
The Spectre of Communism in US China Policy: Bipartisanship in the American Subconscious

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Recent survey research suggests that, on average, Americans of all political stripes hold more positive attitudes towards the Chinese people than they do towards the Chinese government. This tendency appears more pronounced, however, among Republicans and conservatives, who are significantly more negative about the Chinese government than Democrats and liberals.¹

What best explains these two findings? In the wake of the January 2010 ‘Google Incident’ and the Obama administration’s announcement of continued arms sales to Taiwan, a February 1st *People’s Daily Online* editorial declared that ‘Cold War thinking’ continues to bias Americans against China. American ideology, it argued, is imbued with a ‘deeply-rooted hostility against and fear of . . . communism’.²

After 30 years of reform and opening, China today is arguably communist in name only. Could it be that communism is nonetheless what best explains American attitudes that are more negative towards the Chinese government than towards the Chinese people? Bipartisan American ambivalence about the Chinese government may stem in part from a common Liberalism, a celebration of individual freedom set against the idea of tyrannies or despotisms of either the left (communism) or right (fascism). Indeed, communism and fascism are often conflated in the American mind as totalitarianism—total state control and total loss of individual liberty.

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¹ Peter Hays Gries and H. Michael Crowson, ‘Political Orientation, Party Affiliation, and American Attitudes towards China’, *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2010), pp. 219–44.

² ‘Meiguò: lèngzhān sìwéi nìshì bēilì’ (‘The Anachronism of U.S. Cold War Mentality’), February 1, 2010, <http://world.people.com.cn/GB/89881/97034/10899270.html>. For English, see <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90780/91343/6886865.html>. Both accessed on February 12, 2010.

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In his thoughtful *China and the American Dream*, Richard Madsen argues that the Tian'anmen Square Massacre of June 4, 1989 had a profound impact on American views of China, and that changed American attitudes had less to do with events in China than with American national identity itself.³ For Americans, the moral drama of Tian'anmen involved an exercise in navel gazing, of 'dreaming their social selves in face of the realities of the other'.⁴ Specifically, Americans had revelled in China's reform and opening of the 1980s, projecting their Liberal myths onto China and Deng Xiaoping, who was even declared *Time* magazine's 'Man of The Year' in 1985.⁵ China's embrace of the market was seen as affirming American capitalism and democracy. Tian'anmen shattered that illusion; the American image of Deng abruptly shifted from a capitalist 'just like us' to that of a 'communist despot', the very antithesis of American Liberty.

And given recent Republican discourse labelling President Obama a 'socialist'—a January 2010 *Daily Kos* online poll of 2000 self-identified Republicans found that 63% believed Obama to be a socialist⁶—could it be that disparate attitudes towards communism are in part what drives partisan differences in American attitudes towards the Chinese government? Discursive evidence from US Congressional testimony suggests that Republicans are more likely than Democrats to explicitly and derisively associate the Chinese government with communism. For instance, Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) said at an April 2, 2009 Congressional hearing on export controls, '[t]here are reasons why Communist China remains under an arms embargo. The Tian'anmen Square massacre, where the tyrannical and brutal Chinese government murdered thousands of peaceful reformers, changed the course of history.' Note both the reference to 'Communist China' and the clear distinction drawn between the 'tyrannical and brutal Chinese government' and the Chinese people, described as 'peaceful reformers'.

Another question is that of exactly how the idea of communism might impact American perceptions of China. Growing numbers of psychologists acknowledge that implicit, associative, or unconscious processes play roles

³ See also Harold Isaacs, 'Scratches on Our Minds', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1956), pp. 197–211; and David M. Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing U.S.-China Relations, 1989-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁴ Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. xi.

⁵ See <http://www.time.com/time/subscriber/personoftheyear/archive/stories/1985.html>. Accessed on June 1, 2007.

⁶ Eric Kleefeld, 'Republicans Think Obama is a Socialist, and Palin More Qualified to be President', February 1, 2010, <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2010/02/poll-republicans-think-obama-is-a-socialist-and-palin-more-qualified-to-be-president.php>. Accessed on February 12, 2010.

just as important in human judgement and behaviour as do explicit, deliberative, or conscious cognitive processes.⁷ Over the past decade, new methods like the Implicit Association Test (IAT) have given psychologists new tools through which to explore the human subconscious.⁸ These tools can be applied to the study of international attitudes. For instance, one study used the IAT to empirically demonstrate that implicit attitudes towards a foreign country impact declared purchase intentions towards that country's products.⁹

International relations theorists have also become interested in the unconscious or automatic aspects of human judgement and international behaviour. Ted Hopf proposes that in addition to a 'logic of consequentialism' or 'instrumental rationality' involving deliberate cost–benefit calculation, and a 'logic of appropriateness' or 'value rationality' involving conscious attention to norms and identities, there also exists a 'logic of habit' that is subconscious and automatic. Following Weber and Bourdieu, Hopf argues that 'habits are the unreflective reactions we have to the world around us... They simplify the world, short-circuiting rational reflection. They are acquired from the social structures in which we are situated.'¹⁰ Vincent Pouliot has similarly argued for a 'logic of practicality', emphasizing the 'commonsensical' and 'inarticulate' origins of international practices.¹¹

These two lines of research raise an important question: Could communism impact American attitudes towards China in an automatic or habitual way? And, to borrow from Hopf, could the differences in the social structures within which Democrats and Republicans are embedded account for the differential impacts of communism on Democratic and Republican attitudes towards China? This article explores these questions through experiments and surveys in which we prime communism to explore its potential impact on American attitudes towards China at both the conscious and subconscious levels. We hope that this research will contribute to a better understanding of the determinants of mutual perception and misperception in US–China relations, the most consequential bilateral relationship of the 21st century.

⁷ A. G. Greenwald and M. R. Banaji, 'Implicit Social Cognition: Attitudes, Self-esteem, and Stereotypes', *Psychological Review*, Vol. 102, No. 1 (1995), pp. 4–27; J. A. Bargh and T. L. Chartrand, 'The Unbearable Automaticity of Being', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 54, No. 7 (1999), pp. 462–79.

⁸ A. G. Greenwald, D. E. McGhee and J. L. K. Schwartz, 'Measuring Individual Differences in Implicit Cognition: The Implicit Association Test', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 74, No. 6 (1998), pp. 1464–80.

⁹ H. Cai, X. Fang, Z. Yang and H. Song, 'Implicit Consumer Animosity: A Primary Validation', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, in press.

¹⁰ Ted Hopf, 'The Logic of Habit in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, in press, DOI: 10.1177/1354066110363502.

¹¹ Vincent Pouliot, 'The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities', *International Organization*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (2008), pp. 257–88.

Implicit Communism and Explicit China Attitudes

Methods and Measures

We recruited 146 Americans from around the United States to take part in an online survey. It began with a consent form explaining to participants the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, and guaranteeing anonymity of data collected. Data collection and analysis followed the ethical standards of the American Political Science and American Psychological Associations (APSA and APA).

Because the survey focus was on American attitudes towards China, one non-citizen and one Chinese-American (who may possibly have only recently emigrated from China and gained US citizenship) were removed from the sample. A further eight respondents who might have been consciously aware of the implicit communism prime were also removed.¹² The final sample ($N=136$) included more women ($N=77$) than men ($N=59$), and more Republicans ($N=57$) than Democrats ($N=36$) and Independents ($N=43$). Ages ranged from 18 to 66 years, with a mean age of 30 years ($SD=12$). In terms of ethnicity, the sample was 85% white, 2% African-American, 2% non-Chinese Asian-American, 4% Latino/a, and 3% Native American.

To explore the subconscious impact of communism on conscious perceptions of China threat, we created an implicit communism prime using a word unscrambling task to indirectly prime the idea of communism.¹³ Of the 12 sentences to be unscrambled, 8 included a single word related to communism. They were collectivism, revolutionaries, capitalists, socialized, Marxism, comrade, communists, and red. As Figure 1 shows, some were part of the unscrambled sentence and some were the single superfluous word. As mentioned above, only 8 of the 67 participants randomly assigned to this manipulation condition recognized the pattern. Participants' conscious awareness was instead focused on the sentence unscrambling task.

A second group of participants were randomly assigned to a control condition in which they performed 12 similarly valenced sentence unscrambles that contained no words related to communism. Undertaking this task,

¹² In response to a question on the final page of the survey, 'Did you notice any particular pattern to the sentences in the sentence unscrambling task?' Eight of the participants who had been randomly assigned to the implicit communism condition mentioned something to do with communism.

¹³ T. K. Srull and R. S. Wyer, 'The Role of Category Accessibility in the Interpretation of Information About Persons: Some Determinants and Implications', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 37, No. 10 (1979), pp. 1660–72; J. A. Bargh, P. M. Gollwitzer, A. Lee-Chai, K. Barndollar and R. Troetschel, 'The Automated Will: Non-conscious Activation and Pursuit of Behavioural Goals', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 81, No. 6 (2001), pp. 1014–27.

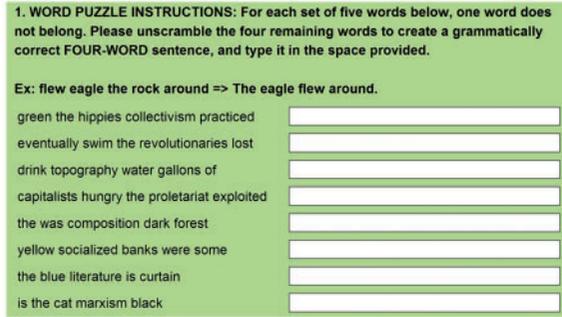


Fig. 1 Implicit Communism Prime: Sentence Unscramble Task.

however, equalized the time and effort they spent relative to those randomly assigned to the manipulation condition.

To capture explicit perceptions of the China threat, we created a three-item threat scale. Each item was assessed on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The items were: ‘China’s system of government is a threat to the American way of life’, ‘China’s rise will help stabilize East Asia and promote world peace’ (reverse coded), and ‘The recent increase in Chinese defence spending undermines U.S. security’. Question order was randomized.

Results and Discussion

We created our threat scale by first reverse coding the one positive item and then averaging across all three statements. The resulting scale had an internal reliability of $\alpha = 0.65$, which was adequate given its shortness.¹⁴ Removing all Independents from the sample, we then ran a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with priming condition (i.e. prime versus no prime) and party identification (Republican versus Democrat) predicting explicit self reports of China threat. As Figure 2 graphically displays, there were significant main effects of both priming condition, $F(1, 89) = 6.06$, $p = 0.016$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$, and party identification, $F(1, 89) = 16.05$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.15$, but no statistically significant interaction.¹⁵ Notably, the effect sizes of

¹⁴ Cronbach’s α indexes the proportion of reliability, as opposed to measurement error, associated with a scale. Values generally range between 0 and 1. Higher numbers correspond to greater consistency in measurement of the construct being measured by a scale.

¹⁵ Here and elsewhere in the article, ‘ p ’ represents a probability value referring to the likelihood of incorrectly judging an effect as significant where none actually exists. For the current test, $p < 0.001$ means that the probability of observing by chance a difference in means this great is assumed to be less than 0.1%. Effects are typically considered to be statistically significant when $p \leq 0.05$.

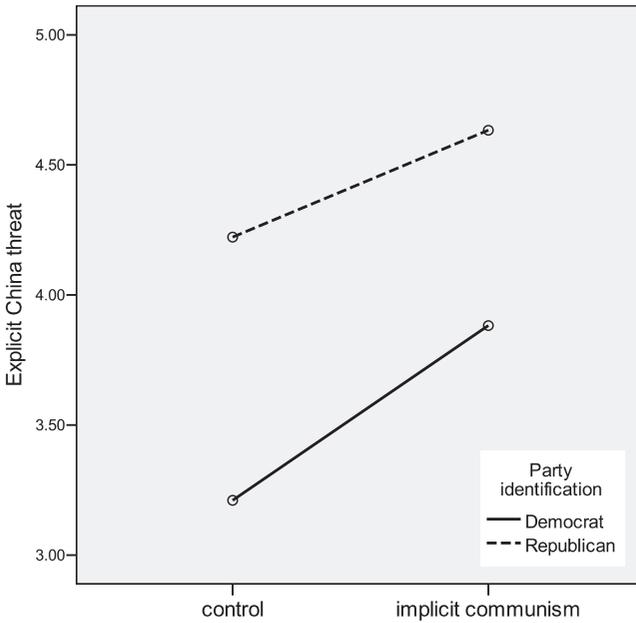


Fig. 2 China Threat Perception by Condition and Party Identification.

these main effects were moderate for the priming condition and large for party identification.¹⁶

These results are consistent with earlier scholarship demonstrating that, all else being equal, Republicans perceive China to be more threatening than Democrats do.¹⁷ They also provide empirical support for our hypothesis that something about ‘communism’ may be contributing at a subconscious level to the more negative attitudes Americans hold towards China, and in particular towards the Chinese government. There was no interaction between the implicit communism prime and party identification, however; the implicit communism prime increased explicit threat perception among both Democrats and Republicans alike.

Our first experiment thus primed communism at the implicit level and found that it negatively impacted China attitudes at the explicit level. Do explicit communism primes also impact Democrats and Republicans equally? And can we measure our dependent China variable at the implicit

¹⁶ η_p^2 (or partial eta-square) provides a global index of the size of the observed difference in means. Small and medium effects are represented by values of around 0.01 and 0.06, respectively. Large effects are represented by values of around .14 or greater. See S. B. Green, & N. J. Salkind, *Using SPSS for Windows and Macintosh: Analyzing and understanding data* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008).

¹⁷ Peter Hays Gries and H. Michael Crowson, ‘Political Orientation, Party Affiliation, and American Attitudes towards China’, pp. 219–44.

level to better understand the impact of any wholly subconscious association between China and communism on Democrats and Republicans? To answer these questions, we conducted a pilot study to first develop a reliable measure of implicit China attitudes to serve as a dependent variable, and then carried out a second experiment.

Measuring Implicit China Attitudes

Methods and Measures

Implicit attitudes are typically assessed indirectly. Rather than directly measuring explicit attitudes towards an object, judgements are instead made of the likeability or beauty of an object closely associated with the object in question. For example, psychologists have successfully assessed individuals' implicit self-esteem by asking them to assess the likeability of their initials,¹⁸ or simply by evaluating how much they like their names.¹⁹ Following this line of research, we decided to try measuring implicit attitudes towards the Chinese government by asking Americans to assess the beauty of a piece of artwork that consisted of a scrambled Chinese flag—an object closely associated with the Chinese government.

Previous studies demonstrate the utility of national flags in assessing attitudes towards nations. For instance, Kimmelmeier and Winter showed that students who completed questionnaires in a room that had an American flag on the wall reported higher degrees of nationalism than students completing the same questionnaire in a room with blank walls.²⁰ Butz, Plant, and Doerr have similarly shown that subliminal primes using rapid computer images of the US flag produced more rapid responses to racial equality-related words than did subliminal primes of the Italian flag.²¹

Building on these two lines of research, we set about validating aesthetic judgements of scrambled national flags as measures of implicit attitudes towards an object nation. To amplify the indirectness of the exercise, we used works of abstract art based upon scrambled elements of a national flag. The resulting works of abstract art had all the core components of the

¹⁸ J. M. Nuttin, 'Narcissism Beyond Gestalt and Awareness: The Name Letter Effect', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1985), pp. 353–61; V. Hoorens, J. M. Nuttin, I. E. Herman and U. Pavakanun, 'Mastery Pleasure versus Mere Ownership: A Quasi-experimental Cross-cultural and Cross Alphabetical Test of the Name Letter Effect', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1990), pp. 181–205.

¹⁹ J. E. Gebauer, M. Riketta, P. Broemer and G. R. Maio, 'How Much Do You Like Your Name? An Implicit Measure of Global Self-esteem', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (2008), pp. 1346–54.

²⁰ M. Kimmelmeier and D. G. Winter, 'Sowing Patriotism, but Reaping Nationalism? Consequences of Exposure to the American Flag', *Political Psychology*, Vol. 29, No. 6 (2008), pp. 859–79.

²¹ D. A. Butz, E. A. Plant and C. E. Doerr, 'Liberty and Justice for All? Implications of Exposure to the U.S. Flag for Intergroup Relations', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2007), pp. 396–408.

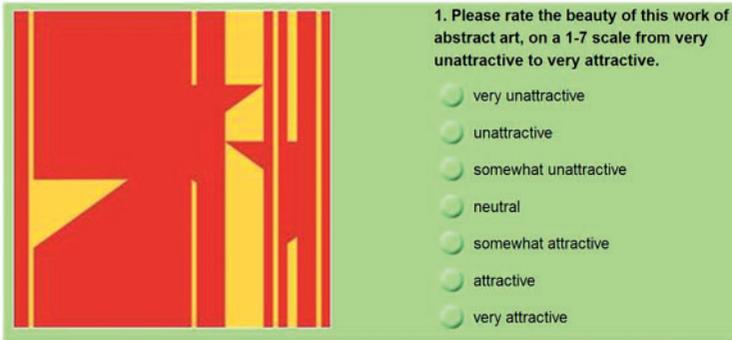


Fig. 3 Implicit China Attitudes Measure: Abstract Art Based on the Chinese Flag.

original flag, such as colours and patterns. We used American survey participants to test whether or not aesthetic judgements of abstract art based upon scrambled American and Chinese national flags were valid measures of implicit attitudes towards America (i.e. patriotism) and China, respectively. The criteria we used for the test were explicit measures of attitudes toward America (i.e. patriotism) and perceptions of China threat. If our works of abstract art based on the American and Chinese national flags were indeed valid measures of implicit attitudes, we would expect them to be positively and significantly, but not too strongly, associated with our explicit measures of patriotism and perceptions of China threat. This expectation is based upon previous research that has generally found implicit measures to be empirically distinct from, but positively associated with, explicit measures of the same constructs. In addition, given the methodological similarity of our two aesthetic judgement tasks, we would expect them to be positively and significantly correlated.

We created scrambled flag works of abstract art by zooming in and breaking them up with random vertical lines. The artwork based on the American flag used the American red, white, and blue, and evoked stars, and we expected it to elicit implicit patriotism among American participants. The artwork based on the Chinese flag utilized the red and yellow of the Chinese national flag, and was based on its design evoking star shapes (Figure 3), so we expected it to elicit implicit attitudes towards China. Participants were asked to ‘judge the beauty’ of these ‘works of abstract art’ on a 1 (‘very unattractive’) to 7 (‘very attractive’) Likert scale.

To capture explicit attitudes towards America (i.e. patriotism), we adapted eight items from Luhtanen and Crocker’s collective self-esteem scale.²²

²² Rita Luhtanen and Jennifer Crocker, ‘A Collective Self-Esteem Scale: Self-Evaluation of One’s Social Identity,’ *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 18 (1992), pp. 302–18.

The items included 'I'm glad to be American' and 'Being American has very little to do with how I feel about myself' (reverse coded). The full scale is listed in the appendix, and shows a good internal reliability of $\alpha = 0.84$.

To capture explicit attitudes towards China, we constructed a diverse 12-item China threat scale. It tapped the political (e.g. 'China's system of government is a threat to American democracy'), economic (e.g. 'Chinese economic growth undermines U.S. economic prosperity'), value (e.g. 'Chinese values and beliefs are quite similar to those of Christian Americans' [reverse coded]), and military (e.g. 'The recent increase in Chinese defence spending undermines U.S. security') dimensions of a possible 'China threat'. The internal reliability of this scale, listed in full in the appendix, was also very good ($\alpha = 0.84$).

One hundred and seventy-eight Americans from around the country took the online Internet survey, with 163 completing the entire set of questions. As in Study 1, the survey began with a consent form and followed the standard ethical guidelines. The final sample ($N = 163$) was well balanced, with slightly more men ($N = 86$) than women ($N = 77$), and slightly more Republicans ($N = 50$) than Democrats ($N = 44$). (The remainder were independents.) Ages ranged from 17 to 80 years, with a mean age of 32 ($SD = 15$). The sample was 69% white, 8% Asian-American, 6% Latino/a, 2% black, and 2% Native American.

Results and Discussion

We constructed our patriotism and China threat scales by first reverse-coding our negatively worded items and then averaging across the 8 and 12 items, respectively. Table 1 shows their means and standard deviations. Given a scale mid-point of four, on average our participants were somewhat patriotic but neutral in their China attitudes, viewing it as neither threatening nor unthreatening. It is also noteworthy that the average judgements of the beauty of our two works of abstract art were almost identical and more or less exactly at the scale mid-point of four. This suggests that there was no colour combination or pattern preference that

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics: Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-order Correlations ($N = 163$)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Patriotism (CSE)	4.91	1.15	–	0.26**	0.33**	–0.17*
2. China threat	3.86	.85		–	0.09	–0.28**
3. American flag abstract art	4.02	1.53			–	0.27**
4. Chinese flag abstract art	3.98	1.44				–

Note. CSE = collective self-esteem.

*Correlation is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

**Correlation is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.

made one work of art inherently more appealing or objectionable than the other.

Table 1 also reveals that the correlational data supported all of our expectations. Patriotism as an American was robustly and positively ($r=0.33$) associated with liking the work of abstract art based upon the American flag, but negatively associated with liking the work of abstract art based upon the Chinese flag ($r=-0.17$). Our explicit measure of perceived China threat was negatively associated ($r=-0.28$) with liking the work of abstract art based upon the Chinese flag. In other words, the more suspicious one was of China, the less one liked the artwork. These correlations all occur in the expected directions. Neither too big nor too small, they are statistically significant but not so large that they simply represent another explicit measure. As in previous research, our implicit measures were empirically distinct from the corresponding explicit measures, but nonetheless exhibited predictable relationships with them.²³ The two flag judgement tasks in the study were significantly and positively correlated, $r=0.27$, perhaps reflecting individual differences in the tendency more generally to like or prefer abstract art. Finally, and less importantly, patriotism as an American was also associated with greater perceived China threat ($r=0.26$).

Taken together, these findings provide convergent evidence that aesthetic judgements of abstract art based on scrambled national flags are reasonable measures of implicit attitudes towards both America and China.

Implicit and Explicit Communism and Implicit China Attitudes

Methods and Measures

To conduct an experiment exploring any possible differential impacts of conscious and subconscious associations between China and communism for Democrats and Republicans, we recruited 171 Americans from around the country for a third online survey. For reasons similar to those applicable to the first survey, i.e. because our interest was in the possible impact of conscious and unconscious American ideologies and identities on American attitudes towards China, eight Chinese-Americans (who may only recently have emigrated from China and gained citizenship) were removed from the sample, as were six participants who did not follow instructions. Five respondents who may have been consciously aware of the implicit communism prime (in the implicit prime condition) were also removed.

²³ J. E. Gebauer, M. Riketta, P. Broemer and G. R. Maio, 'How Much Do You Like Your Name?' pp. 1346–54.

The final sample ($N=140$) was well balanced, with slightly more men ($N=74$) than women ($N=66$), and slightly more Republicans ($N=51$) than Democrats ($N=43$) and Independents ($N=46$). Ages ranged from 18 to 66 years, with a mean age of 30 years ($SD=14$). In terms of ethnicity, the sample was 74% white, 5% non-Chinese Asian-American, 6% Latino/a, and 3% Native American.

To explore the relative impact of conscious and subconscious Communism on implicit American attitudes towards China, we created primes for each. The explicit communism prime, reproduced in Figure 4 above, displayed pictures of Marx, Lenin, and the hammer and sickle emblems used by communist parties in Spain and Turkey. It also included an extended quotation from the *Communist Manifesto*, and explicitly asked participants to complete four sentences starting with the words ‘Marx’, ‘Communism’, ‘Lenin’, and ‘Socialist parties’ respectively.

We used the same word unscrambling task as in Study 1 to subconsciously prime the idea of communism. Only 5 of the 51 participants randomly assigned to this condition were consciously aware of the pattern of communism-related words. As mentioned above, they were removed from the sample.

Marx, Lenin, and socialism



“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”
- Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)

1. Please take a look at the four pictures above, read the quote, and then complete the following sentences:

Marx was...

Communism is...

Lenin was...

Socialist parties...

Fig. 4 Explicit Communism Prime: Sentence Completion Task.

We randomly assigned a third group of participants to a control condition in which they performed the same 12 sentence unscrambles used in Study 1 that contained no words related to communism. To capture subconscious attitudes towards China, we utilized aesthetic judgements of the beauty of the work of abstract art based upon the scrambled Chinese flag formulated for Study 2.

Results and Discussion

We ran a two-way ANOVA with party identification and experimental condition predicting our implicit China attitudes measure. Both main effects were significant, as was their interaction. First, party identification had a statistically significant impact of moderate size, $F(1,88)=5.68$, $p=0.019$, $\eta_p^2=0.06$. Moreover, just as Study 1 suggested that Republicans might hold more negative explicit attitudes towards China than Democrats, our results here suggest that Republicans might also hold more negative implicit attitudes toward China than Democrats.

Second, our three primes also produced significant effects of a slightly larger size, $F(2, 88)=5.02$, $p=0.009$, $\eta_p^2=0.10$, on implicit attitudes towards China. As Figure 5 shows, participants in both the priming conditions exhibited more negative implicit attitudes toward China than those in the control condition. Remarkably, the implicit communism prime (i.e. the sentence unscrambling task), produced more negative implicit attitudes

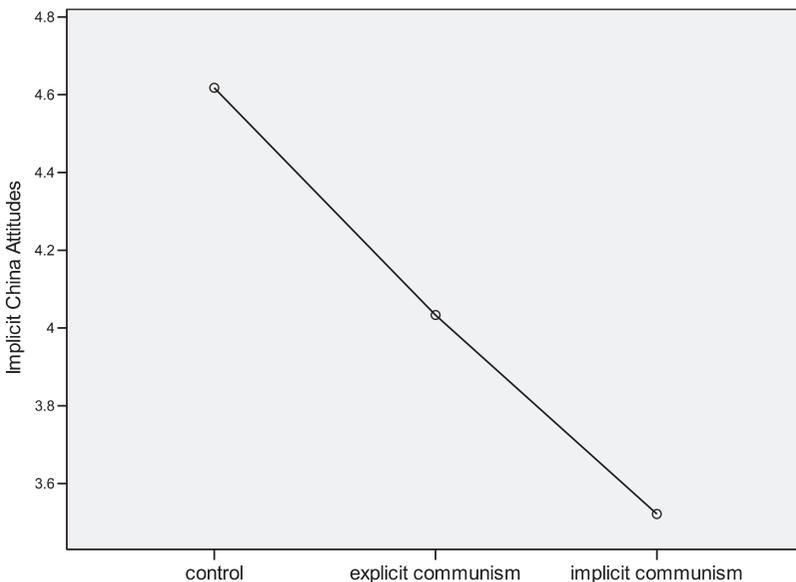


Fig. 5 Implicit Attitudes Towards China by Condition.

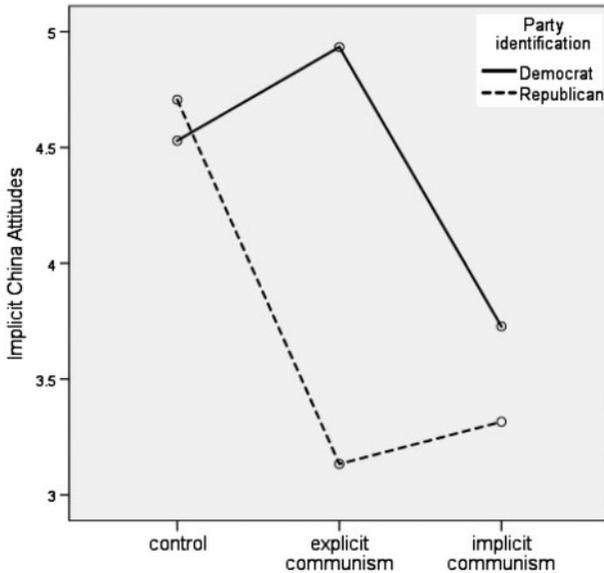


Fig. 6 Implicit Attitudes Towards China by Condition and Party Identification.

towards China than the explicit communism prime (i.e. the sentence completion task) did.

Third and most interestingly, the interaction between priming condition and party identification, $F(2, 88) = 4.36$, $p = 0.016$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$, was both statistically significant and substantial. As Figure 6 graphically displays, there was little difference between Democrats and Republicans in the control and implicit communism conditions, but a dramatic difference in the explicit communism condition, with Democrats ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.34$) rating the abstract artwork based upon the Chinese flag much more favourably than Republicans ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.13$). A series of t -tests revealed that although the difference between Democrats and Republicans in the explicit communism condition was large and statistically significant $t(28) = 3.99$, $p < 0.001$, there was no statistically significant difference between them in either the control, $t(32) = -0.40$, $p = 0.69$, or implicit communism conditions $t(28) = 0.70$, $p = 0.49$.

The results from this experiment add to our knowledge in two ways. First, Study 1 demonstrated that implicitly primed communism produced negative effects on *explicit* attitudes towards China. In this study, we found that communism, whether primed explicitly or implicitly, also produced negative effects on *implicit* attitudes towards China. We also found that party identification moderated the effect of communism primed explicitly but not the effect of communism primed implicitly. As a result, implicitly primed communism exerted a greater negative impact on American attitudes overall than explicitly primed communism did.

Conclusions

The excesses of the Cultural Revolution first discredited communism over four decades ago. After three decades of ‘reform and opening’ that has involved a limited embrace of capitalism, communism is largely irrelevant as an ideology in China today. Instead, it is now nationalism that most serves to legitimize the Chinese state.²⁴ Although few would deny that China’s political system is a one-party dictatorship, most Chinese people today identify themselves as ‘Chinese’ and not as ‘communists’.

The spectre of communism nevertheless continues to haunt American attitudes towards China. The experiments presented in this article reveal that when communism is subconsciously primed, both explicit and implicit American attitudes towards China deteriorate. Something about communism rubs Americans the wrong way, and it is both consciously and subconsciously associated with China.

Our second experiment revealed an important difference among Americans, however. It showed that when Democrats and Republicans were subconsciously primed with communism, both displayed a substantial decline in implicit attitudes towards China. But when primed with communism at an explicit level, only Republicans displayed such a decline; implicit attitudes towards China among Democrats remained unchanged.

What best explains this difference by party identification? We suggest—but cannot prove here—that two different sets of social environments produce different social norms that have a differential impact on how an explicit communism prime affects China attitudes. In his classic conformity studies more than 50 years ago, Solomon Asch argued that because we are motivated to be liked and similar to our peers, we tend to conform to the norms prevalent in our social environment.²⁵ Among liberals, guilt through association is likely not ‘politically correct’, so that when ‘communism’ is primed explicitly, Democrats are less likely to let it negatively impact their attitudes towards China. In conservative circles, however, it seems that disparaging ‘communism’ is the ‘politically correct’ or socially acceptable thing to do. Thus when communism is primed explicitly, Republicans are more likely to let it negatively impact their attitudes towards China.

The idea that there may be a ‘presentation effect’ among Democrats, wherein they block negative subconscious associations between communism and China at the conscious level, is consistent with dual-process approaches to the relationship between implicit and explicit attitudes. Bargh, Devine, and others have argued that when motivated, we can control or regulate

²⁴ Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2004); Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

²⁵ S. E. Asch, ‘Opinions and Social Pressure’, *Scientific American*, Vol. 193, No. 5 (1955), pp. 31–5.

automatic modes of information processing.²⁶ This may help to explain why previous research has found that explicit self-reports of attitudes towards the Chinese government tend to be worse among Republicans than among Democrats;²⁷ Democrats may be more motivated to regulate and control their subconscious attitudes.

A particular strength of our studies lies in their experimental design, which allows us to be confident in the causal effects of our independent variables on our dependent variables. We believe that experiments should be more widely adopted in a political science that tries to explain the causes of human beliefs and behaviours. As Rose McDermott has argued, '[e]xperiments offer a unique opportunity to make a clear causal argument . . . which is why it has been differentially adopted by the hard sciences, psychology, and behavioural economics as the gold standard method of choice'.²⁸ Due to the random assignment of our American subjects to experimental and control conditions, and the very minimal differences between the primes in each, we can have greater confidence that any statistically significant results we obtained in our experiments were 'caused' by the independent variables we manipulated, a causal claim that is much more difficult to make in correlational research designs. Nevertheless, the question of whether our independent variables were priming implicit or explicit communism (as opposed to something else, like attitudes toward countries that have historically been communist), may be one that is open to debate.²⁹

Indeed, one limitation of this study is a need for other measures of implicit attitudes towards China. Our dependent measure of implicit attitudes through aesthetic judgements of abstract art worked well; it correlated positively but not too strongly with our explicit threat measure, and exhibited the expected pattern of relationships with other variables. But we cannot be absolutely sure that the attitudes it captured were indeed towards the Chinese government and not towards related constructs, such as other communist countries like the former USSR or Vietnam, which have similar flags that may have been evoked by our abstract art. Further research with different implicit measures is thus needed to replicate these findings.

²⁶ J. A. Bargh, 'The Ecology of Automaticity: Towards Specifying the Conditions Necessary to Produce Automatic Processing Effects', *American Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (1992), pp. 181–99; J. A. Bargh, 'The Cognitive Monster: The Case Against Controllability of Automatic Stereotype Effects', pp. 361–82 in S. Chaiken and Y. Trope, eds., *Dual Process Theories in Social Psychology* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999); P. G. Devine, 'Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their Automatic and Controlled Components', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (1989), pp. 5–18.

²⁷ Peter Hayes Gries and H. Michael Crowson, 'Political Orientation, Party Affiliation, and American Attitudes Towards China', pp. 219–44.

²⁸ Rose McDermott, 'Editor's Introduction', *Political Psychology*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2006), p. 356.

²⁹ We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this good point.

The exact mechanism of causation in our study, moreover, remains unclear. What exactly is it about communism that has this subconscious impact on American attitudes towards China? Is it, as Chinese commentators frequently complain, a legacy of an American Cold War mentality? Or is there something about communism that ties in more fundamentally with our cultural values as Americans? Does the atheism that we associate with communism threaten our sense of religiously based values? Or could communism be linked with 'implicit Puritanism', the subconscious association Americans make between religious salvation and hard work?³⁰ Or does communism strike more directly at our political ideologies, such that communism is seen as a strong state and thus a threat to our individual liberties? Further research is needed to explore such questions.

The empirical findings presented in this research nonetheless have significant theoretic and policy implications. In terms of theory, to our knowledge, this research represents the first experimental manipulation of implicit attitudes in the study of international relations. It thus represents a first step towards putting recent theoretic work by Hopf and Pouliot on 'habit' and 'practicality' in international affairs to the empirical test.³¹

In terms of policy, if there is a subconscious association between communism and China among all Americans that increases negative attitudes towards the Chinese government, that sets a real limit to the possibilities for genuine US–China cooperation, let alone friendship. Our experiments thus partially confirm earlier scholarship which suggests that Chinese and American national identities act as predetermined elements that limit the extent of possible improvements in future US–China relations.³² As long as China remains communist, even in name only, Americans of both the left and right are likely to remain fundamentally wary of China. And if Republicans are more likely than Democrats to allow the association between communism and China to rise from the subconscious to the conscious level, it not only contributes to an explanation for why Republicans score higher on explicit measures of negative China attitudes than Democrats, but it also contributes to the likelihood of continued partisanship and volatility in US China policy.

³⁰ A. T. Poehlman, 'Ideological Inheritance: Implicit Puritanism in American Moral Cognition', *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, Vol. 68, No. 12-B (2008); E. L. Uhlmann, A. T. Poehlman and J. A. Bargh, 'American Moral Exceptionalism', in J. T. Jost, A. C. Kay and H. Thorisdottir, eds., *Social and Psychological Bases of Ideology and System Justification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 27–52.

³¹ Ted Hopf, 'The Logic of Habit in International Relations'; Vincent Pouliot, 'The Logic of Practicality', pp. 257–88.

³² Peter Hays Gries, 'Forecasting US-China Relations, 2015', *Asian Security*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2006), pp. 1–23.

Appendix

American Patriotism Scale³³

- (1) I'm glad to be American.
- (2) *Being American is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am. (reverse coded)*
- (3) *I often regret that I am American. (reverse coded)*
- (4) Being American is an important reflection of who I am.
- (5) *I often feel that being American is not worthwhile. (reverse coded)*
- (6) Being American is an important part of my self image.
- (7) I feel good about being American.
- (8) *Being American has very little to do with how I feel about myself. (reverse coded)*

China Threat Scale

- (1) Chinese values and beliefs are a threat to the American way of life.
- (2) *Chinese culture has enriched American society. (reverse coded)*
- (3) China's system of government is a threat to American democracy.
- (4) *The Chinese political system is becoming more democratic all the time. (reverse coded)*
- (5) Chinese political leaders are atheists who do not respect the freedom of religion that Americans hold dear.
- (6) *Chinese values and beliefs are quite similar to those of Christian Americans. (reverse coded)*
- (7) China's rise to power endangers U.S. security.
- (8) *China's rise will help stabilize East Asia and promote world peace. (reverse coded)*
- (9) Chinese economic growth undermines U.S. economic prosperity.
- (10) *A growing Chinese economy is good for the working American. (reverse coded)*
- (11) The recent increase in Chinese defence spending undermines U.S. security.
- (12) *The Chinese military is a reliable U.S. partner in combating urgent security issues such as international terrorism. (reverse coded)*

³³ Adapted from Luhtanen and Crocker's collective self-esteem scale. See Rita Luhtanen and Jennifer Crocker, 'A Collective Self-esteem Scale', pp. 302–18.