China’s New Nationalism
Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy

Peter Hays Gries
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War is at once the graveyard of peoples and the birthplace of nations. No true nation is born without war; indeed, nations define themselves through conflict with other nations. Modern China is no exception. The 1931/1937–1945 “War of Resistance against Japan” (KangRi zhanzheng) was the birthplace of the People’s Republic of China. By mobilizing and leading the peasantry in nationalist resistance against the invading Japanese, the Communist Party gained the mass following it later used to defeat the Nationalist Party during the Civil War of the late 1940s. For over half a century now, “defeating the Japanese and saving the nation” has been a dual legacy at the heart of Chinese Communist claims to nationalist legitimacy.

Stories about the Sino-Japanese Jiawu War of 1894–1895 and the Second World War continue to drive Chinese views of Japan and—more to the point—of themselves. China’s wars with Japan have been and continue to be a hot topic. For the first three decades of the People’s Republic
under Mao, the “War of Resistance” was a “chosen glory.” China’s self-image, aggressively projected to the world, was that of a “victor.” Today, however, many Chinese have come to think about the war in less glorious terms. A self-image of “China as victim” is increasingly vying with “China as victor” in the stories Chinese today tell about past wars with Japan. The debates reveal a great deal about recent changes to Chinese national identity.

An “Extraordinary Humiliation”

Although the atrocities of the Sino-Japanese Jiawu War of 1894–1895 are not mentioned as frequently as World War II atrocities such as the Nanjing massacre, Chinese feelings that the Japanese have been unjust and untrustworthy go back to 1895, not to the 1930s and 1940s. The Jiawu War, named for the year 1894 in the Chinese calendar, turned the world of China’s elite upside down. For a millennium, China’s leaders had looked down on Japan, treating it either benevolently, as a student or younger brother, or malevolently, as a nation of “Jap pirates” (wokou). China’s supremacy was abruptly challenged, however, with its loss to Japan in 1895. Earlier losses in wars with “Western barbarians” (yang guizi) were one thing, but losing to an inferior within the realm of Sinocentric civilization fundamentally destabilized Chinese worldviews. Many Chinese today see the 1895 loss to Japan and the ensuing Treaty of Shimonoseki as the darkest hour in the “Century of Humiliation.”

In Chinese accounts, the shock of 1895 is often represented by the encounter between the Qing Court’s Li Hongzhang and Japan’s Ito Hirobumi during the postwar treaty negotiations at Shimonoseki. A 1991 history of the Jiawu War, written as part of the multivolume “Do Not Forget the National Humiliation Historical Series,” references this encounter both in its title, The Extraordinary Humiliation at Shimonoseki, and its first chapter, “Humiliation After Defeat.” Strikingly, the authors chose to begin their story at the “humiliating” moment of war’s end, only afterward presenting a chronology of the war itself. Their account of the negotiations at Shimonoseki combines anger at Ito and sympathy for Li with anger at Li and the Manchu court. Authors Qiao Haitian and Ma Zongping express outrage at the Japanese assassination attempt on Li that preceded the treaty signing. They declare it “scandalous,” and, significantly, justify their outrage by asserting that “international opinion” (guoji yulun) was likewise outraged. Qiao and Ma also declare the Japanese de-
mands at Shimonoseki “unreasonable”—“a milestone in evil.” Ito and the Japanese side, they insist, “took pleasure in making China lose face.”

It is the public nature of China’s loss of face before the world that infuriates Qiao and Ma almost a century later. The authors blame Li and the Manchu court for the humiliation, seeking to save face for Han Chinese like themselves.

More recent popular accounts also evince anger at Ito and Japan. The preface to 1997’s Blood Debt, which focuses on World War II and postwar reparations claims, actually begins with a two-page fictional account of an exchange between Li and Ito in 1895. China is depicted as a “baby lamb” and Japan as an “avaricious” and “evil” wolf:

**Li:** Taiwan is already in your grasp. Why are you so anxious about it?

**Ito:** When something is in your mouth, you hunger to swallow it!

The Treaty of Shimonoseki, according to authors Gao Ping, Tang Yun, and Yang Yu, was China’s “greatest humiliation.” Another popular 1997 book on reparations, Why Japan Won’t Settle Accounts, also begins with the Jiawu War, when “China . . . fell off the express train of historical development, and was looked down upon as ‘Shina’ . . . the ‘sick man of East Asia’ [italics added].” When author Li Zhengtang writes “was looked down upon [bei ren bishi],” his use of the passive construction implies that the agent doing the looking was world opinion. The insult, again, seems not so much to be China’s defeat, or even the ingratitude of Japan, as a former “student,” but the public loss of national face.

These two 1997 books demanding war reparations focus on World War II and are full of visceral anger at Japanese wartime atrocities. By beginning with discussions of the injustices of the earlier Jiawu War, however, the authors establish a moral framework for their anger, attempting to elevate it from a lower, visceral anger to a higher, ethical anger. Many Chinese nationalists feel that Japan betrayed China during the Jiawu War: the “student” beat up his “teacher.” To add insult to injury, China is perceived by the authors to have lost national face at Shimonoseki, something they clearly seethe at as a further injustice done to their nation. Only after presenting these betrayals and injustices can the authors justify their angry demands for war reparations. Otherwise, their reparations claims might appear—to themselves as much as to others—to be self-interested (zisi, a pejorative in Chinese) or even vengeful.

By blaming Li Hongzhang and the Qing, and highlighting Han Chinese resistance, many Chinese accounts of the Jiawu War transform de-
feat into victory with psychological stratagems worthy of the proverbial Ah Q. After arguing that the Treaty of Shimonoseki “lost face for China by forfeiting sovereignty” (sangquan wuguo), the authors of 1996’s A Century of Hatred argue that it was “not China’s loss but Li Hongzhang’s.”\(^\text{10}\) Blaming Li and the Manchus for the defeat saves face for Han Chinese, who opposed the treaty, according to the authors, by “fiercely” resisting the Japanese in Taiwan, Shandong, and elsewhere.

The Chinese, many narratives of the Jiawu War insist, were in fact victors. The preface to a 1997 historical romance for teenagers, Loyal Souls: The Story of the Jiawu War; highlights China as a victor in the eyes of the world: “The Chinese economy’s takeoff today has already attracted the attention of the world [shiren zhumu]; ‘Shenzhen is similar to Hong Kong,’ ‘Shanghai is like Japan’s Ginza [District],’ and ‘All of the open cities on China’s coast are the world’s best places for trade and investment’ are phrases used daily in newspaper editorials and articles around the world. The Chinese nation, chin up and chest out [angshou tingxiong], and feeling proud and elated [yangmei tuqi], is striding towards the twenty-first century.”\(^\text{11}\) Why do authors Li and Shao feel the need to conjure up this glowing image of China in world opinion? Has their heroic account of Chinese resistance convinced them that China was indeed the victor of the Jiawu War? Or is this projection of a positive Chinese self-image onto world opinion a way to maintain a psychological balance, compensating for the loss of self-esteem that resulted from writing about what they actually deem a humiliating defeat?

Defeat in the Jiawu War and the Treaty of Shimonoseki was, and continues to be, a direct assault on Chinese visions of themselves. “Little brother” Japan beat up “big brother” China. The “student” punched the “teacher.” For many Chinese, the treaty publicly instituted China’s humiliation before the world. The loss of national face was even worse than defeat itself. Because Japan is depicted as having caused the public loss of national face, anger directed against Japan thus assumes a moral legitimacy and is not just a base desire for revenge.

Victors in the “War of Resistance”

If Chinese feelings that Japan betrayed them have their origins in the Jiawu War and the Treaty of Shimonoseki, it is World War II and atrocities like the Nanjing massacre that arouse the most controversy and passion. Recent Chinese debates about the Second World War show that Chinese
narratives about the war are being revised. While some nationalists adhere to the Maoist doctrine that China was the heroic victor of the war, others are beginning to probe the sensitive thesis that China was a victim of Japanese atrocities.

Because its success in fighting the “War of Resistance” gave legitimacy to the Communist Party, victory over Japan has been central to official postwar histories. Historiography about the war during Mao’s reign maximized its legitimizing impact. The Communist storyline was simple: without the Party-led defeat of the Japanese, there would be no New China. Indeed, under Mao there was little research on the history of Japanese aggression: praising the victorious leadership of Mao and the Communist Party was more important. The newly established People’s Republic did not wish to dwell on Chinese suffering.

The “China as victor” view of the war did not disappear with Mao’s death in 1976. On 7 July 1987, the fiftieth anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (when Japan moved south from Manchuria to invade China proper), a Liberation Army Daily editorial reiterated the position that the war was China’s first victory after a century of “resistance” (or, losses), “wiping away the [national] humiliation with a single stroke [yijü xixue chiru].” In the wake of Western sanctions imposed after the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, the Chinese Communist Party stepped up efforts to marshal the past to bolster its legitimacy. Chapter 3 describes the ways in which the ninetieth anniversary of the Joint Expeditionary Force against the Boxers was utilized in 1990 to attack Western aggression against China. The Beijing elite also capitalized upon the 1991 sixtieth anniversary of the Mukden Incident of 1931, which led to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Party elder Hu Sheng explained the contemporary relevance of the “War of Resistance” at a conference commemorating the Mukden Incident: “The PRC . . . is an independent and sovereign nation [duli zizhu] that will not submit to foreign pressure, and will not follow foreign commands. . . . Foreign pressure increases the people’s fighting spirit. Of course . . . China does not view any country as its enemy. . . . But the Chinese people do not fail to see that there are still powers in this world [i.e., America] that see China as an enemy.” That Chinese can “see” (kan) that Americans “see China as an enemy” (dishi Zhongguo) justifies the Communist Party’s post-Tiananmen hostility towards the West. By projecting a negative self-image onto Westerners—“they hate us”—the CCP created a legitimate cause for anger. The post-Tiananmen pronouncements of Western governments and the Western press, although directed at the Communist elite, gave the Chinese Communist Party ample evidence to
support their contention. And the CCP largely succeeded in convincing their people that Western sanctions were anti-Chinese, rather than narrowly anti-Communist. The success of the CCP effort helps explain the emergence of popular nationalism in early 1990s China.

As was the case in accounts of the Jiawu War, many discussions of battles during the “War of Resistance” transform defeat into victory using stratagems that divide Chinese victory and victimhood between different groups of Chinese. At the end of their 1997 diatribe Be Vigilant Against Japanese Militarism! for instance, Zi Shui and Xiao Shi present “An Exasperating Discussion of Racial Humiliation.” The 1931 surrender at Mukden, they argue, should be blamed on the Nationalist Party, not on Chinese in general: “Strictly speaking, Chinese troops were not defeated in battle, but defeated themselves through not fighting. . . . It was a shameful day that makes one bear a grudge towards this deceptive world [italics added].” After turning defeat into victory, Zi and Xiao turn shame into pride: “With superhuman strength, the Chinese people have erased the shame of the past, winning respect and glory. . . . The total development of the Chinese race cannot be stopped.”

China was not defeated at Mukden in 1931; in the end, China won. By deploying this version of Ah Q’s “psychological victory technique,” Zi and Xiao maintain face.

As China opens up to the world, such unilateral assertions of China’s status as a victor in World War II are no longer satisfying to many Chinese, especially those insecure about their nation’s victor status. The demand that the world recognize China’s wartime accomplishments, conferring national face upon China, is one of the most passionate themes in recent Chinese scholarship on the war. Zhang Zhuhong’s 1995 “The International Influence of the Battle of Taierzhuang,” for instance, focuses its attention not so much on what happened at Taierzhuang, the location of a 1938 Chinese victory over Japanese forces, or even on what Chinese think or should think happened. It focuses, rather, on what Zhang asserts that the world thought. Taierzhuang, Zhang argues, showed the world that victory was possible at a time of Allied hesitation. The battle “shattered the illusion that the Japanese could not be defeated [italics added].” That Zhang thinks the Allies thought China was a winner is central to how he thinks about himself as a Chinese. In Zhang’s narrative of the battle, the Allies confirmed Chinese face claims.

Many Chinese are incensed by the belief that Japanese refuse to admit having been defeated by China, failing to confirm Chinese claims to victor status. In his thoughtful 1995 probing of the war, Wailing at the Heavens, People’s Liberation Army writer Jin Hui maintains that the Japanese
are “two-faced” (liangfu mianrong) in their attitudes towards Chinese and Westerners. The Showa Emperor, Jin writes, apologized to the United States and Europe, but never to Asia. By maintaining that they lost to the Americans, but not to China, Japanese can feel “more glorious,” as if they have “more face” (geng you mianzi).17

Many Chinese are also angered by the belief that Westerners do not confirm China’s victor status. At a 1997 conference commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the People’s Revolutionary Museum’s Yuan Jiaxin bitterly complained that the West does not respect China’s victor status. Although he did not address why China’s role in World War I might earn it the spoils of war, he traced this attitude to the Versailles Conference, where Shantung and other German territories in China were not returned to China, but were instead transferred to Japan. Yuan then argued that since China had “shown the world” its strength during World War II, China’s Western allies had to admit China’s status, and indeed, they revoked the remaining unequal treaties in 1943, symbolically recognizing China’s equality. In the final years of the war, however, the Allies made military decisions without consulting China, revealing that they did not really view China as an equal.18 The Allies, Yuan deeply felt, did not treat China with respect.

Yuan’s belief that the West does not recognize the contributions China made to the Allied victory has motivated a number of Chinese historians. In 1995, Fujian Party historian Lin Qiang wrote: “The War of Resistance was an important part of the anti-fascist war and made a great contribution. . . . But some foreign historians . . . either because of a lack of understanding or prejudice [pianjian], persist in negating the role of the War of Resistance. This is completely wrong.” Lin then enumerates China’s contributions to the Allied cause: China was the earliest to shoulder the burden of confronting fascism; China protected the Soviet Union’s rear from Japan’s “northern advance” policy; China aided the British and Americans in battle by bogging down the Japanese in the Chinese interior, thus enabling their “Europe first, then Asia” policy; and China smashed the Axis strategy to rendezvous in the Middle East. Here, significantly, Lin clinches his argument by citing Roosevelt’s words of 1942: “If there were no China, think of all the Japanese battalions that could fight elsewhere. They could have immediately taken Australia, India . . . and joined up with Germany in the Middle East.” Lin uses Roosevelt’s words to claim that China made an indispensable contribution to victory. Indeed, Lin concludes that China played the “determining role” (juedingxing zuoyong) in Japan’s defeat, and that the “The Chinese War
of Resistance was . . . an outstanding contribution that was the focus of world attention [jushi shumu].”¹⁹ Mu, the final character of the proverb jushi shumu, literally means “eye,” and even looks like one. The second to last character, shu, also contains the “eye” pictograph. Because Chinese is a pictorial language, the effect is to feel the international gaze, or “eyes of the world,” in an almost visceral, rather than a coldly cognitive, manner. For Chinese like Lin, it is not enough that Chinese assert claims to victor status: an audience of international opinion must confirm those claims.

The PLA Military Institute historian Luo Huanzhang, however, appears to have written the most defensively and passionately on this subject. In a 1991 article, “The Great Contribution the War of Resistance Against Japan Made to the Defeat of Japanese Imperialism,” Luo insists that China’s role in defeating Japan was, in fact, greater than America’s. “American air and sea victories over the Japanese were important but not decisive,” Luo writes, “The Chinese people were the key determining influence in defeating Japanese imperialism.”²⁰ Wartime American aid to China presents an awkward complication for Luo. Luo does profess gratitude, “the Chinese people will never forget American aid.” But he then cites a proverb from the ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius, “like putting out a large fire with a cup of water” (beishui chexin), to argue that American aid was inconsequential: “China’s contribution to the war against fascism was much greater than the Allies’ aid to China.”²¹ This is a rather startling comparison. Why does Luo feel compelled to make it? In a 1995 article on the same subject, Luo’s motives become clear: “You cannot say that China could not have fought the Japanese without help.”²² Luo’s defensiveness appears to stem from a fear that China is seen as unable to defeat Japan alone. Such a fear might undermine Luo’s view of China as a heroic victor, threatening his positive self-image.

As the use of Roosevelt’s “If there were no China, think of all the Japanese battalions that could fight elsewhere” reveals, a popular way to counter fears that world opinion does not confirm China’s status as victor is to find world opinion that does. Research on the “international friends” of wartime China has long been a popular topic. The Party School of the Chinese Communist Party, for instance, sponsored the translation and 1988 publication of James Bertram’s 1939 Unconquered: A Journal of a Year’s Adventures Among the Fighting Peasants of North China. The subtitle of the Chinese translation is China’s War of Resistance in the Eyes of a Foreigner. “In the eyes of” again points to the importance of others’ views to China’s national self-image. An important selling point, the publishers decided, was that this foreigners’ view of China was positive: the cover
flap declares that Bertram “highly praises” the Chinese people’s “unyielding antifascist spirit.”23 Similarly, at the 1997 conference commemorating the Mukden Incident, the Sichuan Academy of Social Science’s Xue Yunfeng made special mention of China’s wartime “international friends,” like American journalist Edgar Snow and Canadian doctor Norman Bethune, to help prove that China was “in the right” (shi zhengque de).24 Indeed, research on Edgar Snow was a particularly hot topic during the fiftieth-anniversary commemorations of the war in 1995. Zhao Wenli, for instance, argues that by influencing international opinion, Snow gave the Chinese Communist Party great encouragement. The result, Zhao explains, was that Chinese felt supported, rather than isolated.25 As Chinese nationalists’ “Kissinger complex” shows, interest in such “international friends” has not faded.26 The world’s response to Chinese claims for national face, whether imagined to be positive or negative, is central to Chinese perceptions of themselves as victors in the “War of Resistance.”

World opinion is also central to the claim that the Chinese were beneficent victors. Like the Chinese writings about the Korean War discussed in the last chapter, Chinese narratives about the “War of Resistance” seek to construct an image of China as a “beneficent victor.” As they attempt to present a magnanimous face to the world, many narratives suppress desires for revenge.27 *Awakening: A Record of the Educating and Reforming of Japanese War Criminals*, a 1991 pictorial history of China’s postwar “reeducation” of Japanese POWs, presents a fascinating example of this dynamic. Both the content and format of *Awakening* reveal that, while its topic is Japanese war criminals, its goal is to create a positive Chinese self-image. Party elder Bo Yibo writes in the preface that “Chinese would have been justified in settling accounts with the Japanese criminals . . . in undertaking racial revenge, but instead we have chosen humanitarianism.” *Awakening* focuses on Bo’s argument that though Chinese are entitled to revenge, their magnanimous nature led them to treat Japanese POWs with courtesy.28 The first section of the book, “Frenzied Aggression, Innumerable Crimes,” contains photographs documenting Japanese atrocities—skulls, twisted bodies, massacre sites, mass graves—and thus sets up a foil of Japanese evil against which the authors may construct a narrative of Chinese goodness.

*Awakening*’s second section, “Education and Remolding, Repentance and Awakening,” documents the Chinese army’s “lenient treatment” of Japanese POWs during the war, and the comfortable life in one POW camp, the Fushun Administration of War Criminals, after the war. One
two-page pictorial spread is devoted to the excellent medical treatment the Japanese prisoners received, accompanied by the explanation that “following . . . the instructions given by premier Zhou Enlai, the staff . . . treated the war criminals in a humanitarian way. They respected their personalities and never beat, scolded or abused them.” Two-page pictorial spreads depict prisoners bathing, playing games, participating in athletics, performing in a camp theater, and enjoying banquets. Six pages are devoted to family visits and travel in China. This section is prefaced by the caption, “Many war criminals said gratefully: ‘The Chinese government is so kind that it allows us to travel while we are still in custody. This generosity is unprecedented in world history.’” A picture of one group of Japanese prisoners visiting the Anshan Iron and Steel Works is accompanied by the caption, “The war criminals . . . all declared, ‘A miracle!’” Whether Japanese POWs actually said such things is not likely something the compilers, working almost four decades later, could prove. It is telling that even at this historical remove they chose to put these words into Japanese mouths.

The third section of Awakening, “Impartial Trial and Lenient Treatment,” documents courtroom proceedings and the evidence used to try dozens of Japanese war criminals. It concludes with pictures of Japanese prisoners crying in gratitude upon a court decision to release them, and a photo of the prisoners waving as the ship carrying them home departs. The latter is accompanied by the explanation that they were bidding farewell to the Chinese people “with mixed feelings of joy and sorrow” (beixi jiaojia). The Japanese POWs, the compilers assert, were grateful to their Chinese jailers. The final section, “Safeguard Peace and Maintain Friendship Between Japan and China,” documents the efforts of the returned prisoners in Japan to promote Sino-Japanese friendship and expose Japanese atrocities during the War.

The book’s goal of establishing Chinese beneficence is revealed in its format as well as its content. The title page is printed in three languages: Chinese, Japanese, and English. It appears that the compilers originally intended to print the entire volume in three languages but then chose only to print in Chinese and English. Why choose English over Japanese? English was probably chosen because the Chinese compilers of the volume were more concerned about Western opinion than they were about Japanese opinion. The book is a claim for national face that must be confirmed by a third-party audience. That audience, preferably, should be as high in status as possible. English, the Chinese compilers decided, would be preferable to Japanese, or any other language, for that matter.
Despite the ways that some Chinese writers try to gain face for China by portraying happy Japanese prisoners of war, depictions of the war years can become problematic when they open the possibility of friendship on equal terms between “victor” and “defeated,” or between China as “teacher” and Japan as “student.” The resilience of the “China as victor” narrative was recently revealed when the Bureau of Film and Television censored the winner of the Grand Prix prize at the 2000 Cannes film festival, *Devils on the Doorstep* (Guizi laile). The film is a moving wartime tale of the friendship that develops between a Japanese prisoner and a group of Chinese villagers. The Film Censorship Committee, however, complained that the “Chinese civilians [in the movie] don’t hate the Japanese [prisoner],” but instead are “as close as brothers” (qin ru xiongdi) with him. Director Jiang Wen’s exploration of the two sides’ common humanity clearly threatened the censors’ vision of heroic Chinese resistance against the hated Japanese. The Maoist heroic narrative of “China as victor” in the “War of Resistance” continues to thrive in today’s China. However, proponents of this view are not satisfied with their own unilateral declarations, but require international confirmation of their claims for China’s victor status and beneficence. And the affirmation of Westerners is what they most desire.

Victims of the “Rape of Nanking”

Following the death of Mao Zedong, the prevailing “China as victor” narrative has been challenged by a new interpretation. Many Chinese have come to focus less on heroic “resistance” during the war, and more on Chinese victimization. Symptomatic of this shift, the trope of wartime China as a raped woman, first utilized by nationalist writers during the 1930s but suppressed under Mao, is resurgent. Why have so many Chinese come to think about themselves as victims? I ask this question not to cast doubt upon the undeniable suffering of the Chinese people during World War II, but to better understand the evolution of Chinese national identity. Public debates between Chinese and Japanese over past atrocities like the Nanjing massacre, for instance, are very much about what it means to be Chinese or Japanese in the twenty-first century.

The new victimization narrative obsesses about two subjects: quantifying Chinese suffering and presenting the Chinese case to the world. Indian historian Sudipta Kaviraj has noted the tendency of nationalists to count everything they possess. Nationalism, he writes, involves a “re-
The statement of the tremendous numbers included in the imagined “we,” Kaviraj argues, acts as a source of great psychological strength. China is no exception. Enumerating “China”—its vast geographic and demographic size—has long been central to the modern Chinese nationalist project of creating the psychological strength necessary to mobilize the Chinese people.

Moreover, recent Chinese accounts of World War II reveal that nationalists also obsessively count everything they have lost. The back cover of 1997’s Blood Debt, for example, has the line “35 million” splashed across a photo of a pile of skulls. In addition to this death toll, it also lists economic damages from the war. Less sensational and more scholarly is the 1995 Losses in the War of Resistance and the Full Story of Postwar Reparations Efforts. Following its title, the book has a straightforward organization, beginning with six chapters documenting different categories of Chinese damages, followed by a ten-page “Table of Losses” that meticulously translates the prose into numbers. The final three chapters chronicle the history of Chinese reparation claims. Quantifying wartime losses literally becomes the basis for postwar entitlement claims.

The marked rise in the numbers of war casualties that appear in Chinese assessments of the war reflects the emergence of the victimization narrative. Immediately following the war, Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist Party announced that Japan had killed 1.75 million Chinese. After it came to power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party declared that 9.32 million Chinese had been killed. That figure stood for many years, reflecting the Maoist suppression of victim-speak in favor of a heroic narrative. In 1995, however, Jiang Zemin raised the casualty estimate to 35 million, the current official Chinese figure. China’s early postwar political elite had needed heroes, not victims; many Chinese today have different needs.

Documenting the Nanjing massacre has been one of the most passionate projects of narrators of victimization, and controversy rages about the death toll. Many Chinese now argue that at least 300,000 Chinese died in Nanjing, while many Japanese, especially those on the political right, argue that the total could not have been so high. The number “300,000” is etched in stone at the entrance to the Nanjing Massacre Museum in Nanjing, and has acquired symbolic importance for many Chinese. Iris Chang, the Chinese-American author of The Rape of Nanking, has been a vocal advocate of this figure. On a 1998 NewsHour, she explained the importance of the number to David Gergen: “Three hundred thou-
sand, please keep in mind, is more than the death toll at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined." Peter Novick has used the phrase “victimization Olympics” in a recent discussion of the uses of the Holocaust today. Winners of such competitions gain moral authority. Because close to 300,000 Japanese died from the A-bombs dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, for many ethnic Chinese like Chang, the toll of 300,000 deaths at Nanjing sets Chinese suffering in the war above that of the Japanese. Combined with the fact that Japan was the aggressor in the war, this figure helps establish China’s moral authority over Japan.

Indeed, because the establishment of moral authority requires complex assessments of relative status and power, the number of deaths at Nanjing has become much more than a historical question. For example, a 1997 conference at Princeton University commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Nanjing massacre witnessed a stunning flare-up of Chinese passions over the death toll. Two Japanese historians spoke on the subject. Utsunomiya University’s Kasahara Tokushi ritualistically confirmed the Chinese 300,000 figure, was deemed sufficiently repentant, and was applauded by the largely Chinese audience. Nihon University’s Ikuhiko Hata met a different fate. Claiming to be a moderate historian attacked by both progressive and conservative forces in Japan, Hata argued that his own investigations and calculations revealed that the number of casualties was actually lower. During the question-and-answer session that followed, Iris Chang demanded to know why Hata would not accept the casualty figures Japanese POWs gave their Chinese jailers. Hata replied that “circumstances” (that is, possible torture and coercion) made such figures unreliable. Many in the largely Chinese audience immediately began screaming at Hata—“Stop!” “He lies!” “Enough!” Furious, Chang stormed out of the Princeton conference hall. Panel moderator and prominent Sinologist Perry Link was barely able to control the situation. The numbers debate had clearly situated the two Japanese scholars on a continuum of contrition. By questioning the claim to 300,000 Chinese casualties, Hata did not exhibit enough repentance for his Chinese audience. By insulting him publicly, Chang and many Chinese in the audience sought to make him lose face.

The numbers debate does not occur in an international void. As events at the Princeton conference suggest, quantifying one nation’s pain is meaningless unless this effort is performed on the world stage. One of the most fascinating aspects of the Nanjing massacre controversy is that the Chinese and Japanese combatants have their eyes on world opinion more than on each other. Each battle is carefully choreographed for the benefit of
Western audiences. The Iris Chang phenomenon, in which Chinese around the world promoted *The Rape of Nanking*, provides numerous examples of how the Nanjing massacre controversy is staged for Western audiences. At the end of her book, Chang argues that a “second rape” of Nanjing has occurred, because Japanese have suppressed and even denied what happened. Chang claims that “When it comes to expressing remorse for its own wartime actions before the bar of world opinion, Japan remains to this day a renegade nation.” The result, she fears, is that the Nanjing massacre has vanished from the “world’s collective memory.” International opinion, furthermore, is an accomplice to this Japanese crime: “the world is still acting as a passive spectator to the second Japanese rape—the refusal of the Japanese to apologize.” Chang is incensed, for example, that American students learn more about Hiroshima than about Nanjing in their school books. Americans, she laments, remember Auschwitz and Hiroshima, but have forgotten Nanjing.

Chang’s “second rape” argument is both Sinocentric and Western-centric. It is Sinocentric to argue that Americans should learn more about Nanjing than about Hiroshima, even though it was Americans who dropped the A-bomb, but not Americans who sacked Nanjing. America would be better served if American school children did more—rather than less—reflecting on their country’s decision to drop the A-bomb on Japanese civilians. But Chang is also Western-centric in asserting, that because American history textbooks say little or nothing about Nanjing, the “world” has forgotten about the massacre. Chinese have certainly not forgotten about it: the Nanjing massacre has been a hot topic in China for years. Chang is Western-centric to exclude China from her “world,” instead conflating “the world” with the West.

Chang’s main motivation for writing and publicizing *The Rape of Nanking* seems to have been to build Western opinion against Japan. Chang seems driven by a genuine anger that seeks relief through humiliating Japanese. As David Kennedy perceptively noted in an *Atlantic Monthly* review: “Accusation and outrage, rather than analysis and understanding, are this book’s dominant motifs. . . . To what purpose is Chang’s outrage directed? Nothing less than hauling Japan ‘before the bar of world opinion’ and forcing it to acknowledge its war crimes.” At a 1998 Nanjing massacre conference held at the University of California, Berkeley, I asked Chang if she worried about committing a “third rape” by reprinting graphic pictures of naked Chinese women in her book, thereby subjecting them to further indignity. Her answer was thoughtful. She said that as a woman she had concerns about the pictures and had discussed the issue with her publishers, but had decided that rectifying the “second rape” (Western
ignorance of the Nanjing massacre) justified the risk of a “third rape.” If her desire to turn Western opinion against Japan overrode such heartfelt concerns, it must have been intense.

Chang was spectacularly successful in realizing her goal. *The Rape of Nanking* was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over twenty weeks, and it received overwhelmingly favorable reviews from the Western media and academia. Numerous Western print and television journalists, unfamiliar with the Asian politics at stake, accepted the book uncritically. “Few non-Chinese,” wrote the *Washington Post*’s Ken Ringle, “remember that sixty years ago . . . the Japanese Imperial Army ran riot in . . . Nanjing, hacking apart in eight weeks between 260,000 and 350,000 people—far more than died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.”47 The *Associated Press*’s Sau Chan goes beyond uncritical acceptance to actively champion Chang’s cause, writing: “Much has been written about the Holocaust in Europe . . . and about the atomic bombings of Japan, which killed about 140,000 in Hiroshima and about 70,000 in Nagasaki . . . . But the Japanese death toll falls short of the estimated 260,000 to 350,000 Chinese killed in Nanjing.”48 The Western print media largely either accepted Chang’s account uncritically, or even actively advocated her thesis.49

The Western visual media was even more sympathetic. Chang encountered favorably inclined interviewers on the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, *Good Morning America*, and *Nightline*. *NewsHour* interviewer David Gergen, for instance, appropriated Chang’s claims as facts in his questions, saying, for example, “Let me ask you about another mystery surrounding Nanking . . . there were more people killed in Nanking than in Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined. And yet, after all the debates about Nagasaki and Hiroshima, we have amnesia about Nanking. Why?”50 Gergen thus helps Chang present her account as historical fact.51

Despite the angry tone and subjective use of facts displayed throughout *The Rape of Nanking*, academic reviews were also largely positive, especially those written by China scholars. Two Sinologists at the University of California, Berkeley, for example, wrote glowingly about Chang’s book. Historian Frederic Wakeman endorsed the book on its back cover: “Iris Chang’s *The Rape of Nanking* is an utterly compelling book . . . . Many Japanese have denied that these events ever took place, substituting amnesia for guilt, but Iris Chang’s heartbreaking account will make such evasion impossible in the future for all but the most diehard right-wing Japanese extremists.” In a lengthy *New York Times* review, Orville Schell, Dean of Berkeley’s School of Journalism, also joined Chang in her criticism of Japan. Schell declares, for instance, that all Japanese are in denial about the war, unwilling to confront their “shame or loss of face.”52
A few American Japan scholars, aware that Chang knows very little of the actual state of Japanese research and education about the Nanjing massacre, have objected to this dominant view. Historian Joshua Fogel, for instance, has argued that “Iris Chang’s book is seriously flawed. . . . It is full of misinformation and harebrained explanations.” His Berkeley colleague Andrew Barshay concurs, challenging Orville Schell’s *New York Times* review of *Rape* as “doubly flawed” in its misrepresentations of Japan. Indeed, these Japan scholars were not alone. Contrary to Wake-man’s prediction, *The Rape of Nanking* created controversy rather than settling it. Chang’s disdain for the historical record exposed her findings to attack from reputable Japanese scholars, and even helped build popular Japanese support for right-wing revisionists. In April 1998, for example, the Japanese ambassador to the United States, Kunihiko Saito, publicly criticized the book as “one-sided” and “erroneous,” and in June 1998 a group of conservative Japanese scholars held a press conference in Tokyo to attack *The Rape of Nanking* as historically inaccurate. Japanese criticisms of Chang’s scholarship were largely unsuccessful, however, falling on deaf Western ears. Chang’s counterattacks, meanwhile, won a sympathetic hearing from the Western press. The *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* set up a debate between Chang and Saito, and *Newsweek* ran an article Chang wrote to plug her book and refute Saito and the Tokyo conservatives.

My purpose here is not to point out flaws in Chang’s argument. Chang never claims to be an historian; she is a sincere young woman enraged by what she has learned about the atrocities of December 1937. My purpose, instead, has been to show that like “China as victor,” the new “China as victim” storyline requires foreign validation. National identities evolve through public contestation, and are based upon recognition from both opponents and neutral parties. The *Rape of Nanking* sensation provided an opportunity for a public contest between Chinese and Japanese narratives of the past before a jury of Western opinion. Thus, two projects are intertwined in victimization narratives: quantifying the pain and presenting the Chinese case to the world.

War Stories
To many Chinese, the modern Sino-Japanese encounter has been highly traumatic. Seen as an inferior for over a millennium, in 1895 the “younger brother” beat up his “older brother,” first militarily, in the Jiawu War, and
then legally, in the Treaty of Shimonoseki. The strongly felt injustice of these “ungrateful” acts is the origin of the ethical anger Chinese today feel about Japanese atrocities during World War II.

Under Mao, official narratives of the “War of Resistance” sought to utilize China’s “victory” both to legitimize the Communist Party and to build a “New China.” And many Chinese still cling to this “heroic narrative” about the war, enraged by the view that Japanese and Westerners do not acknowledge China’s contributions to the Allied victory. In the 1990s, however, a new “victimization narrative” emerged to challenge the heroism thesis. During and after the fiftieth-anniversary commemorations of World War II in 1995 and the sixtieth-anniversary commemorations of the “Rape of Nanking” in 1997, Chinese paid new attention to their World War II sufferings.

For many, this painful encounter with wartime atrocities has generated a visceral anger towards Japan. Few have moved beyond what sociologist Thomas Scheff calls a “humiliated fury.” Japan bashing is ascendant and unquestioned. People’s Liberation Army writer Jin Hui’s moving *Wailing at the Heavens* may be the exception that proves the rule. Unlike most other commemorative volumes published in 1995, *Wailing* does not stop at either valorizing Chinese victories or agonizing over Japanese atrocities. Instead, Jin engages in sincere soul-searching, asking, for example, why so many Chinese were “as meek as lambs at the slaughterhouse” during the war: “Men are not lambs. But it seems like many of those slaughtered were even more obedient than lambs. . . . Why didn’t they resist when faced with death?” This inquiry leads Jin into a probing examination of why the Chinese, like a “sheet of loose sand,” lacked courage and unity in fighting the Japanese. To my knowledge, *Wailing* is the only recent Chinese volume on World War II that asks such heart-wrenching questions, raising the issue of whether national identity can withstand Jin’s style of critical inquiry. When faced with the trauma of past atrocities, most Chinese writers instead seek to relieve their pain by bashing Japan. *The Rape of Nanking* was typical, lambasting the entire Japanese race as “sadistic ‘conformists’.” And Chang’s book was a great success in both China and America.
In 1996, the Year of the Rat, researchers at the Beijing Asia-Pacific Economic Relations Center issued a two-volume work comparing the modernizations of China and Japan. Part of a series on national affairs that earnestly seeks the “Holy Grail” (zhènli: literally, ‘truth’) of a “rich people and a strong state” (fumin qiangguo), A Century of Hatred opens with a section entitled “Sino-Japanese Relations During Eight Years of the Rat.” The section delimits the scope of the study: it is a brief history of the last century of Sino-Japanese relations, focusing on the Years of the Rat in each twelve-year cycle of the Chinese zodiac. The focus on these years leads the authors to contemplate how the rat became the first sign in the Chinese zodiac. The authors recount a traditional folktale about a race, in which the rat craftily persuaded the cat not to compete, and then rode on the back of the cow most of the way, only to dismount and sprint past it to the finish line. Having told their parable, the authors then assert that China is like the cat (agile but naïve) or cow (honest but foolish), and
was beaten by Japan, the cunning rat. As the authors’ use of the folktale suggests, complex and multiple motivations, including a variety of emotions and material goals, drive Chinese nationalists. Calling Japan a “rat” clearly satisfied the authors’ desire to insult Japan. Yet the goal of their book is largely instrumental: to learn from Japan’s successful modernization experience. The image of China presented in the anecdote is also mixed: China has the good qualities of being agile and honest, but also the bad qualities of being naïve and foolish. China deserved to be first but was deceived by Japan. Japan thus humiliated China.

How should Chinese react? The authors, like many contemporary Chinese confronting their perceived “humiliation” at Japanese hands, alternate between self-criticism and anger at their rival. They criticize Chinese for their “great nation complex”: “it is hard for us to truly admit to ourselves that we are more backwards than others.” But they also devote a lengthy chapter to a comparison of the “mighty” Chinese and “trifling” Japanese national characters. Even though they thus display obvious bias, the authors argue for the need to balance reason and emotion in scholarship: “Some say that most post-Liberation research on modern Chinese history still stagnates at the level of emotional outpourings condemning foreign aggressors. This trivializes the reasoned nature of our research. . . . Neither reason nor emotion should be overemphasized at the expense of the other.” Despite these good intentions, however, their title—A Century of Hatred—suggests that the authors have difficulty practicing what they preach. Chinese hatred of the Japanese still runs too deep.

Arguing that elites “use” nationalism as a “tool” to bolster their legitimacy, Western scholars today have largely dismissed emotions as irrelevant to nationalist politics. Such analysts can therefore do little to help us understand such nationalist passions. In the China field, the “elites use nationalism” view translates into a powerful “party propaganda” consensus on the genesis of Chinese nationalism: with the decline of Communism, the Party elite fosters and uses anti-foreign sentiment in an attempt to retain power. This “party propaganda” explanation of Chinese nationalism blinds us to the critical roles that the people and the passions play in it. Both the Party elite and popular nationalists participate in nationalist politics, and both emotional and instrumental concerns drive their behavior. Regime legitimacy and the very meaning of being Chinese are at stake. To understand Chinese nationalism, therefore, it is crucial to overcome this juxtaposition of elites against the masses and sense against sensibility. This chapter focuses on the issue of motivation, whereas the next chapter turns to the role of the people in Chinese nationalism.
Despite compelling neurological evidence to the contrary, there is a strong tendency in the liberal West to view emotion and reason as locked into a zero-sum relationship in which any gain for one is a loss for the other. In other words, becoming more emotional entails becoming less rational, and vice versa. Studies of Chinese nationalism are no exception, pitting reason against the emotions. Optimistic pundits tend to downplay the role of the passions in Chinese nationalism. They acknowledge the role of Chinese national feelings, but then assert that the rational pursuit of China’s national interest will win the day. In a review of Sino-American relations, for example, one American scholar notes the danger that Beijing and Washington elites may push disagreements for domestic purposes, but cites the Chinese proverb “loud thunder, but little rain” (leisheng da, yudian xiao) to conclude optimistically that interests will triumph over the passions. Former president of the National Committee on U.S.–China Relations, Mike Lampton similarly recognizes Chinese fears of Westernization, but then concludes that China pursues its interests “just like other countries.” He thus implies that in “normal” countries, emotions like fear do not influence those who make decisions about foreign policy. Optimistic accounts of Sino-Japanese relations also dismiss emotion as secondary. A recent examination of the Sino-Japanese Diaoyu Islands controversy asserts that economic performance is more important than nationalism (that is, interests will trump passions) and thus can reach a conclusion about the controversy marked by “cautious optimism.” From this rationalist point of view, the Party will be able to control nationalist sentiments and pursue China’s national interest.

More pessimistic pundits, by contrast, lament that reason is impotent when confronted with the passions. David Shambaugh’s 1991 Beautiful Imperialist, discussed in chapter 4, is a prominent example of the irrationalist view of China’s America policy. Shambaugh argues that passion and ideology distort Chinese perceptions of America, concluding that “the vast majority of America watchers in China do not understand the U.S. very well.” Because of China’s history of victimization at the hands of Western imperialists, “Chinese leaders simply do not trust American motives.” Chinese emotions thus impede the development of harmonious Sino-American relations. Pessimistic accounts of Sino-Japanese relations are also less than confident about the triumph of reason. In his 1989 China Eyes Japan, Allen Whiting suggests that reason is powerless before the passions: negative images of Japan have thwarted China’s interest in closer relations with its Asian neighbor. Arguments over the nature and future direction of Chinese nationalism thus often tell us more about the
optimism or pessimism of their proponents—whether they follow in the “rational” or “irrational” traditions—than they do about China.\textsuperscript{12}

The idea of \textit{face} can help us overcome the reason vs. emotion dualism that hobbles studies of nationalist motivation. People are emotionally attached to the self-image they present to the world. If a person’s \textit{face} is assaulted, his or her feelings are hurt. But \textit{face} also provides people with real power. He who “loses face” loses status and the ability to pursue material goals. As international relations theorist Robert Jervis put it over three decades ago, “prestige and saving face are . . . aspects of a state’s image that greatly contribute to its pursuit of other goals.”\textsuperscript{13} Both passion and reason are intimately intertwined in nationalist politics.

To understand the complex and multiple motives that drive China’s nationalists, this chapter explores three recent examples of Sino-Japanese and Sino-American “apology diplomacy”: the failed Japanese attempt to apologize for World War II in 1998, the 1999 Belgrade bombing, and the 2001 spy plane collision. Apologies are about power relations. Offenses to the social order threaten established hierarchies, and one way that the aggrieved can regain social position is vengeance. As sociologist J. M. Barbalet writes, “Vengefulness is an emotion of power relations. It functions to correct imbalanced or disjointed power relationships. Vengefulness is concerned with restoring social actors to their rightful place in relationships.”\textsuperscript{14} Apologies are another means of restoring threatened social hierarchies. The form an apology takes depends critically upon the relative status of the parties involved. The kind of apology necessary to rectify an offense an inferior commits against a superior is greater than that required of an offense committed between equals. For instance, a son who insults his father publicly must give an extended and public apology. Privately insulting one’s brother, however, requires a lesser kind of apology. An apology may not be possible, therefore, if there is disagreement over the relative status of the parties involved. If both parties claim to be the superior in a hierarchical relationship with each other, there can be no agreement on the extent of the apology necessary to rectify the offense.

However, the politics of apology is not just about relative status and material power, it is also about equally powerful passions. A public offense causes the injured party to lose face and is, therefore, far more offensive than one made in private.\textsuperscript{15} Vengeance and apologies not only help reestablish power relations, they also restore self-esteem. As sociologist Barrington Moore writes: “Vengeance means retaliation. It also means a reassertion of human dignity or worth, after injury or damage. Both are basic sentiments behind moral anger and the sense of injustice.”\textsuperscript{16}
Social psychologists have convincingly demonstrated that belittling the offender can restore the collective self-esteem of the offended. In one compelling experiment, women who were shown a clip from an altered *Rocky IV*, in which the American boxer (played by Sylvester Stallone) loses to the Russian, lost national self-esteem. Self-esteem was restored, however, when the subjects were subsequently allowed to denigrate Russians. By righting a wrong, apologies can similarly restore the self-esteem of the aggrieved. If an offense is felt to be too hurtful, however, no apology can suffice.


In October 1998, Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and visiting South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung issued a joint statement in Tokyo. Obuchi expressed his “heartfelt apologies” to the Korean people for their suffering under Japanese colonial rule, and Kim responded with “sincere acceptance.” It was the first written apology for the atrocities of World War II that Japan had issued to any country. In a speech before the Japanese Diet, Kim focused on reconciliation, forgiving Japan for its past misdeeds and speaking of their past and future partnership. When he finished his speech, the Diet gave Kim a standing ovation.

Things did not go nearly as well during Chinese President Jiang Zemin’s visit to Tokyo the next month. Kim’s successful trip had raised Chinese expectations. An editorial in Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* declared that “China should get an apology every bit as profuse as Korea’s.” In an oral statement, Prime Minister Obuchi expressed his “heartfelt apologies” to the Chinese people. While Emperor Akihito toasted Jiang at a state dinner, however, Chinese and Japanese diplomats engaged in last-minute haggling over the wording of their joint declaration. Yet in the end, Japan expressed only “deep remorse” rather than “heartfelt apologies” in the written document. Neither Obuchi nor Jiang was willing to sign the document, and the signing ceremony was cancelled.

Why did the Japan-Korea apology succeed, while a similar Japan-China effort failed just a month later? Western pundits have largely laid the blame for the Japan-China apology failure on the Japanese “psyche”: the Japanese people, it seems, suffer from an “apology complex.” In a high-profile *Foreign Affairs* article, *New York Times* journalist Nicholas Kristof presented a typical explanation: “Japanese people are famously polite, apol-
ogizing at the start and end of every conversation and many times in between—which makes the reluctance to apologize for the war even more remarkable. If the Japanese regularly apologize for being a nuisance, even when they are not, why will they not show regret for the slaughter of millions? Directed at any other ethnic group, such stereotyping of an entire people would be considered taboo by *Foreign Affairs*’s audience. But wartime propaganda about the “Japs” still resonates in the West, and Japan bashing continues to be socially acceptable in the United States.

A minority counterargument, however, holds that China’s elite was also to blame for the failure of the Japan-China apology. According to this view, the Chinese Communist Party is more interested in using Japan’s past misdeeds than in resolving them. Significantly, Kristof also advanced this argument. In “an effort to push the guilt button and gain more concessions,” he wrote in the *New York Times*, “Jiang’s behavior has been impolite and calculating. . . . China’s leaders have been less interested in healing the wounds of history than in reminding everyone of their existence.” The Chinese Communist Party, Kristof contends, “derives its legitimacy in part from the spirited resistance it led against Japanese invaders, and whenever it wants something from Tokyo it thunders about Japanese war brutality.” The Party elite, it seems, puts the past to use in both its foreign and domestic policies.

Both of these arguments are problematic. If the fault lies with the Japanese national character, then how can we account for the fact that the two apologies had such different outcomes? In other words, if the Japanese suffer from some sort of “apology pathology” as Kristof suggests, then how could they successfully apologize to Kim and Korea, but not to China? And if Jiang simply sought to continue using the past as a tool in the bilateral relationship, why would he travel to Tokyo seeking to resolve the issue in the first place? Indeed, his failure only provided ammunition for his critics. It is the past, arguably, that got the better of Jiang—not the other way around. Both of Kristof’s arguments advance extreme views of human motivation: either the Japanese are irrationally unable to apologize, or the Chinese are cold and calculating. The politics of apology, however, actually involve a complex interplay of both emotions and interests. Apologies implicate both the self-esteem and the relative status of the parties involved. The challenge is to show how considerations of both passion and power affect the process of apologizing.

There were significant differences in the contexts behind the Japan-Korea and Japan-China apologies, differences that help explain the success of one and the failure of the other. Whereas Japan and Korea had achieved
general agreement concerning their relative status and, therefore, the necessary extent of the apology, the same cannot be said of Japan and China, who are still far from reaching consensus about their relative positions. They are less likely, therefore, to agree on the degree of apology required to restore proper power relations. Furthermore, where Koreans have been confronting their past suffering under Japanese colonialism for decades, Chinese have only recently begun to face their victimization during the “War of Resistance.” The wounds of war are still too fresh for many Chinese to seriously entertain an apology. Considerations of both power and passion suggest, therefore, that talk of genuine Sino-Japanese reconciliation is premature.

As I noted in chapter 2, the prevalence of teacher/student and older brother/younger brother metaphors in Chinese writings about Sino-Japanese relations suggests that many Chinese nationalists today see themselves as superior to Japan. For instance, in the popular 1996 anti-Japanese diatribe *China Can Still Say No*, Song Qiang and his colleagues write, “Sun Yat-sen said that ‘China and Japan are brothers: China is the older brother, and Japan is the younger brother.’ Unfortunately, this ‘younger brother’ . . . does not treat his older brother like a human.”\(^{23}\) From this Chinese perspective, Japanese aggression against China during the Jiawu War and World War II is the almost unthinkable act of a student insulting his teacher, or a younger brother beating up his older brother. Such actions threaten Chinese views of a Sinocentric Asia. Violations of this kind can only be corrected by the inferior’s *profound and repetitive* public prostrations before the superior. And the kowtowing can only stop when the superior is satisfied that status has been restored. In this Chinese view, only this kind of abject apology can reconstruct the proper hierarchical relationship between China and Japan.

China’s instrumental concerns about relative status are compounded by deep emotions. Chinese anger about Japanese wartime atrocities still runs too deep for an apology to heal the wound to Chinese self-esteem. As leading China scholar Kokubun Ryosei has recently noted, the last two decades of Sino-Japanese relations have been marked by increased contact and mutual dependence, but also by growing antipathy.\(^{24}\) The anger has both visceral and ethical dimensions. Visceral anger may be emotionally pleasing: “A man in a rage does not want to get out of it,” wrote sociologist Charles Cooley a century ago. Ethical or righteous anger, however, may have a positive social function: “The higher function of hostility is to put down wrong.”\(^{25}\) Recent Chinese narratives about Japan are full of examples of both lower, visceral and higher, ethical forms of anger.
In *China Can Still Say No*, Song Qiang and his coauthors reveal a visceral anger towards Japan with lines like “We have probably made a mistake . . . you can only be humane towards humans; towards beasts you can only be bestial.” They clearly delight in insulting Japan. In a section entitled “Japan Should Beat Itself,” for instance, they state: “Japan is an immoral neighbor. . . . Immoral in the past, immoral in the present. Immoral in politics, immoral in economics. . . .”

Even Chinese scholars who have engaged in sincere soul-searching about World War II cannot but express a visceral anger at Japanese atrocities. As noted in chapter 5, PLA writer Jin Hui’s thoughtful 1995 *Wailing at the Heavens* is exceptional among Chinese writings on the war because it asks heart-wrenching questions about China’s own failures. But Jin’s research also forced him to confront evidence of Japanese atrocities, a process which brought forth some troubling emotions: “Skimming these records of violence today, we still frequently curse them in our hearts as ‘devils.’” Other “devils,” like “Western devils,” “British devils,” and so forth, must be further specified. Chinese, Jin explains, view the Japanese as the worst of all their early modern oppressors, reserving the term “devils” (*guizi*) just for them. Jin says that thinking about the “devils” led him to consider the issue of retribution very carefully: “I do not seek to arouse a desire for revenge. . . . It is not in the Chinese character to harbor a grudge, and excessively fierce feelings of vengeance can only corrode our hearts. . . . We should be vigilant about the monsters around us, and even more vigilant that we ourselves not become monsters.” Despite self-conscious efforts such as these to overcome his anger, Jin’s writing still lapses into snubs like “The greatest Japanese characteristic is that they lack a special characteristic,” and even racist comments, such as that all Japanese men are “more bestial than beasts.”

The visceral component of the anger many Chinese feel towards Japan understandably stems from the brutality of Japan’s wartime atrocities.

Such visceral anger is reinforced, however, by a higher or ethical anger based upon a strong sense of injustice. The sensationalist diatribe *Be Vigilant Against Japan!* passionately declares apology and indemnity are called for by “a fierce cry coming from the depths of over a billion Chinese souls.” As noted in the last chapter, two 1997 books on the topic of war reparations, *Blood Debt* and *Why Japan Won’t Settle Accounts*, framed their demands in the context of the injustice of China’s public loss of national *face* in the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, asking, in effect, “How could ‘little brother’ do this to us?” It is only after presenting the injustice of this Japanese betrayal that the authors can justify, to themselves as much
as to others, their angry demands for war reparations. To these authors, ethical anger makes visceral anger socially acceptable.

The anger the Chinese display toward Japan is sometimes completely contrived—designed to secure material goods like Japanese aid—and sometimes pure passion, as is the case in Iris Chang’s 1997 *The Rape of Nanking*. However, Chinese nationalists’ anger is usually both personal and political. The anger seeks to restore both personal self-respect as a “Chinese” and China’s proper place as superior in Sino-Japanese relations.

Considerations of both power and passion thus prevent many Chinese today from entertaining any Japanese apology seriously: they cannot agree on the two countries’ relative status, and their anger at Japan still runs too deep. During the 1995 fiftieth-anniversary commemorations of the Second World War, for example, Chinese nationalists unanimously rejected a series of Japanese apologies as insufficient. One Chinese scholar argued that Japanese Prime Minister Maruyama’s 1995 apology for the war was overshadowed by Liberal Democratic Party politician Hashimoto’s concurrent visit to Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, where Japanese honor their war dead.29 A Chinese Academy of Social Sciences researcher has dubbed this phenomenon “two tunes within one government,” declaring it “abnormal” and “incomprehensible.”30

Zi Shui and Xiao Shi elaborate on Chinese problems with Maruyama’s apology in their *Be Vigilant Against Japanese Militarism!* In a section entitled “How Deep was Maruyama’s ‘Apology’?,” Zi and Xiao complain about four issues: the apology was given at a press conference rather than at the formal memorial service; Hashimoto visited Yasukuni at the same time as Maruyama gave his apology; a Japanese cabinet member issued “revisionist” remarks but was not forced to resign; and Maruyama did not fault Emperor Hirohito for the war. The authors thus conclude that Maruyama’s statement was “only half an apology.”31 Their problems with the apology are more than petty: by suggesting that Maruyama publicly blame the emperor for the war, they suggest that he put not only his political career, but perhaps his very life, on the line for Chinese national pride. (Right-wing Japanese nationalists once physically assaulted the mayor of Nagasaki for suggesting that the emperor was responsible for wartime atrocities.) Given the issues that upset Zi and Xiao, it is likely that no apology could satisfy them. In this, they are not unusual. The 1995 Japanese Diet Resolution on the War, which expressed “deep remorse” for what Japan had done in the past, met similar condemnations from many Chinese. Many Chinese nationalists do not seem ready to seriously entertain any Japanese apology, no matter how profoundly felt or eloquently stated.
Instead, many Chinese nationalists seek to restore their self-esteem by bashing Japan. Because they wish to maintain a positive self-image, however, few will admit to such base desires. *Blood Debt* contains a fascinating example of such barely concealed motives. The first chapter is entitled, “I Want One U.S. Dollar of Indemnity.” The title suggests that an indemnity can symbolize an apology. The authors explain that “A U.S. dollar . . . is not an indemnity in an economic sense. . . . It is a confession to those victimized by Japan.” Professing a desire for just one dollar, the authors construct a magnanimous self-image: “Beneficent and generous Chinese seek only a clearing of this historical debt, not historical revenge.”

The currency the authors have chosen, however, suggests other motives. They desire an *American* dollar—not a Chinese yuan or a Japanese yen. The monetary damages listed on the back cover are also given in U.S. dollars. This implies that the indemnity must be made before the bar of Western opinion. The authors desire, it seems, to humiliate Japan publicly: “Recollecting the bitterness of fifteen years of resistance. . . . Hasn’t the Chinese race been too understanding? . . . As a lesson to future generations, the [Japanese] should be punished—both a moral and just punishment—and an economic one.” Contrary to their earlier ostentatious gesture of magnanimity—just “one U.S. dollar”—the authors here suggest that the size of the economic punishment should represent the size of the crime. Discussions of indemnity figures, like the debates surrounding the number killed during the Nanjing massacre that I discussed in chapter 5, seek to place Japanese on a specific point in a continuum of contrition.

*Blood Debt* is not an anomaly. Recent Chinese writings about Japan reveal that many Chinese nationalists fantasize about punishing, not forgiving, Japan. Moreover, as was the case with *Blood Debt*’s authors, for many Chinese the amount of the indemnity has come to symbolize the degree of Japanese contrition and subservience. Finally, like *Blood Debt*’s authors, many Chinese nationalists play out their conflict with Japan upon an international stage, frequently referring to foreign condemnation of Japanese actions to justify their refusal to accept Japanese apologies. In a section of their *Be Vigilant Against Japanese Militarism!* entitled “Asian Popular Opinion Is Furious,” authors Zi and Xiao justify their indignation by quoting a long list of Asian press reports condemning Hashimoto. One PLA writer turns to Western opinion, citing a *New York Times* article calling the Diet Resolution “a self-justification, not an apology.” Likewise, another writer maintains that Hashimoto’s “international reputation” was damaged by his visit to Yasukuni. Chinese nationalists thus seek to muster world opinion against Japan.
The martial metaphor is deliberate: Chinese and Japanese are arguably still at war, but on the field of public image, not of battle. They do combat today with words rather than with weapons. Foreigners are often unwitting accomplices in a Chinese project of mustering foreign opinion against Japan. A NewsHour piece featuring Iris Chang and the Japanese ambassador to the United States, Kunihiko Saito, is a fascinating example of the American media’s unwitting collaboration with Chinese nationalists in their verbal war with Japan. Rather than interviewing Chang and Saito separately, or moderating a debate between them, PBS anchorwoman Elizabeth Farnsworth allowed Chang to attack Saito directly—Farnsworth even joined her in condemning him. Early in the interview Chang argued that an apology must be voluntary to be sincere, saying “I think that the measure really of a true apology is not what a person or a government gives grudgingly under pressure. . . . A true apology is what one feels in his heart when he makes that apology.” Nevertheless, she later contradicts herself, attempting to coerce an apology from Saito: “Can the ambassador himself say today on national TV live that he personally is profoundly sorry for the rape of Nanking and other war crimes against China?” Saito responded, “We do recognize that acts of cruelty and violence were committed by members of the Japanese military and we are very sorry for that.” Despite this step in the right direction, Farnsworth and Chang then had the following astonishing exchange:

Farnsworth: Did you hear an apology?
Chang: I don’t know. Did you hear an apology?37

Having just written a book on the Nanjing massacre, Chang, understandably, is still too angry to accept any Japanese apology. The effect of the exchange, whether Farnsworth intended it or not, is that she helped Chang undermine or devalue Saito’s attempt to apologize. She thus, perhaps unwittingly, participated in Chang’s project of rallying Western opinion against Japan.

The Farnsworth interview also reveals that Chinese displays of anger such as Chang’s frequently do not have the desired effect. Although many Chinese nationalists desire that Japan prostrate itself before them in order to restore their national pride, forcing the Japanese into this position does not satisfy them, but only increases their anger.38 The NewsHour interview displays just this dynamic. Chang began by defining an apology as “voluntary.” By the end of the interview, however, Chang’s anger was so great that she sought to force an apology from Saito. Nothing Saito
might have said in response would likely have satisfied Chang, however, because it could no longer be voluntary.

Many Japanese, to be sure, are not passive spectators of this contest; some are active combatants. Nationalists on Japan’s far right seek to save face for Japan by discrediting China’s Japan bashers. For example, cartoonist Kobayashi Yoshinori has sought to discred...
Westerners are, like it or not, the audience and judge of such Sino-Japanese conflicts over face and should avoid taking sides. We would do well, as Laura Hein notes, to “avoid giving aid and comfort to political agendas not [our] own.” Instead, the West should try to understand the stakes of the game. Chinese and Japanese are fighting not just over issues of self-esteem, but also over their relative positions in the new Asian order. Americans and Chinese have recently battled over similar issues.

A “Terrorist Attack”:
The Belgrade Embassy Bombing, 1999

Immediately following the May 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, President Bill Clinton issued a public apology to the Chinese people. American ambassador to China James Sasser quickly followed suit, as did NATO Secretary General Javier Solana. As noted in chapter 1, their phone calls to President Jiang and other members of the Chinese leadership went unanswered for several days. Although their apologies were finally published in the Chinese media four days later, the Chinese leadership publicly rejected them. After lengthy negotiations, Beijing and Washington agreed on compensation packages for both sides. When money finally changed hands in January 2001, however, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao again demanded that the United States “conduct a comprehensive and thorough investigation into the bombing, severely punish the perpetrators and give satisfactory account of the incident to the Chinese people.”

How can we account for the failure of this Sino-American apology diplomacy? I argue that many Chinese could not accept an apology because they viewed the bombing as an assault on China’s national dignity. Refusing repeated American apologies was one of the only ways that China’s leaders could seek to regain face for the Chinese people.

Though clearly not representative, a collection of 281 condolence letters, essays, and poems e-mailed, faxed, and mailed to the Guangming Daily newspaper in the hours and days following the May 1999 Belgrade embassy bombing provides a window into Chinese nationalism today. These writings were posted on the paper’s Web site, which created a special page commemorating Xu Xinghu and Zhu Ying, the two Guangming Daily reporters who were killed in Belgrade. Shanghai’s Xiong Junfeng, for instance, sought to correct a matter of diction: “I believe that we should stop calling NATO’s bombing of our embassy a ‘barbarous act’ — a ‘terrorist act’
would be more appropriate. Something ‘barbaric’ stems from ignorance, but American-led NATO’s despicable act was clearly premeditated. . . . This was a terrorist attack through and through.”45 The letters reveal that the vast majority of Chinese believed that the United States bombed their embassy intentionally. In contrast, no mainstream Western media source initially took issue with NATO’s explanation that the bombing was an accident.46 Indeed, many Western news articles and editorials did not use the word “bombing” without prefacing it with the qualifier “accidental.” That the bombing was an accident thus became self-evident.

How can we account for these mutually exclusive views: the Chinese certain that the bombing was intentional; the Americans equally sure that it was an accident? As I noted in chapter 1, the Western media blamed a Chinese misinformation campaign. The Chinese government, it claimed, was not letting the Chinese people know about Serbian atrocities in Kosovo, but was instead calling attention to NATO “interference” in the “internal politics” of the Yugoslav Federation. Furthermore, the Chinese media did not report Clinton’s public apologies immediately following the bombing. The Washington Post was eloquent on this matter: “The Big Lie is alive and well in Beijing. . . . It should come as no surprise, after weeks of . . . internal propaganda, that many ordinary Chinese now believe the embassy bombing was deliberate.”47 Communist Party propaganda, in this Western view, explains the Chinese people’s mistaken belief that the bombing was intentional.

The Chinese government clearly manipulated information about the Kosovo war in general and the embassy bombing in particular. The problem with the misinformation argument, however, is that numerous Chinese who read the Western press coverage of the Kosovo conflict also believed that the bombing was intentional. The Chinese and American disagreement over whether the bombing was an accident is thus best explained, not by the misinformation argument, but by social psychology: the “intergroup attribution bias.” Social psychologists have found that all humans, as social beings, consistently favor their ingroups over outgroups when making attributions.48 Thus, if an ingroup member does something good, we attribute it to his or her goodness. If he or she does something bad, however, we write it off as beyond the member’s control. Conversely, if a member of an outgroup does something good, we dismiss it as “luck” or somehow attribute it to the situation, so it does not reflect well on the outgroup. If an outgroup member does something bad, we ascribe it to his or her badness, which then reflects poorly on the entire outgroup. Out of a desire to view our ingroup as good, in short, we give our fellow in-
group members the benefit of the doubt. This charity does not, however, extend to outsiders.

In the context of U.S.-China relations, Americans perceive their leaders as fellow ingroup members. Americans could not, therefore, easily attribute the Belgrade bombing to innate badness; instead, they focused on the situation: it must have been a tragic mistake. Like all peoples, Americans view themselves positively and desire that others also view them that way. As I noted in chapter 1, the NewsHour’s Jim Lehrer was so stunned by the Chinese view that America intentionally bombed their embassy that he brought up the issue seven times in an interview with the Chinese ambassador to the United States, Li Zhaoxing. 49

For Chinese, however, there is no reason to extend charitable attributions to outgroup Americans. Chinese nationalists on the Guanming Daily Web site largely assumed that the bombing was intentional, speculating instead about America’s precise goals: to foment domestic social chaos, to damage the Chinese economy, to divide China, to test the Chinese government’s resolve, and, more fundamentally, to humiliate China. Because the United States “fears a strengthened China,” a “young teacher” from Kunming writes, NATO seeks to “foment chaos. 50 Chaos in China would allow America, according to an e-mail from Beijing, to “topple China without fighting.” 51 Tian Chengyou from Zhengzhou similarly argues that the timing of the bombing, which coincided with the rise of China’s economy, the tenth anniversary of Tiananmen, and approaching American elections, indicates America’s goal—inciting domestic chaos. In an essay entitled “America’s Plot,” Qiu Yingxiong concurs: “Because of defeats in Korea and Vietnam, America is not sure that it can subdue [chenfu] China.” 52 Qiu thus argues that America seeks to test the Chinese government’s resolve.

If the “intergroup attribution bias” helps explain divergent Chinese and American views on the cause of the bombing, why did so many Chinese view the Belgrade bombing as a threat to China’s national self-respect? And how should we understand the various angry responses to this threat, such as demands for apologies and explanations, tongue lashings, demonstrations, calls for economic boycotts, and other forms of revenge? Psychological research on self-esteem helps explain Chinese reactions to the Belgrade bombing. To the extent that individuals associate with a certain group, they gain “collective self-esteem” from that group’s accomplishments. 53 Therefore, to the extent that individuals identity with their nations their self-esteem is tied to its fate. We have seen that many Chinese berate Japan in an attempt to restore their self-esteem. The anger that many
FIGURE 10. “Fuck your crazy American!!!” This graffiti appeared outside the west entrance to People’s University in Beijing in May 1999. Photo courtesy of Scott Kennedy.
Chinese displayed toward America during the bombing protests, similarly, sought to regain face for China.

Chinese protestors clearly felt their nation had been dealt an unjust blow. Almost all of the 281 letters sent to the Guangming Daily express an ethical “outrage” or “indignation” (fennu, fenkai, qifen). None speaks of more visceral forms of anger, like being “irritated” or “ticked off” (e.g., shengqi). Such righteous anger is “designed to rectify injustice”; it seeks, one group of psychologists writes, “to reassert power or status, to frighten the offending person into compliance, to restore a desired state of affairs.”

Indeed, during the Belgrade bombing protests, many popular nationalists demanded that their government take a tough stand and “restore justice” (taobui gongdao).

Moreover, several of the letters detail specific requests and demands, which often extend well beyond securing a mere apology from NATO. According to some writers, the government should obtain a satisfactory explanation and demand monetary compensation. Yan Cui from Guangzhou wrote a letter to the U.S. president, asking, “Even more infuriating [than the bombing itself] is that after the tragedy, you have been arrogant and impolite, not only failing to offer an apology, but actually resorting to sophistry [qiangci duoli]. How can the Chinese people accept such an explanation?” To this writer, Clinton’s apologies sound hollow without a convincing account of the bombing. Monetary compensation would offer some satisfaction for a writer from Shanghai, who urges the Guangming Daily editors to “sue America, Clinton and NATO in Chinese courts, according to Penal Law Codes 6, 8, 15 and 120, and to seek indemnity under Code 36 . . . Protect the Chinese people’s proper rights!”

As was the case with Blood Debt’s demand for just “one U.S. dollar,” indemnities seem important to this writer not simply as monetary compensation, but also as a public punishment that symbolically restores China to its proper status.

Other writers urge a different kind of economic retaliation—boycotts. A poem from Shenyang in China’s Northeast extols this form of ingroup loyalty:

When we are wearing Pierre Cardin and Nike . . .
When we are driving Cadillacs, Lincolns, and going to KFC and McDonalds . . .
Do we have a clear conscience?
No!!

As our fishing boats are stopped and searched unreasonably.
As our compatriots lose their lives in the sea protecting the Diaoyu Islands [from Japan] . . .
Can we still sit in front of our Sony televisions?
No!!!

Koreans are proud to use their own national products . . .
Can we still find glory by using foreign products?
No!!!

Let’s resolve to produce and use national products!\(^{57}\)

This was a popular cry. An employee at the Shenzhen Labour Bureau e-mailed the *Guangming Daily* a copy of a letter he had sent to the Jinshan Corporation, a Beijing competitor of Microsoft: “American products bring us pleasure—and bombs and disaster. And the West uses the profits from its sales in China to build weapons and target the Chinese people. . . . How can Chinese be happy about this? I have long been a nationalist and have never used Japanese goods. . . . Now I will not buy American goods either. I urge your company to seize this precious turning point of broad nationalist mobilization to promote national products, earning face for the nation and bringing credit to China.”\(^{58}\) Several information technology companies wrote in pledging sales boycotts. Fujian United Information Services, for instance, promised the *Guangming Daily* that it would cease selling IBM, Lotus and other American products.\(^{59}\)

To restore their personal self-esteem, some writers vilified America and NATO. Bill Clinton, who embodied America, was a popular object of derision. For instance, Beijing’s Chen Jie abuses Clinton as a “bad person” who “cannot even govern his own country,” which is “plagued by guns and drugs.” NATO faces similar derision. X. F. Liu, from the Stone Computer Group in Beijing, declares NATO a “mad dog,”\(^{60}\) while Zhou Shaogeng, of the China Railroad Foreign Services Company, composed a lengthy song as a “battle cry to arouse the people.” Each stanza begins with a new insult:

NATO is a group of thieves . . .
that use the blood and flesh of others as bricks and tiles
to build their own safe and happy den.
NATO is a group of madmen . . .
whose hearts have been blackened by the smoke of gunpowder . . .
NATO is a group of fools . . .
who close their eyes and refuse to look back.
What is NATO?
NATO is the nemesis of peace . . .\(^{61}\)

Angered by America’s “gunboat diplomacy,” nationalist writer Zhang Zhaozhong of China’s National Defense University similarly sought to
save face for China by mocking America as “supercilious” and “overweening” in his 2000 diatribe *Who Is the Next Target?* 62

Many letters stress the importance of protecting China from further humiliation by transforming it into a more powerful country. An e-mail from Beijing puts the consensus view succinctly: “We will only avoid being insulted if we strengthen ourselves.” 63 The phrase “turn grief into strength” (*hua beitong wei liliang*) is a continuous thread throughout the writings. Many students who wrote to the *Guangming Daily* vowed to study hard to empower China. The radiology majors at Harbin Medical University, for example, pledge: “We promise the Party and all our countrymen that we will turn grief into strength, studying hard to strengthen our country into a world superpower.” The incoming biochemistry class of 1998 at Nankai University similarly writes from Tianjin: “We will study hard to strengthen the motherland . . . so that in the not-so-distant future no hostile force will dare or be able to take military action against China.” 64 The dream of a “prosperous country and a strong army” (*fuguo qiangbing*) still inspires Chinese over a century after it was first promoted by late-Qing-dynasty reformers.

Many of the writers reassure themselves about China’s ability to fortify itself against future humiliation by locating power in unity and num-
bers. For Wu Jing, whose “heart still feels like a large stone is pressed down
upon it,” a united China is the answer: “Ever since my feelings of grief
and outrage passed, I have been wondering what, as a Chinese, I should
do. How can we prevent our martyrs’ blood from having flowed in vain?”
Wu proposes establishing a commemorative fund: “One yuan from every
Chinese would not be much money, but it would show the American im-
perialists Chinese unity. The Chinese people, of one mind and one will,
will not be insulted.”

Another letter, a poem written out of “great pain
and fury” by an undergraduate from Central China Industrial Uni-
versity, finds strength in China’s massive population:

1.2 billion people shout together:
The Chinese race will not be insulted!
The giant dragon has woken to take off in the Orient,
How can your kind of paper tiger resist?

The boycott efforts mentioned above were also attempts to find strength
in unity and numbers.

Other writers turn their attention outward, appealing to “international
society” (guoji shehui) to take China’s side in a battle for global popular
opinion. An e-mail from Shandong is concise: “We must fully utilize the
power of popular opinion to attack the American aggressors.”

Zhang Qian from Beijing has a concrete plan: setting up three counters on the
Guangming Daily website that would count the days that pass without
an American apology:

- Since May 8th there have been XX days, and China has yet to receive
  a formal apology.
- Since May 8th there have been XX days, and China has yet to receive
  compensation.
- Since May 8th there have been XX days, and the troublemaking
  murderers have yet to be punished.

The passing of every additional day, he argued, would bring shame upon
NATO. Zhang has a powerful vision of cyber-nationalism: “The Inter-
net is Western, but . . . we Chinese can use it to tell the people of the world
that China cannot be insulted!”

The editors of the Guangming Daily similarly seek to shame America by posting at the top of their condolences
Web site two English-language translations of letters to Bill Clinton writ-
ten by the parents of the deceased. Zhu Fulai and Guo Guiqi write: “We
had a happy family . . . a perfect family. How happy we were! . . . We wish you, your wife, and your daughter a happy life!"\(^{69}\)

Taking power in numbers to one logical conclusion, several letters speak emotionally of revenge. The last lines of a poem sent in by Wang Shuke of Shanxi Province read:

The countless masses work together, 
and plan revenge in ten years. 
This is the hatred of our race-nation.\(^{70}\)
Other letters and poems echo this threatening tone, often using the menacing proverb, “undergoing hardships and strengthening one’s resolve to wipe away the national humiliation [wo xin chang dan].” Blood is an even more pervasive theme. Many write cryptically that the martyrs’ blood will not have been shed in vain, while others demand a cashing in on the “blood debt” (xuezhai). R. X. Liu, for instance, writes from Inner Mongolia: “The blood debt must be repaid with blood! . . . 1.2 billion Chinese will persist in fighting American imperialism to the end. We will not be as meek as lambs at the slaughterhouse.” Indeed, for some writers, the restoration of Chinese dignity justifies militarization. An e-mail from Shenyang proposes that everyone contribute money to buy an aircraft carrier: “When we have a strong and modern military, we’ll see who still dares to bully us!” A writer from Guangzhou also raises the specter of violence: “Chinese love peace and seek economic development. But . . . we do not fear war. China’s youth should unite . . . shoulder to shoulder, and shout at the imperialists: ‘The Chinese people cannot be insulted!’” Several letters, notably, invoke pride in past military “victories” over America in Korea and Vietnam. As argued in chapter 4, this pride creates the confidence necessary for a possible future military encounter with the United States.

Despite the ferocity of much of this nationalist rhetoric, it must be understood in the context of the transient threat that the Belgrade bombing represented to Chinese national self-esteem. Whether throwing bricks at the U.S. embassy, hurling invective at the U.S. president, or fantasizing about military retaliation, many Chinese found solace in various forms of “outgroup denigration.” Such psychological tactics restored their healthy sense of self-respect. The response of the Belgrade bombing protesters was not simply a calculating way to pursue China’s national interests. Because the bombing damaged not just the embassy, but also the cherished identifications of individual Chinese with their nation, their response was deeply passionate.

The Two “Very Sorrys”: The Spy Plane Fiasco, 2001

Following the plane collision of April 2001, in which an American EP-3 surveillance aircraft and a Chinese F-8 jet fighter collided over the South China Sea, killing the Chinese pilot and forcing the Americans to make an emergency landing on China’s Hainan Island, Chinese and American diplomats in Beijing and Washington engaged in over a week of inten-
sive diplomacy. The focus of the negotiations was the wording of a letter the Americans would send to the Chinese government. The agreed-upon wording came to be known as “The two ‘very sorry’s’”: “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.”

American commentary on the spy place standoff frequently resorted to attributing “culture” to Chinese behavior. What role did culture actually play in Sino-American “apology diplomacy”? Samuel Huntington has asserted that the post–Cold War world is divided into civilizations marked by fundamental cultural difference. A number of Western analysts followed Huntington in suggesting that the fallout from the plane collision confirms that China is both different and dangerous. The Chinese, in this view, are obsessed with saving face. “Beijing’s false accusation of U.S. responsibility,” Jim Hoagland wrote in the Washington Post, is a “a reflexive act of pride.” Jiang, it seems, was “getting personal” by drawing a “line in the sand” with Bush. This irrational emotionalism, some Western pundits asserted, is rooted in Chinese tradition. Writing in the New York Times, Fox Butterfield located the cultural roots of China’s demand for an American apology in “Chinese child-rearing practices” and the “old Confucian tradition of conformity.” A cruel Confucian culture, it seems, lies at the heart of Communist tyranny.

Other Western pundits, in contrast, have denied that culture played any role in Chinese behavior, depicting Beijing’s response as purely rational and goal-oriented. The Financial Times’s James Kynge focused on foreign policy. Jiang Zemin, he wrote, “seized on the incident to demand a halt to U.S. air surveillance missions near the Chinese coastline.” On the NewsHour, former American ambassador to China Winston Lord highlighted Beijing’s domestic objectives: it is “extremely tempting for [Beijing] . . . to use foreign devils and invoke nationalism to distract the populace.” Beijing, in this view, was simply cold and calculating, using the incident for domestic and foreign political purposes.

Arguments about Chinese culture thus reproduce the problematic sense/sensibility dichotomy: either the Chinese are rational, or they are irrational. Such arguments also iterate an equally problematic East/West dualism: either we are different, or we are the same.

Culture does matter: cultural differences clearly played a major role in the Sino-American apology diplomacy of April 2001. But Chinese and Americans do not differ in kind: we are all, after all, human beings. The trick is to capture the ways both cultural differences and cultural com-
monalities work together to shape international relations. Recent experimental findings in cross-cultural psychology have revealed significant East-West differences both in reasoning about causes and about assessing responsibility. These are differences of degree, not kind, but they can help account for some of the disparate Chinese and American responses to the plane collision.

Cross-cultural psychologists juxtapose Western analytic and Eastern holistic reasoning. Western reasoning tends to focus on objects and categories and is driven by formal logic; in the East, by contrast, reasoning embraces contradictions among objects in a yin-yang field of constant change. In the case of the plane collision, Western analysts, searching for “the” (one and only) cause of the accident, have focused on the pilots and their planes. There was much talk in the Western press, therefore, about the Chinese and American pilots and the lumbering EP-3 and the speedy F-8. Analytic reasoning led many Westerners to blame Chinese pilot Wang Wei and his F-8 fighter.

This search for a single “cause” of the accident struck many Chinese as odd. They tended to look instead to the bigger picture. And the circumstantial evidence, as they saw it, was damning. The accident occurred off the Chinese coast, at a time when America was increasing the frequency of its surveillance flights. Furthermore, the new Bush administration was pursuing a National Missile Defense (NMD) initiative that has the potential to undermine China’s national security. The Bush team had also embraced Cold War rhetoric, repudiating Clinton’s policy of “engagement,” and labeling China America’s “competitor.” (To make things worse, there is no Chinese notion of “friendly competition” akin to sportsmanship; instead, a “competitor” is a rival to be vanquished.) Following on the heels of the 1999 American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the plane collision appeared as yet another example of American bullying. Both the Belgrade bombing and the plane collision fit perfectly into the emerging “victimization narrative” of Chinese suffering at the hands of the West that I discuss in chapters 3 and 5. In sum, when all aspects of the political and historic context of the plane collision are taken into account, it becomes clear why American behavior looked so belligerent to many Chinese.

Cross-cultural psychologists have also found significant differences in the ways that Westerners and Easterners assess responsibility. The former concentrate more on culpability, while the latter highlight consequences. The distinction is comparable to that between states like Ohio, where police and insurers use a fault standard to determine who is responsible for a car accident, and Michigan, a “no fault” state. Michigan lawmakers
notwithstanding, Americans tend to focus on the issue of fault, seeking to get “inside the minds” (mens rea) of those involved. Hence our legal focus on “premeditation” and the distinction between “first-degree” and “second-degree” crimes. This also helps account for the American focus on the personalities of the two pilots: the “hotshot maverick” Wang Wei (“China’s Tom Cruise”) and the stalwart Nebraskan Shane Osborn. Because Americans see Wang as the one who intentionally created a dangerous situation, they will not apologize.

Chinese, by contrast, tend towards Michigan lawmakers’ reasoning on auto accidents: they have a more pragmatic, consequence-oriented view of responsibility. Regardless of who was at fault in the plane collision, a Chinese citizen was dead. A sincere American apology was therefore needed to restore the Sino-American relationship. Chinese were angered less by the accident, or even by Wang’s death, than they were by the American refusal to apologize. Initial American declarations (from Bush to Powell and down the line) that America was “not responsible”—and demands for the return of the American crew—were seen as highly offensive. A People’s Daily commentary, for instance, maintained that “U.S. officials’ rhetoric about Chinese culpability is more dangerous than the collision itself.”

By refusing to apologize, America appeared extremely arrogant. A similar cultural misunderstanding had occurred after the Belgrade bombing two years earlier. Americans, focusing on the question of intent, were upset by Chinese skepticism that the bombing was an accident. Chinese, focusing on consequences, were upset because three Chinese were dead and American apologies were not seen as sufficient to restore the relationship.

Chinese and American reactions to the spy plane incident also exhibited a number of cultural commonalities. As noted above, social psychologists have demonstrated that outgroups do not get the benefit of the doubt and that ingroup members seek to maintain collective self-esteem. This work helps explain significant similarities in the Chinese and American responses. In diplomatic contexts, Chinese and Americans tend to view each other as outgroups; after the plane collision, therefore, there was a strong tendency to ascribe hostile intent to “them.” Both sides gave the benefit of the doubt to their compatriots and argued that the other had revealed its “true nature,” whether as an “imperialist aggressor” or as a “Communist tyrant.” The “intergroup attribution bias” thus helps explain the radical divergence between Chinese and American understandings of what happened. Each blamed the other; each sought to save face for their nation at the other’s expense.

Psychological research on collective self-esteem can also shed light upon
Chinese and American reactions to the plane collision. As noted above, to the extent that we identify with a group, our self-esteem is tied to the group’s fate. Both Chinese and Americans viewed the events of early April 2001 as a threat to their self-esteem. In China, many perceived American callousness towards the fate of Wang Wei as a humiliating loss of face. Similarly, in the conservative *Weekly Standard*, Robert Kagan and William Kristol declared the Bush administration’s handling of the affair “A National Humiliation”: Bush’s “groveling” was a degrading “loss of face.” The public image of one’s nation is clearly not a uniquely “Oriental” concern.

Some Chinese and Americans responded to the mutual identity threat by denying its existence. Although the incident was clearly a disaster for the bilateral relationship, many on both sides quickly claimed victory—a clear sign of denial. Gloat ing that “We won!” allowed many Chinese and American nationalists to save face. In Beijing, many boasted that President Jiang had planned America’s humiliation from the start, and had “taught Bush Jr. a lesson.” Qinghua University’s Yan Xuetong, for instance, declared that “China stuck to principle” and “did a better job of dealing with the incident.” In Washington, meanwhile, Bush was widely praised for having handled the situation masterfully, winning the day. For instance, the “Nelson Report” circulated a parody of the American “we’re sorry” letter: “We’re sorry the world is now seeing your leaders as the xenophobic, clueless thugs that they really are. We’re sorry you are losing so much face over this.”

Others responded to the threat to their self-esteem not with denial but by venting a rage designed to restore national self-respect—to regain face. For instance, by publicly calling Bush a “coward” (in a letter from Wang Wei’s wife), Beijing sought to gain face for China at Washington’s expense. And with the release of the American crew on 11 April, American hawks quickly began screaming for vengeance. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who had been muzzled during the sensitive negotiations, immediately held a Pentagon news conference to present additional incriminating evidence against Wang Wei. Nationalists on both sides of the Pacific thus sought to restore face for their nation by denigrating the other.

The idea that cultures can be so different that understanding one another is impossible is extremely pernicious. There is much that all humans share, including pride. But Chinese and American policymakers and pundits do need to be aware of cultural differences. In this case, they needed the open-mindedness to try to understand not just what an apology meant to them, but also what it meant to the other side. We must, in other words, learn to embrace both cultural differences and our common humanity.
The specific language of apology varies across cultures, but, as social beings, we all care greatly about it.

Olympian Apologies

As Team China entered the stadium during the opening ceremony of the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, NBC sportscaster Bob Costas commented:

The People’s Republic of China, one fifth of the world’s population, with an economy growing at a rate of about ten percent a year. . . . But of course, there are problems with human rights, copyright disputes, and the threat posed to Taiwan. And within the Olympics . . . they’ve excelled athletically and built into a power, but amidst suspicions, Dick [Enberg], especially concerning their track athletes and their female swimmers possibly using performance enhancing drugs. None caught in Barcelona, but since those games of 1992, several have been caught.89

Costas’ impolitic remarks quickly created a furor among Chinese living in the United States. Students and scholars at Harvard and Berkeley led the way, “strongly demanding a public apology from Mr. Costas or NBC!” Chinese activists utilized e-mail networks to gather donations to fund protest advertisements, one of the first of which appeared in the Washington Post on 14 August: “NBC commentator Mr. Bob Costas’ hostile comments against many international athletes, including Team China, had [sic] badly contaminated the spirit of the Olympics and deeply offended countless viewers worldwide. Mr. Costas and NBC should have the courage to publicly apologize for their ignominious prejudice and inhospitality.”90

Very likely under pressure from its parent company, General Electric, which does substantial business in China, NBC’s Vice President for Sports, Ed Markey, wrote the Chinese students the next day: “Mr. Costas did not intend any disrespect to the People’s Republic of China or its citizens. The comments made were not based on NBC beliefs. Nobody at NBC intended to offend anyone, and we regret that this apparently happened. We apologize for any resulting hurt feelings and we sincerely hope this puts the matter to rest.” Markey’s hope was quickly dashed, as student leader Chen Kai promptly rejected this private apology and demanded a public, prime-time television apology. When Markey responded instead with a public news conference, the students determined to raise funds for yet another anti-NBC advertisement, which they later ran in
the *New York Times*. Costas’ words were appalling—condemning all Chinese for the transgressions of a few coaches and swimmers is arguably even racist—but the impassioned nationalism of the Chinese activists was also shocking. How should it be understood?

In this chapter I have argued that nationalism involves a combination of both sense and sensibility, a combination captured by the concept of *face*. Like all peoples, Chinese are emotionally bound to visions of their proper *face*. Martin Yang defines *face* largely in terms of affect: “When we say that a man wants a face, we mean that he wants to be given honor, prestige, praise, flattery, or concession, whether or not these are merited. Face is really a psychological satisfaction, a social esteem accorded by others.”

Face is also, however, an instrumental issue. Nanjing University sociologist Cheng Boqing defines *face* as an “individual’s credit,” which can be stored in a “social bank.” Losing face is thus like going socially “bankrupt.” Ambrose King similarly writes that “the social aspect of *face* . . . is like the credit card. Having *face* is like having good credit, so that one has a lot of purchasing power.”

Saving national face is thus no mere emotional matter: it has instrumental implications for the individual. In Chinese, the phrase “to lose face for . . . ” (*gei . . . diulian*) points to the responsibility Chinese have to maintain the *face* of the groups to which they belong. In international contexts, that group is the race-nation (*minzu*). Responsible for China’s national *face*, many Chinese abroad feel a heavy pressure to maintain appearances. In his thoughtful 1996 book *Studying in the USA*, Qian Ning explains, “Life abroad naturally fosters a patriotism that is always deeper than that cultivated by domestic ‘patriotic’ thought education. . . . The reason is simple: China’s image in the world [*shijieshang de xingxiang*] is intimately connected to the position of overseas Chinese abroad.”

Nationalism is not only about an irrational emotionalism, but also about position—and hence, power. Fearing that Costas had caused China to lose face, Chinese student leaders felt the responsibility—especially strong as intellectuals—to regain it through winning an apology from NBC.

Chinese generally approve of such efforts to maintain the *face* of the group. While winning glory for oneself (*zhengqi*) has a displeasing ring to it, the phrase *zhengguang* and the proverb *guang zong yao zu*, which refer to winning honor or glory for the group, are admirable. Indeed, Chinese press coverage was very supportive of the protestors’ claims. The next summer, similarly, one popular Canton monthly proclaimed that Hong Kong had “earned glory for the Chinese race” (*wei Zhonghua minzu zheng le guang*). The accomplishments of a member of a group
are seen to increase the group’s face before other groups. CCTV coverage of the Hong Kong handover ceremonies highlighted international celebrations of China’s accomplishment. The handover in this sense resembled a debutante ball: China stepped out into international society and demanded face in the form of recognition from other national groups.

Problems arise, however, when excessive concerns for face lead to nationalist excess. Unwilling to negotiate with NBC and bent on vengeance—publicly humiliating Costas—Chinese protest organizers like Chen Kai appeared unappeasable to American audiences. Seeking to redress a legitimate grievance and regain face for China, they only ended up making China lose more face before their intended audience. As Lu Xun and numerous other Chinese observers have noted, excessive concerns for face can be self-defeating, making those who harbor them appear as foolish as Ah Q.