly, what should be made of China’s new nationalism? The “May 8th” protests shocked the U.S. media, which quickly blamed the Chinese government. A brief review of American newspaper editorials on 11 May 1999 reveals that most media outlets thought the Chinese people were not genuinely angry with America; rather, they were manipulated by Communist Party propaganda that called the bombing intentional. The *San Francisco Chronicle* protested that Beijing has “failed to tell its citizens that the U.S. attack was an accident and that President Clinton has apologized to Beijing.” As *USA Today* stated, “China’s state-controlled media aren’t reporting to their public the U.S. apology officials say they want. It’s no surprise that the usually pro-American Chinese are angry.” Such “state-supervised anger,” the *Boston Globe* wrote, was neither genuine nor popular. The “brutes of Beijing,” it seems, were responsible for the Chinese people’s anger and mistaken belief that the bombing was intentional, and the protests were yet another example of the “Communist menace.”

The mainstream American media’s portrayal of the Belgrade bombing protests fits in well with the dominant Western interpretation of Chinese nationalism in general: the Communist Party has constructed Chinese nationalism as a tool to legitimize its rule. With communism in crisis, proponents of this view argue, Party elite foment nationalism to maintain power. Thomas Christensen expressed this dominant argument succinctly in an influential *Foreign Affairs* article: “Since the Chinese Communist Party is no longer communist, it must be even more Chinese.”

There is broad consensus in the West on the fundamental nature of Chinese nationalism today: it is “party propaganda,” generated by the Communist elite for its own purposes.

This mainstream view of Chinese nationalism is not wrong, but it is incomplete. Even the brief summary of the Belgrade bombing protests outlined above suggests that Western dismissals of Chinese nationalism as a tool of communist rule greatly oversimplify reality. Chinese nationalism cannot be interpreted in isolation, but must be understood in its international and historical contexts. Moreover, Chinese nationalism is not sim-
ply “party propaganda,” since ordinary Chinese now play a central role in nationalist politics. And Chinese nationalism is not simply an “instrument” or “tool.” Chinese, like all peoples, have deep-seated emotional attachments to their national identity. Hence, this book advances four interrelated arguments. First and second, Chinese national identity evolves in dynamic relationship with other nations and the past. Third and fourth, Chinese nationalism involves both the Chinese people and their passions.

Arguments in the West over the existence of a “China threat” frequently atomize and even demonize China. Is Chinese nationalism benign or malign? Is China a panda or a dragon? Such debates are dangerous because they treat Chinese national identity as autonomous and unchanging, ignoring the international context within which it evolves. Nationalism concerns the identity of nations, and identity does not develop in isolation. The China Internet Information Center’s Belgrade bombing Web site, for instance, played up evidence of various foreigners’ support of China’s position. Similarly, in their account of the Rome protests discussed above, New China News Agency correspondents Yan Tao and Liu Ruting “quote” an Italian named Mario: “Like the Chinese people, the Italian people love peace and oppose war . . . If NATO persists in bombing the Yugoslav Federation, Italy should withdraw from this aggressor organization.”

The centrality of foreigners’ views of China to Chinese nationalism points to the dynamic, intersubjective nature of Chinese national identity. Just as personal identity emerges through our interpersonal relations, national identities evolve through international relations. Chinese identity is not static, but evolves as Chinese interact with the world. Chinese nationalists are thus extremely sensitive to the things that Westerners say about China. We would be wise, therefore, not to indulge ourselves in fits of China bashing.

Identities, personal and national, are also constituted in large part by stories about the past. Therefore, the ways Chinese imagine their “Century of Humiliation” at the hands of Western imperialists in the past have a powerful influence on the nature and direction of Chinese nationalism today. As the People’s Daily noted in “This is not 1899 China,” Chinese reactions to the 1999 Belgrade bombing were shaped in part by memories of China’s semicolonial past. In summer 2000, the Beijing Youth Daily’s Zhang Tianwei made the connection between past “humiliation” and current nationalism: “Until they achieve a rebirth, and their emotional scars have thoroughly healed, the Chinese people will carry their memories with them as they confront themselves, others, the present, and the future.”

If Western China policies do not consider how Chinese nationalism is
shaped by interactions with the West and evolving narratives of the national past, they may well push Chinese nationalism in a malevolent direction.

Moreover, the “party propaganda” view of Chinese nationalism dominant in the West too narrowly focuses on the Communist Party, dangerously overlooking the role of the Chinese people. The global and spontaneous nature of the “May 8th” protests should cast serious doubts on this top-down view. The Western media’s argument that the Communist Party used “misinformation” about the bombing to manipulate the Chinese people like puppets cannot explain why the bombing also outraged Chinese outside China who had full access to the Western media, like Zhao Guojun and his colleagues in Vancouver. The 1990s witnessed the emergence of a genuinely popular nationalism in China that should not be conflated with state or official nationalism. Although the antiforeign impulses of popular nationalism in China often mirror party-line nationalism, popular nationalism’s independent existence undermines the Communist Party’s hegemony. The Chinese people are demanding a say in nationalist politics: the fate of the nation is no longer the Party’s exclusive dominion. Western policymakers should also recognize that because the Party’s legitimacy now depends upon accommodating popular nationalist demands, the Foreign Ministry must take popular opinion into account as it negotiates foreign policy.

The West’s “party propaganda” view also focuses on the instrumental motivations of Chinese nationalists, dangerously dismissing their emotions as irrelevant. Many Chinese construed the Belgrade bombing as an intentional assault on Chinese sovereignty, another in a long line of Western insults. Seen as such, the bombing aroused a genuine anger that sought to right a wrong. These passions are evident in Yue Hongjian’s moving poem, Su Zhengfan’s diary, and the drama of the worldwide “May 8th” protests. While some will always seek to “use” nationalism, it also has a vital affective component: we all have emotional commitments to our national identities. Chinese nationalists are no different—they are moved by considerations of both sense and sensibility.

In sum, Western academics and journalists tend to treat Chinese nationalism ahistorically and in isolation from other nations. And by highlighting “party propaganda,” they dangerously trivialize the roles that the Chinese people and their emotions play in Chinese nationalism. I maintain that national identity, the past, the people, and the passions all play vital roles in nationalist politics everywhere. Chinese nationalism today is no exception. To make these arguments, I rely heavily on social psychology. The concept of face—the self displayed before others—will be central to my analysis.
The Many Faces of “Face”

Following the Belgrade bombing, “Ouyang from Wuhan” wrote a lengthy essay that he sent to the Guangming Daily. According to Ouyang, the American motive behind the attack was to humiliate China. To underscore his point, Ouyang uses the word *xiuru* (to humiliate) thirteen times, at one point deploying it in six consecutive sentences: “Chinese, this is actually Americans *humiliating* us! The American desire to *humiliate* us is no mere recent event. Blocking our hosting of the Olympics was a *humiliation*. Boarding the *Milky Way* by force to search its cargo was a *humiliation*. Recent allegations that we stole their [nuclear] secrets are a *humiliation*. Similarly, the motive for the bombing of our embassy was to *humiliate* China.” Once this goal is understood, Ouyang argues, American behavior starts to make sense. America’s “compulsive lying” about the bombing, for example, is part of a larger plan: “Their goal is to humiliate Chinese, and the more absurd [their explanations], the more they can humiliate us.”

Chinese like Ouyang were not the only ones outraged and insulted by the unfolding events of May 1999. House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, for example, was infuriated by the Chinese reaction to the bombing. He later told a group of Washington Post reporters:

I was on “Meet the Press” . . . right after the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Kosovo [he meant Belgrade], and the [Chinese] ambassador [Li Zhaoxing] was on before me. And if you remember, he’s kind of an obnoxious fellow and he’s screaming and yelling about how bad the Americans were, and I had had it up to about here. So he’s coming off the stage and I’m going onto the stage and I intentionally walked up to him and blocked his way. . . . I grabbed [his] hand and squeezed it as hard as I could and pulled him a kind of little jerk like this and I said: “Don’t take the weakness of this president as the weakness of the American people.” And he looked at me kind of funny, so I pulled him real close, nose to nose, and I repeated it very slowly, and said, “Do—not—take—the—weakness—of this president as the weakness of the American people.”

It is hard to say which is more shocking: DeLay’s bullying, or his gloating about it later. However, most Americans, myself included, believed that the bombing was not deliberate and thus shared his dismay at the Chinese challenge to American integrity. Indeed, Ambassador Li had a very long week in Washington. In an interview on PBS’s NewsHour, the mild-mannered Jim Lehrer pestered Li about Chinese skepticism that the bombing was an accident: “Yes, sir. But my question is: why would you think that it would not be an accident or a mistake? In other words, why
would you think—to repeat my question, why would you think that the United States would intentionally kill Chinese citizens in downtown Belgrade? Lehrer, stunned by Li’s skepticism, returned to the issue seven times in the course of his brief interview. DeLay and Lehrer, like most Americans, simply could not accept the Chinese challenge to their positive self-image. “How can they think that we Americans could do such a thing intentionally? We are not that kind of people!” was a widespread sentiment. It is notable that the bombing was rarely mentioned in the U.S. media without the qualifying adjective “accidental.” An “accidental bombing” was very different from an “intentional bombing.” It had very different implications for American self-esteem.

Ouyang, DeLay, and Lehrer were all motivated by a concern for face, the self revealed to others. “Saving” or “maintaining” face involves efforts to preserve what social psychologists call “ingroup positivity” or “collective self-esteem.” To the extent that we identify ourselves as “Chinese” or “Americans,” we seek to maintain the face or honor of our nations. Viewing the Belgrade bombing as the latest incident in a long history of Western aggression against China, Ouyang construed the blast to be a threat to his self-esteem as a Chinese. Similarly, DeLay and Lehrer viewed Ambassador Li’s intransigence on the bombing as a direct challenge to their view of themselves as decent and respectable Americans, although their reactions to that challenge were dramatically different.

Some readers may object to the contention that Americans like DeLay and Lehrer care about saving face. Viewing ourselves as “rugged individualists,” we Americans have a long tradition of passionately denying that we care “what society thinks.” We are, it seems, a nation of John Waynes and Lone Rangers—individuals who bravely chart their own courses. As sociologist David Ho notes, “The Western mentality, deeply ingrained with the values of individualism, is not one which is favorably disposed to the idea of face. For face is never a purely individual thing. It does not make sense to speak of the face of an individual as something lodged within his person; it is meaningful only when his face is considered in relation to that of others in the social network.” Indeed, the valorization of the rational individual central to Western civilization helps explain how the figurative face came to be a pejorative in the English language, meaning mere “pretense” or “façade.” The word has developed a strong negative connotation as a false social appearance covering an unseemly inner reality. Face serves as a negative foil for a rational and genuine self.

That foil has long been found in the Orient. To demonstrate the defects of the “Chinese racial character” and justify his Christian civilizing
mission, British missionary Arthur Smith first associated the term *face* with the Orient in the late nineteenth century. *Face*, it seems, represented duplicitous Oriental “disguise.” Fearful of society—“the mob” and its unruly passions—classical Liberals began to use words like *face* to project their fears about society and the emotions onto the Orient, the realm of the mindless Yellow Horde. Paradoxically, the East came to represent both a passive “herd mentality” and a cunning duplicitousness to Western minds. This helped preserve the good qualities of individualism and rationality for Liberalism and the West.

The continuing association of *face* with the Orient can be seen in the titles of a pair of recent books about China: James Mann’s *About Face: A History of America’s Curious Relationship with China*, and John Garver’s *Face Off: China, the United States, and Taiwan’s Democratization*. Mann’s engaging narrative dwells on the themes of secrecy and paradox: “It was a relationship beset with contradictions, a strategic marriage of convenience. . . . In private, some American leaders, particularly Nixon, could be candid about the regime they were dealing with. . . . Yet in public, American leaders presented their new relationship with China as something different.” Oriental duplicitousness can rub off. There is something “two-faced” about Nixon and others associated with this “curious relationship.” It is a tale of intrigue, in which public appearances mask private realities.

In this book I seek to redefine the word *face* as a cultural universal. It is not uniquely “Oriental,” but applies to all humanity—including Westerners. Against Americans’ rugged individualist lore, I contend that the “self” does not exist in isolation. No man is an island. But neither is man a mere pawn of society: all humans have free will. As social beings, our identities emerge through social intercourse. *Face* captures the interplay of self and society in the process of constructing personhood.

*Face* also helps capture an interplay of reason and passion central to nationalism that can be seen in the intense emotion Ouyang and DeLay displayed following the Belgrade bombing. In *Face Off*, a fine analysis of the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996, Garver recognizes that “strong ‘national feeling’ may take on a life of its own.” He insists, however, that “Great powers go to war over interests.” With “feeling” and “interests” presented as binary opposites, human behavior becomes impenetrable. The complexity of human motivation is an urgent problem in all of the social sciences. Garver’s title *Face Off* evokes an image of America and China staring each other down. Because he reduced motivation to a choice between sense and sensibility, however, Garver was limited in his ability to explore
why the Taiwan Strait Crisis occurred. Both power and pride motivated politicians in Washington and Beijing to play such a high-stakes game.

**Face** as a universal human concern can help us overcome the opposition of reason and passion common in social science, providing a more nuanced account of human motivation. There are both emotional and instrumental motivations for defending the “self shown to others.” As sociologist Erving Goffman, pioneer in the Western study of **face**, observes, “a person . . . catects his face; his feelings become attached to it.”27 People become emotionally attached to the image they present to the world. If **face** is assaulted, feelings are often hurt. But maintaining **face** also means maintaining authority. He who “loses face” loses status and the ability to pursue instrumental goals. An example of how emotions and authority both motivate public efforts to save **face** is the 1997 suspension of former Golden State Warriors basketball star Latrell Sprewell for physically assaulting his coach, P. J. Carlesimo, during a team practice. The athlete millionaire, it turns out, did not like his coach’s “in your face” style. The incident quickly became national news. Dennis Wolff, Boston University’s basketball coach, explained the dynamic: “If you tell a guy that you want him to improve his free-throw shooting, he takes it that you don’t like him. You know, ‘You’re dissing me’.28 . . . You can’t embarrass players in front of the group. . . . But if you allow guys to dictate to you it’s over.”29

In social settings—“in front of the group”—(dis)respect or saving **face** is no mere emotional matter: it is a way of maintaining authority. As Goffman has also noted: “Every day in many ways we can try to score points, and every day in many ways we can be shot down.”30 Both power and passion are implicated in such face-to-face combat.

**Face** can help us to understand how national identities are reshaped through international encounters and what the complex motivations are that drive nationalists. **Face** is not pretense; Chinese culture is not, as writer Ian Buruma asserts, a “culture of duplicity.”31 **Face** is present in all societies—even if many in the West are loath to admit as much—but it manifests differently in different contexts. “If a black coach kept coming after Sprewell after he said to stop, he would have been hit, too,” argues African-American studies scholar William Banks, “But a black coach probably would have known better, [s/he] would have understood that . . . some current players are operating on street rules.”32 “Street rules” likely refers to the social norms governing life in inner-city America—norms that are very different from those governing upper-middle-class suburbia. The former, for instance, demand a public response to being “dissed.” The latter assume precisely the opposite: that one disregard such “slights” as “be-
neath” one’s response. This culture clash may in part explain how the Golden State Warriors incident occurred: coming from very different subcultures, Sprewell and Carlesimo likely had very different understandings of the rules that should govern their interaction at team practices.

As “dissing” suggests, the language of face varies across both time and place. In the West, we are most familiar with the language of “honor.” In an elegant essay written almost seventy years ago, Hans Speier argued that, “A man’s honor neither springs from his personality nor clings to his deeds”; it has a “double aspect,” both dependent upon others’ valuations yet also independent and absolute. Speier maintains that our current preference for the latter over the former is the product of a specific historical circumstance: the bourgeoisie’s revolt against the nobility. “The modern individualistic notion of ‘personal honor,’ as independent from any others’ opinion, is a polemic conception which served the middle classes in their struggle to overthrow the feudal conception of honor. The conspicuously honorable behavior of the nobility was devaluated to mere gestures, irrelevant politeness . . . against which was set up a realm of ‘natural’ inner quality accessible to everyone alike.”33 This conflict is ably captured in the 1995 movie Rob Roy about an eighteenth-century Scotsman’s revolt against the local nobility. Liam Neeson, playing Rob Roy, explains to his son, “Honour is what no man can give you and none can take away .... Honour is a man’s gift to himself.” I disagree. Although we in the West may dislike it, honor, like face, depends in part on the opinions of others. In the movie, Rob Roy may reject the judgments of the nobility, but his honor depends in part on the respect his fellow Scotsmen confer upon him.

The language of honor is not just the stuff of Scottish legends; it continues to inform life in the West today, although it does so differently in different places. In their fascinating Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South, social psychologists Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen found that insults are a much more serious matter for Southerners than they are for Northerners. In a series of experiments conducted at the University of Michigan in 1995, students walking down a hallway were bumped into and called an “asshole!” Southern students were much more likely than northern students to respond aggressively to any subsequent affronts. For instance, Nisbett and Cohen sent their students down a hallway one at a time and had a burly football player walk down the center of the hall on a collision course towards them. Northerners were more likely to get out of the way quickly; Southerners were more willing to play “chicken” against the oncoming Wolverine. The differences were so
striking that Nisbett and Cohen suggest that the students may have interpreted the “asshole!” comment in qualitatively different ways. Northerners were likely to see the comment as reflecting upon the other person, not themselves, while Southerners were much more likely to take it personally as a question of masculine honor. If the norms regulating *face* can differ within one nation, they can certainly diverge between nations. The Chinese and American cultures of *face* are governed by very different sets of rules. Since foreign policy invariably involves the projection of domestic social norms onto the international arena, Americans and Chinese often expect international society to operate by the same rules that govern their own domestic societies. And because these rules often differ, the efforts of Americans and Chinese to maintain *face* on the international stage can easily become conflicts. Like Sprewell and Carlesimo, Americans and Chinese may take different expectations about appropriate conduct into their interpersonal and international encounters.

To better understand Chinese nationalism, Americans must understand the “rules of the game” that Chinese take into interpersonal and intergroup encounters. An interrogation of China’s *face* culture reveals the social norms that regulate the negotiation of identity and authority in China. Chinese views of *face* can be understood at two levels: *lian* and *mianzi*. Sociologist Hu Hsien-chin defines the former as “decency” or “good moral reputation” and the latter as an “extra reputation” achieved through social accomplishments. I focus on the social *mianzi*; my references to *face* in the Chinese context are thus to *mianzi*, not *lian*. Chinese discussions of *face* use theatrical allusions, suggesting performances before audiences of popular opinion, whether these are individuals or groups. A person or group may “give” *face* to another through public praise or deference, or it may “leave” another *face* by not publicly exposing a faux pas. Conversely, public criticism prevents one from “getting off the stage”—stuck in the spotlight of public scrutiny.

In Chinese, therefore, *face* is not always a bad thing. In English, however, *face* is invariably used as a pejorative, as in “two-faced.” It may be helpful for the Western reader to think of *face* as denoting the more neutral term “honor.” The “*face* game” is a battle over the zero-sum resource of social status. *Face* is thus fundamentally political, involving a contest over power. Parties vie for *face*. Indeed, the metaphor of exchange is implicit throughout *face* discourse, but even explicit at times: one can try to “buy” and “sell” *face*, for example, in exchange for goods and services. Transparent attempts to buy *face* are not always successful, as the nou-
veaux riches will readily attest. *Face* does not, therefore, imply that Asian political cultures are always “harmonious.” The idea that Japanese have a “wa culture” of harmony is as absurd as arguments that Japanese are born into a “samurai” or “kamikaze” culture of violence. All societies experience cooperation and conflict. China is no exception. Chinese will sacrifice relationships to protect *face*. It is not uncommon, for instance, to discover brothers who have lived in the same small village for years without talking. But *face* can also facilitate social intercourse. The fear of losing *face* can constrain behavior, promoting sincerity in social relations. The desire to maintain *face* can thus act as both a barrier to and a facilitator of social interaction.

The same is true of intergroup relations in general and international relations in particular. Experimental work in social psychology has convincingly demonstrated that as social beings we identify ourselves with groups, imbue these groups with positive value, and go to great lengths to maintain “ingroup positivity” or group *face*. Indeed, we can be very creative in our efforts to maintain *face* for our groups, altering comparisons that are threatening (“They may be good at X, but we are good at Y—and Y is more important”), shifting the values of group attributes (arguing that white society viewed “black” as ugly, the American “Black is beautiful” movement successfully challenged that view), changing the quality upon which two groups are compared (“They may have a strong economy, but we know how to party!”), and self-deception (“I think we’re stronger, so we are stronger”).

In China, such psychological acrobatics are widely associated with Ah Q, the famous protagonist of Lu Xun’s brilliant 1922 satire “The True Story of Ah Q.” China’s most famous twentieth-century writer, Lu Xun was highly critical of the negative influence a vain desire for *face* can have on Chinese behavior. Ah Q, his extreme caricature of this failing, is well known for his “psychological victory technique” by which he maintains an inflated sense of himself. For instance, after suffering humiliating public beatings, Ah Q frequently hits himself. Why? Ah Q sought to fool himself into thinking that he was actually giving—not receiving—a licking: “Presently [Ah Q] changed defeat into victory. Raising his right hand he slapped his own face hard, twice, so that it tingled with pain. After this slapping his heart felt lighter, for it seemed as if the one who had given the slap was himself, the slapped one some other self, and soon it was just as if he had beaten someone else—in spite of the fact that his face was still tingling. He lay down satisfied that he had gained the victory.” Turning defeats into victories, Lu Xun suggests, allows Ah Q to save face. Na-
tionalists everywhere frequently engage in such face-saving self-deception. Many Chinese narratives of Sino-American and Sino-Japanese military encounters, we shall see, transform defeats into heroic victories with an Ah Q–like magic. Such subtleties allow the authors of these accounts to maintain face.

To repeat, the universal desire to save face is not necessarily a source of conflict. Desires to maintain national face can even promote peaceful diplomacy. Contrary to the views of many liberals and realists in international relations, Chinese, Japanese, and Americans are neither innately pacifist nor hardwired for conflict. Instead, history and culture shape how we will construe and react to the events of world politics. It is the actions of individuals that will determine whether our need to view our nations positively—our need to save face—will lead to cooperation or conflict in twenty-first century East Asia.

American Arrogance and Chinese Vanity

Chinese contains a rich popular vocabulary for criticizing those who are too “thick-skinned” or “thin-skinned.” Individuals with “thick skin” (lianpi hou) are resistant to popular censure. The more serious accusation that an individual “doesn’t want face” (buyaolian) condemns individual profit-seeking as a selfish lack of concern for society. The charge that an individual “has no face” (meiyoulian) is even more severe: without a conscience, the individual has lost his or her humanity. The “thin-skinned,” by contrast, have an excessive concern for social approbation. “Si yao mianzi huo shouzui” refers contemptuously to an irrational willingness to suffer to maintain or gain face. Efforts to “put on airs” (yao mianzi or zhuang menmianr) are ridiculed as “hitting your cheeks to appear healthy/fat” (da zhonglian yun pangzi), and as “ringing hollow” (diqu buzhu).

China’s leaders are often too thin-skinned before domestic audiences and too thick-skinned before foreigners. They have been intolerant of domestic criticism, suppressing it brutally. The Tiananmen massacre is but one example of such thin-skinned behavior. However, Beijing’s elite often appear to disdain international opinion by lying to foreigners. PLA chief Chi Haotian’s 1996 claim that “I can tell you in a responsible and serious manner that not a single person lost his life in Tiananmen Square,” for instance, is an example of thick-skinned behavior before international audiences, who, Chi surely realizes, witnessed the massacre on their own television sets.
The more common dynamic in Sino-American relations, however, is a thick-skinned Washington and a thin-skinned Beijing. Unilateral American policies are often insufficiently attentive to Chinese opinion. Chinese elites, for their part, often appear overly sensitive about Chinese face, seemingly demanding that America petition China for approval before setting its Asia policies. American arrogance and Chinese vanity can even upset bilateral relations when American and Chinese interests and goals are congruent. Former Assistant Secretary of State John Holdridge has recently related, for example, how he received a tongue-lashing from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs during an official trip to Beijing in 1982. Although he had come to personally announce a unilateral U.S. concession—giving in on F-5 jet sales to Taiwan—China’s diplomats were angry: “They were upset because China had not been a major player in the sequence of events leading up to my visit.”

Process matters. Until Chinese and Americans learn to interact more harmoniously on the world stage, their common interest in a stable Asia-Pacific will not ensure peace in the twenty-first century.

A Confucian saying holds that “Petty people are irascible. If you draw close to them they are contemptuous of you. But if you are distant from them, they bitterly complain [xiaoren wei nan yang ye, jinzhi ze buxun, yuanzhi ze nu].” This book will reveal that China’s parochial nationalists often act like such “petty people.” When Westerners are accommodating, they are contemptuous. Nationalist Li Fang, for instance, wrote vainly in 1996 that “every American president now comes running obsequiously to China to make his report.” When Westerners are firm with China, however, many parochial nationalists angrily denounce the West as a big bully. In another article in the same magazine Li Fang vehemently denounces Americans as “arrogant, boastful, and showoffs.”

Fortunately, most Chinese would likely agree with the Analects’ dictum that “a superior man is broad-minded, whereas a petty person is always resentful.” They recognize, as the Analects also cautions, that “Intolerance of minor insults will ruin great projects.” If they are secure in the belief that China’s national face is respected in the international community, the Chinese people will marginalize parochial nationalists like Li Fang and demand that their leaders behave like superior men.
Washington Times national security correspondent Bill Gertz has dark suspicions about Chinese intentions: his writings are distinguished by the fears and fantasies that he projects onto China. In his 2000 book *The China Threat: How the People’s Republic Targets America*, Gertz argues that “the China threat is real and growing.” “The true nature of Chinese communism,” he asserts, is the same as that of all dictatorships: “military aggression.” Gertz goes on to equate engagement policies with appeasement: “the Clinton-Gore administration treated China the way Chamberlain treated Hitler.” Fears about a declining West become manifest when Gertz asserts that Clinton’s engagement policy was “ridiculed by China’s communist leaders as the abject weakness of a decaying Western society.” Gertz, it appears, has direct access to a sinister “Chinese mind,” about which he must warn the West. Gertz clearly identifies with Notra Trulock, a former Energy Department official that Gertz claims was harassed for exposing the alleged Chinese theft of American nuclear secrets, and
other such Cassandras, whom he calls his “heroes”: “Notra Trulock had dared to challenge the pro-China policies of Bill Clinton. . . . No good deed goes unpunished, as they say.”2 Substitute “Gertz” for “Trulock” and one can see how Gertz might conceive himself to be a valiant defender of American security, struggling fearlessly against China and those who would “appease” it.

Suspect as they may be, the writings of Gertz and other American China bashers should not be dismissed lightly. Like all identities, Chinese and American identities are dynamic, evolving in part through their mutual interactions. Because Chinese nationalists care intensely about China’s “international image” (guoji xingxiang) and do not want any dirty laundry exposed in public, they pay close attention to the Western press. It is no coincidence that one of the very ugliest of China’s anti-American diatribes, 1997’s The Plot to Demonize China, focuses on real and imagined anti-China schemers in the Western press. Coauthor Li Xiguang, a New China News Agency reporter, even harbors a strong grudge against the rather pro-China Washington Post, where he spent several months as a visiting fellow.3 Chinese nationalists pay close attention to Gertz and other American China bashers.4 Accordingly, Gertz and others like him have a disproportionate impact on the shape and evolution of Chinese nationalism.

Disciplining America

The back cover of a special 1996 issue of the provincial Chinese magazine Love Our China displays smiling pictures of former Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, PLA chief Chi Haotian, and Trade Minister Wu Yi juxtaposed with unflattering pictures of their American counterparts: Warren Christopher, William Perry, and Charlene Barshefsky. A header in bold type declares, “A Colossus and a Bandit Test Their Strengths.” The subhead explains, “The grand rules of Sino-American relations are that the kind discipline [chengjie] the barbaric.” China’s role as disciplinarian is highlighted by a large picture of a People’s Liberation Army infantryman on the Chinese side of the page thrusting his bayonet towards the American “barbarians.”

Such imagery inverts the “King Kong syndrome” satirized by Rey Chow, in which the U.S. media, Washington politicians, and Hollywood frequently construct China as a “primitive monster” that the West must punish.5 The Bill Gertzes, Tom DeLays and Richard Geres of the West repeatedly depict China as the last bastion of despotism, thus positioning
themselves as freedom fighters. American ideologues have long deployed the foil of Chinese tyranny to argue the virtues of American liberty.\textsuperscript{6}

As the example from \textit{Love Our China} reveals, however, the roles can be reversed: China can discipline too.\textsuperscript{7} Just as many in the West use the “Orient” to define themselves, many in the East use the “Occident” to the same ends. The text on the back cover of \textit{Love Our China}, for instance, begins with some contrasts: “China has 5,000 years of civilized history . . . while America has only 200 years of history.” It then turns to insults: “Facing an ancient Eastern colossus, America is at most a child.” “Emotion-cues,” sociologist Candace Clark reminds us, “can be used to manipulate, reminding and counter-reminding each other of judgments of the proper place.”\textsuperscript{8}

By “altercasting” America as a child, China can play the superior elder. “Altercasting,” a basic technique of interpersonal control, involves the projection and manipulation of identities onto others to serve one’s own goals.\textsuperscript{9}

Following Edward Said’s discussion of “Orientalism,” Chen Xiaomei has labeled such Chinese uses of the West “Occidentalism,” a “deeply rooted practice [in China] of alluding to the Occident as a contrasting Other in order to define whatever one believes to be distinctively ‘Chinese.’”\textsuperscript{10} Reversals of the relative status of China and the United States appear in descriptions of Sino-American relations that invoke relational metaphors. The teacher-student relationship, for instance, is a prominent metaphor in Chinese writings about America. Chinese as diverse as Sun Yat-sen, Chen Duxiu, and Mao Zedong all at one point looked to America as a “teacher” to be emulated. In 1904 future president Sun Yat-sen wrote, “We . . . must appeal to the people of the civilized world in general and the people of the United States in particular, for your sympathy and support . . . because we intend to model our new government after yours.” May Fourth intellectuals also looked to America as a teacher. In 1918 Chen Duxiu, soon to be founder of the Chinese Communist Party, wrote glowingly of Woodrow Wilson: “All the speeches made by President Woodrow Wilson of the United States are open and above board. He can be regarded as the best man in the world.” Prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, Mao Zedong also viewed America as a teacher. In 1946 Zhou Enlai told American General George Marshall that “It has been rumored that Chairman Mao is going to pay a visit to Moscow. On learning this, Chairman Mao laughed and remarked . . . that he would rather go to the United States, because he thinks that he can learn lots of things useful to China.”\textsuperscript{11} However, Mao soon became disillusioned and revolted against mentor America, whom he claimed had bullied, rather than instructed, student China.
Like Mao, today’s young Chinese nationalists also claim to have rebelled against an America they figure as teacher. At the beginning of the 1996 anti-American sensation *China Can Say No*, Song Qiang confesses that in the 1980s he “worshipped” Ronald Reagan. By the 1990s, however, Song had come to view pro-American sentiment as an “infectious disease” to be purged.\(^\text{12}\) In “Our Generation’s America Complex,” Li Fang similarly depicts America as a “teacher to rebel against.”\(^\text{13}\) Wen Ming is indignant in the *Beijing Review*, writing that Americans “think they are the chosen people and have the right to teach others.”\(^\text{14}\) Young Chinese are increasingly rebelling against their chosen teacher.

Many Chinese nationalists today clearly want to exchange roles within their teacher-student relationship with America. In 1996, Guan Shijie wrote in the English language *China Daily* that “the time has come for the West to learn from the East. The West should switch positions, and the teacher should become a student.” This statement is both ironic and disappointing, because Guan is the director of “International and Intercultural Communications” at Beijing University, the birthplace of political liberalism in China.\(^\text{15}\) His longing seems widespread, however, and is often revealed indirectly in seemingly apolitical discussions of the Chinese and English languages. For example, 1997’s *Dragon History*, a psychoautobiography written by members of the “fourth generation” of Chinese in their thirties, contains a section entitled “Whitey, Please Study Chinese.” The author recounts an experience that he had reading a Chinese language textbook written for foreigners. One sentence read, “I’m determined to study the English language well. If I don’t learn it well, I won’t be able to find a spouse.” Reading this line made the Chinese author feel “suffocated and resentful.” He then shares a fantasy with his readers: “The sentence would clearly be much more enchanting if you just replaced the word ‘English’ with the word ‘Chinese.’”\(^\text{16}\) He thus expresses his desire for an inversion within the hierarchy, with China taking the superior position.\(^\text{17}\)

Another way China’s young nationalists revolt against the United States is by reversing the roles in another relationship metaphor: that of father and son. By depicting America as a child, China can be the father. After a lengthy tirade against American arrogance, for example, nationalist Li Fang sets things right by declaring that “America is still a child.” He then relishes a discussion of his Singaporean brothers “whipping American ass.”\(^\text{18}\) (In 1994, American teenager Michael Fay was lashed four times as punishment for the crime of vandalism.) In his section of *China Can Say No*, Qiao Bian similarly declares the United States a “spoiled child” who
changes the rules in order to win. Again, altercasting America in the role of child, Li and Qiang depict China as a parent—and clearly believe that parents have both the right and responsibility to discipline their children.

Chinese national identity, in sum, is constructed in part through the ways that Chinese think and write about America. Ambivalence about their status vis-à-vis the United States is reflected in the use popular nationalists make of teacher-student and father-son metaphors to describe Sino-American relations. What Jin Niu has labeled a “teacher-student complex” (shi-sheng qingjie) is still pervasive in Chinese attitudes towards America, revealing Chinese anxieties about their own identity and position in international society. Indeed, the West is central to the construction of Chinese identity today: it has become China’s alter ego. As the sole superpower of the post–Cold War world, America symbolizes the West for China and for much of the rest of the non-Western world. For many, the global reach of American culture, industry, and military might make America the Occident.

However, although the United States provides China with an important foil, Americans are not ideal objects for Chinese identity dialectics, because they are so racially and culturally different from Chinese. It is simply too difficult for many Chinese to identify with “Western devils” (yang guizi). The father-son relationship used to reinforce Chinese superiority over America is less prominent in describing relations with Japan, where an older brother–younger brother metaphor is more typical. Perhaps the greater distance between fathers and sons feels more appropriate for the Sino-American relationship, whereas greater similarity allows the Sino-Japanese relationship to be captured by the older brother–younger brother metaphor. Thus, although an assumption of fundamental difference underlies many Chinese writings about the West in general and about the United States in particular, an assumption of similarity underlies many Chinese writings about Japan.

Japan, China’s Occident

Japan is not geographically west of China, but Chinese often include Japan in both the noun and adjective “Xifang”—“the West” and “Western.” It is through Japan that Chinese have sought both to learn from the West and to understand themselves. That the idea and even the title for the popular 1996 anti-American book China Can Say No was inspired by Ishihara Shintaro and Morita Akio’s 1989 anti-American The Japan that Says No is
emblematic of Japan’s continuing centrality to Chinese identity. Indeed, Japan has served as the primary reference point from which modern Chinese have defined themselves. Although America has come to represent the West *par excellence* for post–Cold War Chinese (and most non-Western peoples), Japan’s proximity to China, the racial and cultural similarities Japanese share with the Chinese, and Japan’s extensive interactions with China in the modern period justify its designation as “China’s Occident.” The vital analogue and inspiration for such a designation is historian Stefan Tanaka’s 1993 argument that China has served as “Japan’s Orient.” Tanaka argues that prewar Japanese used “the West and Asia as other(s) to construct their own sense of a Japanese nation as modern and oriental.” Chinese nationalists similarly use Japan and “the Occident” to build their own visions of China and its proper place in the world.

Because of the centrality of Japan to Chinese national identity, histories of Sino-Japanese relations raise extremely sensitive issues. Many Chinese assume a moral right to control discussions of the subject. The Shanghai Academy of Social Science’s Wang Hailiang, for instance, reacted strongly to Yamada Tatsuo’s 1994 history of Japan-China relations. Writing in a 1996 *Asia-Pacific Forum*, Wang declares that Yamada’s views are “incorrect” and “cannot be accepted.” Wang is angered that Yamada characterizes the second half of the nineteenth century as a period of “mutual reliance,” and the twenty years centering around 1900 as an era of Japanese assistance to Chinese revolutionaries. Like numerous Chinese, Wang maintains that Japan, a “hungry wolf on the prowl” (*elang bushi*), had expansionist aims directed at China ever since the Meiji Restoration of 1868. To say that Japan assisted Chinese revolutionaries is “like saying that the Japanese made modern Chinese history.” Wang’s rage, however, is reserved for what he calls Yamada’s search for an “objective explanation” for World War II: “Research all you want and you won’t be able to change World War II’s evil nature. . . . Invasion is invasion!”

Many Chinese seem happier with Chinese histories of Sino-Japanese relations, or, better yet, with cooperative histories dominated by Chinese. The 1982 movie *The Go Masters*, about Chinese and Japanese “*weiqi*” or “*go*” players, is a fascinating example of such a joint project. A match set in 1924 is interrupted by World War II and not completed until thirty years later, on the Great Wall, symbolizing the triumph of Chinese civilization. Chinese moral superiority is also the subject of the film’s many interpersonal relationships. A Chinese magnanimously forgives a repentant Japanese classmate after a fight. And masculine and feminine roles are also used to indicate Chinese dominance, as the son of the Chinese
protagonist and the daughter of the Japanese protagonist fall in love. She is assimilated to Chinese culture, reaffirming Chinese superiority. Although Chinese clearly controlled *The Go Masters* project, Japanese participation confirmed Chinese *face* claims.

The closely intertwined nature of modern Chinese and Japanese history accounts for the unique way Chinese talk about their country’s “friendship” with Japan. Although such phrases as “Sino-Japanese friendship” are frequently used by Chinese writers to remind Japanese of their indebtedness to China, they also confirm positive Chinese views of themselves.\(^\text{24}\) Therefore, such phrases also contribute to Chinese productions of *face*. An example of how this works may be seen in the reaction of a group from the Institute for Japanese Studies at China’s Liaoning University to a two-week tour of Japan in 1990. Writing in *Japanese Studies*, they claimed to have been overcome by the “friendliness” of their Japanese hosts. One incident, they write, particularly “warmed our hearts.” Visiting a Japanese elementary school, they were greeted by “childish hellos” in Chinese.\(^\text{25}\) This greeting was probably moving to the Chinese visitors because it reinforced a positive self-image of themselves as parents to Japanese culture at a time when the shock of witnessing first-hand the high Japanese standard of living was likely challenging their national self-esteem.

In contrast, when Chinese project negative self-images onto Japanese observers, it is with the anger of those who expect friendship but receive rejection. A Chinese survey provides a telling example of such projection. Administered to over 1,000 Chinese in Shanghai in 1996, the survey included the question, “How do Japanese view Chinese?” Reporting on their results in Fudan University’s *Japan Research Quarterly*, researchers Chen Jian’an, Xu Jingbo, and Hu Lingyun note that 54 percent responded “with disdain,” while only 27 percent responded “respectfully.” The result surprised the authors, who open their article by indignantly asserting that “Westerners see both Chinese and Japanese as ‘Orientals.’ . . . This is a mistake.”\(^\text{26}\) The idea that Westerners might group Chinese together with Japanese infuriates them, but it originates not with Westerners, but with Chinese. The authors of the survey, by asking Chinese to imagine how others view them (clearly a recipe for projection) have set themselves up to be outraged.\(^\text{27}\) It is noteworthy that the authors’ response to the questionnaire results was to reject a distressing similarity to the Japanese that they had projected onto Westerners.

Indeed, Chinese can declare both similarity and difference with Japanese either to resist the West or to win praise from it. Similarity with Japan
is often emphasized to create a “yellow Asia” in opposition to the “white West.” Japan is especially useful as an example of non-Western modernization, satisfying the nationalist imperative to distinguish between modernization and Westernization.\textsuperscript{28} For instance, Gao Zengjie writes in *Japanese Studies* that discussions of Chinese and Japanese differences are based upon the premise of commonalities, which he then enumerates. “Chinese and Japanese scholars,” Gao concludes, “agree that modernization is not the same as ‘Westernization.’”\textsuperscript{29} Feng Zhaokui, Gao’s colleague at the Institute for Japanese Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and China’s foremost expert on Japanese economics and technology, also utilizes Japan in this manner in his section of the 1993 *Japan’s Experience and China’s Reforms*. Feng argues strongly against the idea, which he ascribes to “the West,” that China’s transition towards a market economy means that China is becoming like the West. Such a view, he declares, is a Western “disorder” (maobing). Feng then lists similarities between China and Japan to demonstrate that the Chinese, like the Japanese, do not need to Westernize to modernize. He cites Japan’s use of economic planning during its postwar takeoff to claim that, “just as the ‘market’ is not monopolized by capitalism (socialism also has markets); the ‘plan’ is not monopolized by socialism (capitalism also has ‘plans’).” His nationalist reaction to his impression of the West’s impression of China even leads him to assert by the end of the chapter that “socialism is better than capitalism at integrating the plan and the market.”\textsuperscript{30} Similarity between China and Japan is thus used to create an Asia better than the West. Chinese superiority can also be established by depicting Japanese culture as similar to but derivative of Chinese civilization. As democracy activist Wei Jingsheng told writer Ian Buruma, “The Orient is China. Japan is just an appendage.”\textsuperscript{31}

However, to make the same argument that China is superior to the West, Chinese can also emphasize Japan’s differences with China, and sometimes cast these differences as culturally Western. For example, in the 1996 *China Can Still Say No* Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang and their coauthors insist on Chinese differences from the Japanese to assert Chinese superiority: “There is a saying that Japanese and Chinese are ‘of the same culture and same race.’ But I don’t believe that Japanese are the descendants of Chinese. Although they also use Chinese characters and preserve some things from Chinese culture, Japanese lack Chinese generosity, kindheartedness, and modesty. Theirs is a different kind of blood.”\textsuperscript{32} In their 1997 psycho-autobiography *The Spirit of the Fourth Generation*, Song and his coauthors identify Japan with the West, asserting that the
Japanese “economic animals” are the “eastern heroes” of “Western materialism,” inferior to “Eastern harmony.”

Many Chinese seem to move easily between depicting the Japanese as same and viewing them as different. In his Brief History of Sino-Japanese Friendship, for example, Ge Xin first writes that “looking over the history of friendship between the Chinese and Japanese peoples, Chinese have given more to Japanese than Japanese have given to Chinese.” He thus establishes the difference between generous Chinese and the stingy, ungrateful Japanese. In the same paragraph, however, Ge continues, “Japanese enterprise management thought, greatly esteemed by all the nations of the world, mostly comes from Confucius, Mencius, and Sun Zi’s Art of War.” Ge, easily moving between depictions of Japan’s difference from and similarity to China, shows how both may be used to identify China with Japan in ways that gain face for China before world opinion. China both becomes superior to Japan and basks in its reflected glory.

Like Chinese writings about America, Chinese discussions of Sino-Japanese relations often invoke the Confucian “five relationships.” The teacher-student and older brother–younger brother metaphors are particularly prominent. Altercasting Japan in the inferior role makes China its superior. For example, in his 1997 diatribe Why Japan Won’t Settle Accounts, Li Zhengtang argues that for hundreds of years China was Japan’s “benevolent teacher.” In the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, however, “China lost to her ‘student.’ ” He then asks, “How can we sons and grandsons of the Yellow Emperors forget for a moment this great racial insult?” Li himself has not forgotten. The righteous Japan bashing expressed throughout Why Japan Won’t Settle Accounts suggests that Li believes the “student” should be put back in his proper place. Li’s anger seeks to reconstruct the correct teacher-student hierarchy with China in the superior position.

In a more dispassionate academic account of the issue by Jiang Lifeng and a few of his colleagues at the Institute for Japanese Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the older brother–younger brother metaphor is used to the same ends. This relationship metaphor seems particularly suited to the Sino-Japanese relationship. According to Jiang, China and Japan may fight, but they are still “brothers” sharing the “same culture and blood” (tong wen tong zhong). At issue is their “relative position.” During the ancient period, China was superior and relations were “harmonious.” In the early modern period, however, Japan became superior and a “competitive” politics damaged Sino-Japanese relations. Although Jiang and his coauthors do not explicitly state what the brothers’
current relative positions are or should be, their view is revealed indirectly. Writing about the nations’ respective attitudes toward their common history, for instance, they argue that the Japanese “seek psychological equality” by evading responsibility for World War II. This position implies China’s current moral superiority. Jiang and his colleagues are also angered by the “high posture” they believe Japan has taken towards China since the mid-1990s, contending that the Japanese want to establish a “superior position.”

Chinese nationalists are very sensitive about issues of hierarchy and power in Sino-Japanese relations. Historian Arif Dirlik argues that when Chinese speak of “two thousand years of Sino-Japanese friendship” they seek to remind the Japanese of Japan’s cultural indebtedness to China. The same logic applies when Chinese claim that China and Japan are neighbors separated by “a mere belt of water” (yi yi dai shui). The phrase uses proximity to claim Chinese hegemony. Dirlik’s statement that “For the Chinese . . . history (as culture) represents a means of bringing symmetry to . . . an ‘asymmetric’ relationship,” is questionable, however. “Symmetry” suggests equality. The prevalence of teacher-student and older brother–younger brother metaphors in Chinese discussions of Sino-Japanese relations suggests that many Chinese see Japanese as morally inferior to them—not as equals.

A Clash of Civilizations?

Chinese identity does not exist in isolation. It evolves through the ways Chinese perceive their interactions with other nations, and especially through the ways they perceive their relations with the United States and Japan. Samuel Huntington’s clash-of-civilizations argument provoked heated debate in mid-1990s China. Many Chinese pundits were upset by Huntington’s idea of an Islamic-Confucian alliance against the West. Huntington, they argued, was paranoid: fearful about America’s decline, he resorted to China bashing. But anger alone did not sustain the Huntington sensation in China. The idea of a clash between East and West pleased many Chinese nationalists, who embraced the image of China Huntington provided: “They see us as a threat! We’ve finally regained our great power status!”

Huntington’s focus on race and culture also struck a chord with Chinese intellectuals, who have long defined “modern” Chinese history as beginning with the mid-nineteenth-century arrival of Western imperial-
ism in China. Wang Jisi, Director of the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, explained the appeal of Huntington to Chinese intellectuals: “An important reason Huntington’s theory has provoked so much discussion in China is that his prediction of a clash of civilizations echoes a debate that has been going on within China for over a hundred years which revolves around a most sensitive issue for the Chinese: Are Chinese and Western cultures headed for convergence or collision? . . . As he sees it, the clash of civilizations is like the clash of national interests: Either the west wind prevails over the east wind, or vice versa. There can be no room for accommodation or convergence.” Many Chinese nationalists fear that modernization will lead to “peaceful evolution”: cultural convergence or Westernization. By reifying cultural differences, Huntington creates space for a non-Western but modern China.

More importantly, however, Huntington confirmed Chinese nationalists’ assertions that the West is in decline and that the twenty-first century will be China’s era. In a 1995 issue of *World Affairs* (Beijing), Jin Junhui quotes Huntington on the rise of the non-West (in Jin’s eyes, China)—“the peoples and governments of non-Western civilizations no longer remain the objects of history, as targets of Western colonialism, but join the West as movers and shapers of history.” He continues that “Even as one criticizes the ‘Clash of Civilizations,’ . . . we should not be blind to some of Huntington’s more incisive points.” Indeed, many Chinese read Huntington as arguing that China—not Islam—is the greatest threat to America. Writing in the influential *Reading* (Beijing) magazine in 1997, for example, Li Shenzhi asserts that Huntington states that “Chinese civilization is Western civilization’s number one enemy.” This view allowed readers like Li to view China as the number two power of the post–Cold War era. The reason for the demonization of China, Li further maintains, lies in Huntington’s fears about the decline of the West: “This is unmistakably the tone of someone with no other choice, someone defending himself in retreat.” He then revels in a description of the decline of the West: “Even though this U.S. melting pot has melted down all kinds of ethnic groups from Europe during the past 200 years . . . it is now clear that there are too many ingredients, too little old sauce, and not enough heat. The pot is also too small and unable to melt down the increasingly diverse ingredients.” Huntington confirms a Chinese nationalist vision of America declining while China rises.

Such efforts to contrast a good China with an evil West are not confined to elite academic discourse, but inform popular culture as well.
The 1993 mainland Chinese television series *A Beijinger in New York* depicted the trials and tribulations of Chinese businessman Wang Qiming (played by Jiang Wen, China’s most popular and virile actor of the time) as he made his way in the dog-eat-dog world of New York City. The series was perhaps most astonishing for its repeated racist depictions of America. At one point, for instance, Wang yells, “Fuck them! They were still monkeys up in the trees while we were already human beings. Look at how hairy they are, they’re not as evolved as us.” At another crescendo in the action, Wang hires a buxom blond prostitute and has his way with her with a vengeance. The series was a hit. Less sensationally, but perhaps more significantly, the show was notable for its repeated efforts to construct a positive Chinese national identity at America’s expense. America is depicted as a place of mean-spirited conflict and self-interest; China, in contrast, is seen as a land of harmony and warm-hearted beneficence. David McCarthy, Wang’s chief American rival in business and love, epitomizes American avarice and ruthlessness. By the end of the Wang-McCarthy Sino-American contest, however, Wang has succeeded in business and love. McCarthy affirms Wang’s victory and Chinese superiority by heading off to China to teach English.

The Sino-Western encounter also ends with Chinese victory in Mo Yan’s 1995 *Large Breasts and Full Hips*—but the Westerner emerges from the encounter dead. Author of *Red Sorghum* (which director Zhang Yimou later made into a hit movie), Mo Yan tells a complex and dark tale of rape, humiliation, and suicide. The story centers upon a Western missionary’s affair with a Chinese woman—and the affront this represents to male Chinese pride. China is redeemed, however, when a Chinese bandit calls the priest a “monkey”—“you’re a bastard from a screwing between a man and a chimp”—shoots the priest in the legs, and forces him to watch as he rapes the Chinese woman. The priest, humiliated, then commits suicide. Humiliated by past Western aggressions, China turns the tables, humiliating the West and getting its revenge. Both *A Beijinger* and *Large Breasts* thus depict the Sino-Western encounter as a violent contest over female bodies. Female suffering is secondary to the authors’ primary concern: regaining face for male Chinese at the West’s expense. China’s self-image is forged within a “clash of civilizations,” a dialogic process of comparison with and distinction from other nations—and China always wins.
“The sleeping lion has awoken, erasing the national humiliation,” reads the calligraphy above Xia Ziyi’s 1996 painting *The Awakened Lion*. Painted in anticipation of Hong Kong’s 1997 “return to the Motherland,” Xia’s roaring lion, with bared fangs and angry eyes, does not seem humiliated or ashamed. What is the relationship between the humiliation discussed in the calligraphy and the rage of the lion? Although Marxists as diverse as Kautsky, Luxembourg, and Lenin viewed nationalism as an instrument utilized by the ruling classes to divide and conquer the working classes, Karl Marx himself used psychology to explain it: “Shame is a kind of anger turned in on itself. And if a whole nation were to feel ashamed it would be like a lion recoiling in order to spring.”¹ China’s past “national humiliation” at the hands of Western imperialism, Xia seems to argue, can be “erased” with an angry roar.

Why does Xia choose a lion, rather than the usual dragon, to symbolize China? He is not alone in doing so. Today’s Chinese nationalists...
frequently depict China as a lion. The editors of the 1996 *Cartoon Sayings of Deng Xiaoping* show China as a lion in a cartoon illustrating one of Deng’s sayings on the importance of independence and self-reliance. Dwarfed by a giant lion, frightened Westerners with top hats and big noses declare, “The sleeping lion has awoken!” and run for their lives. Xi Yongjun and Ma Zaizhun’s 1996 *Surpassing the USA* suggests an answer to the puzzle. In chapter 7, “The Sleeping Lion Has Been Infuriated,” they write: “The French hero Napoleon long ago said, ‘Asia’s China is a sleeping lion. Once it awakes, it will shake the entire world.’ The sleeping lion of the East has already awoken to an obsessively ambitious America, and has roared.”² By choosing to represent China as a lion, Xi, Ma, and perhaps Xia and the *Deng Sayings* cartoonists have chosen to recall Napoleon’s famous view of China. Why do they go out of their way to appropriate a foreigner’s view of China? Why not assert China’s resurgence in their own terms and images? I suggest that the views of respected Westerners like Samuel Huntington and Napoleon are central to Chinese views of themselves. And Napoleon’s image of China as a sleeping lion allows Chinese nationalists to put the past to good use: because sleeping lions do not sleep forever, Chinese can be confident that China will be strong and prosperous again.

The Weight of the Past

In addition to evolving to cope with the demands of present-day Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations, Chinese national identity evolves to cope with the burden of the past. The crucial national narrative of the “Century of Humiliation” (bainian guochi) from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century is central to Chinese nationalism today. What is the relationship between the past and the nationalisms of the present? One view holds that the past determines the present. The Kosovo conflict was frequently depicted as “intractable” because of Muslim-Christian enmity dating back to the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, when the Muslim Turks defeated the Christian kingdom of Serbia. In his 1992 *The Tyranny of History*, an intensely personal reaction to the Tiananmen massacre, W. J. F. Jenner accounts for Chinese identity using a similar argument: “China is caught in a . . . prison of history.”³ The weight of the past, it seems, is particularly heavy in China. Jenner thus pessimistically predicted, incorrectly, that the “Party is over.” According to him, the CCP could not last long.
Another view, held by most scholars of nationalism today, maintains precisely the opposite: that historians writing in the present determine the past. Following in historian Eric Hobsbawm’s footsteps, most China scholars have stressed how Chinese historians “invent” histories and traditions to serve contemporary ends. In his fascinating study of the 1900 Boxer Rebellion, historian Paul Cohen discusses how Chinese historians “draw on [the past] to serve the political, ideological, rhetorical, and/or emotional needs of the present.” Cohen cites the People’s Daily, which in 1990 sought to combat post-Tiananmen Western sanctions by commemorating the ninetieth anniversary of the Boxer Rebellion with several articles describing the brutality of the foreign armies that marched on Beijing in 1900. Cultural critic Geremie Barmé even goes so far as to assert that “Every policy shift in recent Chinese history has involved the rehabilitation, re-evaluation and revision of history and historical figures.” There is little doubt that China’s rulers have long used the past to serve the present. By privileging the present, however, such approaches often end up trivializing the way the weight of the past shapes nationalism today.

The concept of national “narratives” can help us better understand the role of the past in nationalist politics today. Narratives are the stories we tell about our pasts. These stories, psychologists have argued, infuse our identities with unity, meaning, and purpose. We cannot, therefore, radically change them at will. Far from being simple tools of our invention, the stories we tell about the past both constrain and are constrained by what we do in the present. Simply put, the storied nature of social life provides our identities with meaning. “Identities,” Stuart Hall notes, “are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves in, the narratives of the past.” Hall’s “positioned by, and position ourselves in” nicely captures the balance of agency and constraint in the relationship between individuals and their constitutive narratives. Thus, whereas the past loses any causal weight of its own when it is depicted as an easily malleable tool in the hands of nationalist historians, and the present becomes a prisoner of the past in deterministic approaches, the concept of narrative allows for an interdependent relationship between past and present in nationalist practice.

In particular, narratives about the “Century of Humiliation” frame the ways that Chinese interact with the West today. This period begins with China’s defeat in the First Opium War and the British acquisition of Hong Kong in 1842. The period was marked by major wars between China and
Western powers or Japan: the two Opium Wars of 1839–1842 and 1856–1860, the Sino-Japanese “Jiawu” War of 1894–1895, the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, and the “War of Resistance against Japan” of 1931/1937–1945. Many educated Chinese today are painfully aware of the “unequal treaties” signed with the British at Nanjing in 1842 and the Japanese at Shimonskei in 1895. Unilateral concessions forced on the Chinese in these treaties, such as indemnities, extraterritoriality, and foreign settlements in the treaty ports, are still perceived as humiliating losses of sovereignty. Other symbols of the period still resonate with today’s nationalists. The stone ruins of the Old Summer Palace outside Beijing, looted and burned by Europeans in 1860, are a reminder of the “rape” of China. Lin Zexu, a famous Chinese crusader against opium and British aggression, still stands for Chinese courage and virtue.

The “Century of Humiliation” is neither an objective past that works insidiously in the present nor a mere “invention” of present-day nationalist entrepreneurs. Instead, the “Century” is a continuously reworked narrative about the national past central to the contested and evolving meaning of being “Chinese” today.

Furthermore, the “Century” is a traumatic and foundational moment because it fundamentally challenged Chinese views of the world. In Chinese eyes, earlier invaders became Chinese, while barbarians beyond the border paid humble tribute to “civilization” (wenming). Both practices reinforced a view of Chinese civilization as universal and superior. Early encounters with “big noses,” from Marco Polo to pre-nineteenth-century European and American traders and missionaries, did not challenge this view. “Our ancient neighbors,” writes one young Chinese nationalist, “found glory in drawing close to Chinese civilization.” The violent nineteenth-century encounter with the “West” was different. The “Central Kingdom” was not only defeated militarily, but was also confronted by a civilization with universalist pretensions of its own. “The Western impact,” writes Tu Weiming, “fundamentally dislodged Chinese intellectuals from their Confucian haven . . . [creating a] sense of impotence, frustration, and humiliation.” The “Western devils” (yang guizi) had a civilization of their own that challenged the universality and superiority of Confucian civilization. The traumatic confrontation between East and West fundamentally destabilized Chinese views of the world and their place within it. “Trauma brings about a lapse or rupture in memory that breaks continuity with the past,” writes historian Dominick LaCapra in a discussion of the Holocaust. “It unsettles narcissistic investments and desired self-images.” Just as the trauma of the Holocaust led many in
the postwar West to reexamine their tradition, the “Century” threatened a Chinese identity based upon the idea of a universal and superior civilization.17 “The Israelis’ vision of the Holocaust has shaped their idea of themselves,” Tom Segev writes, “just as their changing sense of self has altered their view of the Holocaust and their understanding of its meaning.”18 Since stories about the past both limit and define our national identities in the present, the same is true of the Chinese and the “Century of Humiliation”: Chinese visions of the “Century” have shaped their sense of self, and these changes to Chinese identity have altered their views of the “Century.”

Today, Chinese struggles to come to terms with this period of trauma are reflected in the emergence of new narratives about the “Century.” Under Mao, China’s pre-“Liberation” (1949) sufferings were blamed on the feudalism of the Qing Dynasty and Western imperialism, and the antifeudal, anti-imperialist masses were valorized for throwing off their chains and repelling foreign invaders. This “heroic” or “victor” national narrative first served the requirements of Communist revolutionaries seeking to mobilize popular support in the 1930s and 1940s, and later served the nation-building goals of the People’s Republic in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. One 1959 movie about the First Opium War, for instance, changed its title from *The Opium War* to *Lin Zexu* to glorify Chinese heroism. New China needed heroes.

During the 1990s, however, the official Maoist “victor narrative” was slowly superseded by a new and popular “victimization narrative” that blames “the West,” including Japan, for China’s suffering. This “new” storyline actually renews the focus on victimization in pre-Mao Republican-era writings on the “Century.”19 Indeed, the image of China as a raped woman, common in Republican China but unpopular during the Maoist period, has reemerged. In Republican China, playwrights like Xiao Jun used rape in nationalist plays such as *Village in August*, in which Japanese soldiers rape a patriotic peasant woman.20 The return of the “rape of China” theme may be seen in such bestsellers as Chinese-American Iris Chang’s 1997 *The Rape of Nanking*, which I discuss in chapters 5 and 6. This text helped transform the 1937 Nanjing massacre into a “rape.” But the image had been revived before 1997 in mainland China. A special 1994 edition of *Rainbow* magazine, “The Secret Records of the Eight-Nation Force’s Bestiality,” is an early example of the reemerging “rape of China” theme. Late Qing historical records, the editors assert, reveal that two hundred thousand Chinese women were killed after being raped by foreign troops in 1900. However, such fantastic claims are really a disguise for
what is actually soft pornography.21 Young male Chinese readers could thus simultaneously satisfy a righteous anti-Western anger and their prurient desires.

The contrast between “victor” and “victim” national narratives is nicely captured in two Chinese movies about the First Opium War of 1839–1842. *Lin Zexu* (1959), mentioned above, is a story of the Chinese people’s heroic anti-imperialist struggle. Named *Lin Zexu* to highlight resistance, it does not focus solely on Commissioner Lin, but emphasizes his close relations with a peasant couple who seek vengeance against Eliot, the evil British trader who had killed the peasant woman’s father. Lin and the Chinese people (*renmin*) are one in an upbeat tale of popular defiance. *Opium War* (1997), by contrast, is a dark and depressing tale of past tragedy. It is only at the very end of the movie, with the image of a stone lion and the message that “on July 1, 1997, the Chinese government recovered sovereignty over Hong Kong,” that China is redeemed. Director Xie Jin’s vision of the past is one of opium addicts and humiliation; his vision of the present and future is one of mighty lions awakening to exact their revenge.22 A victim in the past, a vengeful China will be a victim no longer.

Nineteen ninety-seven seems to have been a pivotal moment in the re-emergence of the victimization narrative in China. The countdown to Hong Kong’s “Return to the Motherland” in the spring and summer of 1997 created a strong desire to “wipe away” (*xixue*) the “National Humiliation.” And in the fall of 1997, sixtieth-anniversary commemorations of the Nanjing massacre, as well as Iris Chang’s book about it, directed Chinese attention to their past suffering as never before. Anticipating closure on the “Humiliation,” many Chinese paradoxically reopened a long-festering wound. For many Chinese nationalists, this painful encounter with past trauma was expressed in the language of victimization.

China of 1997 may thus prove to be comparable to 1961 Israel, when Eichmann’s trial precipitated a dramatic shift in Israeli attitudes towards the Holocaust. The repression of Holocaust memories in the name of the nation-building (creating a “New Israel”) that prevailed in the late 1940s and 1950s gave way to a new identification with victimization in the 1960s. The early postwar Israeli rejection of victimhood is reflected in the evolution of Holocaust Day, which was established only in 1953 and did not become a mandatory national holiday until 1959. Early Holocaust Day commemorations emphasized the “martyrs and heroes” of the ghetto resistance, not the victims of the concentration camps who were memorialized in later tributes.23 China is now undergoing a similar process, as
long-suppressed memories of past suffering resurface. Chinese nationalism since the 1990s cannot be understood apart from this new encounter with past trauma.

Despite the new focus on “victimization,” heroic narratives about the “Century of Humiliation” have not disappeared. Narratives of “China as victor” and “China as victim” coexist in Chinese nationalism today. The “Century” is arguably both what psychologist Vamik Volkan calls a “chosen glory” and what he calls a “chosen trauma.” The publisher’s preface to a 1991 series of books entitled “Do not forget the history of national humiliation” is typical, describing the “Century” as both a “history of the struggle of the indomitable Chinese people against imperialism,” and a “tragic history of suffering, beatings, and extraordinary humiliations.” Many Chinese nationalists, it seems, are eager to capitalize on the moral authority of their past suffering. But there is a downside to the new “victimization narrative.” It entails confronting vulnerability and weakness. The enduring need for heroism and a “victor narrative” serves, it seems, to allay the fears of those who are not yet ready to confront directly the trauma of the “Humiliation.”

Neither “China as victor” nor “China as victim” has yet to probe the wound of the “Century” very deeply. The fate of the few Chinese who have attempted to push beyond the polar and facile explanations of “revolutionary heroism” and “imperialist aggression” and explore the deeper sources of China’s early modern encounters with imperialism is instructive. The popular phrase “backwards/beaten” (luohou aida) captures their plight. Interpreted as “the backwards will be beaten” (luohou jiuyao aida), the phrase implies that the former caused the latter: economic and technological backwardness led to China’s defeat at the hands of the West. A few Chinese have pursued this logic, asking themselves, “Why were we backwards?” In 1995, for example, historian Mao Haijian criticized Chinese scholarship on the Opium War as a contest to see who could best vilify the British. He suggested that Chinese should instead seek to learn from their past mistakes: “Self-criticism of our own history is the only way to ensure that we avoid going down the same historical path again.” Specifically, Mao questioned whether Lin Zexu was really a hero, whether Manchu official Qishan was really a “traitor,” and even whether the Treaty of Nanking was really a bad thing for China (he suggested that it helped China to open up sooner rather than later). Although such probing critiques might have been permissible in the liberal 1980s, they were not acceptable in the nationalist 1990s: Mao was criticized in internal Party meetings for “thought problems” (sixiang wenti). Mao Haijian’s bold reap-
praisal of the Opium War appears to be the exception that proves the rule: “the backwards will be beaten” is not yet a palatable public interpretation of China’s recent past for many Chinese. “China as victim” proponents, it seems, will not tolerate criticisms of their moral authority.

The more popular interpretation of “backwards/beaten” is “backwards because beaten” (luohou yinwei aida). In other words, “Western” (especially Japanese) aggression kept China backwards. During the “Say ‘no’!” fervor of 1996–1997, for instance, many Chinese nationalists found it more satisfying to blame the West for China’s problems than to reflect upon China’s role in them. Attributions of blame frequently led to desires for revenge. As noted above, because the First Opium War marked the beginning of the “Century of Humiliation,” many Chinese looked to the return of Hong Kong in the summer of 1997 to “erase” the “Humiliation.” A Chinese software company released an Opium War computer game in which modern-day Chinese virtual opium warriors battle invading British forces. But this time they can win. The manual reads: “Let’s use our wisdom and courage to exterminate the damned invaders!”

Computer geeks were not the only ones to savor sweet revenge. In the spring of 1997, diplomat Ling Qing recalled in a political journal how he felt in 1985 when Deng said that “If talks [with the British] do not succeed, China will decide how and when to take Hong Kong back.” “I was truly moved,” Ling wrote. “Compared with the situation one hundred fifty years earlier, it was a great 180-degree reversal of fortunes. . . . Today it is our turn to speak and their turn to listen.” Anti-British retribution was particularly noticeable in attacks on Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten. Chinese nationalists enjoyed retelling a story of how Thatcher emerged from a 1982 meeting with Deng without a smile, lost her balance going down the stairs of the Great Hall of the People, and fell to her knees. The message is clear: the British must kneel down and beg forgiveness from their betters. Patten, however, received the brunt of Chinese ire in 1997. Unofficial sources did not mince words: he was described as “irksome” and “blabbering,” and told to “Shut up!” For many Chinese, 1 July 1997 was payback time.

Evolving and contested narratives about the “Century of Humiliation,” in sum, both reflect and powerfully shape China’s relations with the West today. By invoking the people, events, and symbols of China’s early modern encounter with the West, Chinese continually return to this unresolved trauma, hoping to master it. However, the “Century” often appears to have no end. China’s 1945 victory over the lowly “Jap devils” (guizi) did
not satisfy its need for closure. Although Mao is thought to have declared that “China has stood up!” neither Communism’s victory over the Nationalist Party in the Civil War nor the declaration of “Liberation” in 1949 appears to have exorcised the past. “Victory” over the “American imperialists” in Korea, as we shall see in the next chapter, was more satisfying. Nevertheless, one of 1997’s most widespread official slogans was “Celebrate Hong Kong’s return, erase the National Humiliation,” suggesting that feelings of humiliation live on. And as the 1999 People’s Daily editorial about the Belgrade bombing, “This is not 1899 China,” suggests, China’s early modern traumatic encounter with the West continues to haunt Chinese nationalists today.

The Past in the Present

Narratives about China’s past both constrain and enable the nationalist politics of China’s present. Young nationalists in China are seeking to come to terms with their personal pasts, defining themselves as “pragmatic” conservatives against narratives of the “romantic” and “pro-Western” 1980s. They have also returned to the pre-“Liberation” narrative of a “Century of Humiliation” during which Chinese were victimized by the West, and this new “victimization” narrative now coexists with the earlier “heroic” version. The reemergence of this victim narrative has had real consequences for Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations. Today, many Chinese nationalists are primed to view American or Japanese actions as aggressive. Their quick judgments following the Belgrade bombing of 1999 and the spy plane collision of 2001 cannot be understood apart from this reencounter with past trauma.

As we shall see in the next two chapters on recent Chinese “histories” of Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations, this reworking of the national narrative has raised as many questions as it has answered. Recent popular and official texts on Sino-American relations have largely stuck to the victor narrative. Whether writing about actual combat during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, or about Sino-American diplomatic battles, Chinese nationalists overwhelmingly choose stories of heroic victories. Pride in the past can create confidence in the future, and it may be that anxiety over possible future conflict with the United States in the Taiwan Strait and elsewhere gives the victor narrative an enduring appeal.

Popular writings about Sino-Japanese relations, in contrast, have taken the lead in advancing the new victimization narrative about Chinese
suffering. As Chinese begin to confront the Nanjing massacre and other Japanese atrocities, anti-Japanese anger and desires for vengeance are spreading. It may be that with China’s impressive economic and military modernization, Chinese no longer really fear Japan; they therefore have the luxury of confronting their past victimization at the hands of the Japanese.