China’s New Nationalism

Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy

Peter Hays Gries
Contents

List of Illustrations ix
Introduction: Dragon Slayers and Panda Huggers 1

1. Saving Face 13
2. Chinese Identity and the “West” 30
3. A “Century of Humiliation” 43
4. The “Kissinger Complex” 54
5. Victors or Victims? 69
6. China’s Apology Diplomacy 86
7. Popular Nationalism and the Fate of the Nation 116
8. Chinese Nationalism and U.S.-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century 135

Notes 151
Bibliography 181
Acknowledgments 201
Index 205
# Illustrations

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

The impasse was broken after eleven days of intensive negotiations. American Ambassador Joseph Prueher gave a letter to Foreign Minister
Tang: “Please convey to the Chinese people and to the family of pilot Wang Wei that we are very sorry for their loss. . . . We are very sorry the entering of China’s airspace and the landing did not have verbal clearance.” Having extracted an “apology” from Washington, Beijing released the twenty-four American servicemen being held on Hainan Island. In the Chinese view, Jiang, “diplomatic strategist extraordinaire,” had won a major victory.\(^3\) The American spin was quite different. Powell denied that America had apologized, again asserting, “There is nothing to apologize for. To apologize would have suggested that we have done something wrong or accepted responsibility for having done something wrong. And we did not do anything wrong.” The conservative media was not so restrained. The *Weekly Standard* declared the People’s Republic to be “violent and primitive . . . a regime of hair-curling, systematic barbarity.”\(^4\) A *New Republic* editorial asserted that “a non-Maoist tyranny in China is still a tyranny. . . . They are, in short, in transition from communism to fascism.”\(^5\) Chinese nationalism, the *National Review* maintained, is “psychopathological.”\(^6\)

Is China out to settle old scores with the West, or is China seeking to incorporate itself peacefully into the world system? Is China, in other words, an evil dragon or a cute panda? Westerners hold both views. Foreign-policy makers, businesspeople, and academics frequently sing China’s praises. Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger paints a rosy picture of Chinese intentions. “China is no military colossus,” Kissinger argues in the *Los Angeles Times*, and has “the best of intentions.” China, Kissinger insists, can be counted on to pursue its “self-interest” in cooperation—high praise indeed from a proud practitioner of realpolitik.\(^7\) As China’s economic reforms embraced the market, many in the West came to romanticize a business China that was thought to be capitalist, “just like us.” In 1985, after six years of successful economic reforms in China, *Time* magazine even declared Deng Xiaoping “Man of the Year.”\(^8\) Western businesspeople have frequently served Beijing in exchange for access to China’s consumers. Academic China watchers also tend to present a rosy picture of China, rarely speaking out on controversial issues such as human rights. Scholars like Andrew Nathan and Perry Link are the exceptions that prove the rule. Because they have spoken out against Chinese human rights violations, Chinese nationalists and government officials have subjected them to vicious personal attacks, and they have been denied visas to China. For example, Penn State’s Liu Kang, one of the most virulent of China’s anti-American nationalists, viciously attacks Link in his “A ‘China Hand’ Not Welcome in Beijing” section of the best-selling 1996 diatribe *The Plot to Demonize China.*\(^9\)
Meanwhile, an odd alliance of politicians, celebrities, and journalists on the left and right join together in China bashing. On the left, a variety of politicians and actors have avowed a profound concern for Chinese human rights abuses and the fate of Tibet. Nancy Pelosi, congressional representative from northern California, feels so strongly about standing up for democratic values that she frequently joins conservatives in Congress to criticize China. Pelosi even has a special China human rights page on her Web site. Actors have joined the politicians. Living in affluent southern California, but enraptured by Tibetan spirituality, Hollywood celebrities like Richard Gere and Steven Seagal have turned to the Dalai Lama for spiritual guidance and depicted Beijing as a ruthless dictatorship. On the right, a “Blue Team” of conservative hawks has emerged on Capitol Hill to attack “panda huggers” and “Sinapologists.” For example, William Triplett, coauthor of *Year of the Rat* and *Red Dragon Rising*, and a former staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, argues that China is a rising power determined to challenge the United States. He maintains that China’s “dictatorial regime” is suppressing “the Chinese people’s yearning for freedom and democracy.” To such dragon slayers, America must stand up for democracy, disciplining an evil and despotic China. The Western media often reinforces this message: journalists stationed in China, harassed by the Beijing authorities, frequently focus on the dark side of life in what they characterize as a land of tyranny.

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

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

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

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

Many “fourth-generation” nationalists today have self-consciously defined themselves against the “Liberal ’80s.” Sociologist Karl Mannheim long ago argued that the formative events of youth mark each generation. Late-1980s experiences like the pro-Western “River Elegy” television sensation and Beijing Spring 1989 came at a pivotal time in the lives of Chinese nationalists now in their thirties. Today’s nationalists frequently dismiss the 1980s as a period of dangerous “romanticism” and “radicalism”; they then depict themselves as “realistic” and “pragmatic” defenders of stability and order. During the “May 8th” nationalist protests of 1999, for instance, one group of students demonstrated with a painting of what might best be described as the “Demon of Liberty.” During Beijing Spring a decade earlier, Chinese students became famous for their statue the “Goddess of Democracy.” This self-conscious superimposition of America as demon over America as goddess tells us far more about
Figure 2. Good America: The “Goddess of Democracy,” 1989. Mao looks on as students protest in Tiananmen Square during Beijing Spring. Photo courtesy of AP/Wide World Photos.
changes in the worldview of Chinese youth since 1989 than it does about the United States.

These and other Chinese voices can help us with the thorny problem of just what exactly “Chinese nationalism” is. Because it is based upon analysis of European history, the definition that nationalism arises when nations seek to become states does not apply very well to China. The Western view of the nation as a uniquely modern institution is also problematic in the Chinese context. “China” has four millennia of documented history, and two millennia of centralized rule. Did it only become a “nation” in the twentieth century? Historian Prasenjit Duara has gone to great
lengths to argue that premodern China’s regions were linked to Beijing in a variety of ways, creating a widely shared notion of “China.” Because premodern Chinese shared a common culture, he argues, they were the “first nation.” Other historians disagree, arguing, for example, that local religious practices accentuated regional differences, undermining consciousness of a common “Chinese” identity.

Confucianism presents a further problem to those who want to define Chinese nationalism. One group of scholars holds that Confucianism and nationalism are incompatible: Confucian universalism, which holds that all peoples can become Chinese if they adapt to a Sinocentric civilization, mitigates against the idea of a Chinese nationalism that defines itself in contradistinction to other nations. Other scholars, however, argue that “Confucian nationalism” is not an oxymoron: Confucianism allows for the reinforcement of cultural boundaries when barbarians do not accept Chinese values. The “universal” “all under heaven” (tianxia) can and often has become a closed political community.

Historian Lei Yi of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing has used the phrase “‘Sinocentric’ cultural nationalism [‘Huaxia zhongxin’ wenhua minzu zhuyi]” to describe such views. The Confucian world was not “one big happy family” (tianxia yi jia), but extremely Sinocentric, involving a “fierce racism, rejection of other cultures, . . . and cultural superiority.”

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

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

Because Chinese politics often dictates that “surface and reality differ” (biao li bu yi), the successful interpretation of Chinese materials is no easy task. China’s emperors saw language as a tool of rule. Diction mattered. Two millennia ago, the Art of Writing demonstrated how language could be used to mold popular opinion. For instance, China’s emperors commissioned literati to (re)write official dynastic histories to legitimize their rule. China’s rulers could also be quite ruthless. Emperors from Qin Shihuang (ruled circa 1 B.C.E.) to Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty (ruled 1736–1796 C.E.) are famous for burning books and suppressing free expression.

Such actions forced China’s literati to develop the art of “indirection.” Historical allegory—especially critiques of the corrupt practices of past emperors—was and is one form of “indirection” used to chastise present-day politics. Western-style direct criticism, indeed, came to be seen as vulgar.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Enigma of Chinese Nationalism

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

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

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

Arguments in the West over the existence of a “China threat” frequently atomize and even demonize China. Is Chinese nationalism benign or malign? Is China a panda or a dragon? Such debates are dangerous because they treat Chinese national identity as autonomous and unchanging, ignoring the international context within which it evolves. Nationalism concerns the identity of nations, and identity does not develop in isolation.

The China Internet Information Center’s Belgrade bombing Web site, for instance, played up evidence of various foreigners’ support of China’s position. Similarly, in their account of the Rome protests discussed above, New China News Agency correspondents Yan Tao and Liu Ruting “quote” an Italian named Mario: “Like the Chinese people, the Italian people love peace and oppose war . . . If NATO persists in bombing the Yugoslav Federation, Italy should withdraw from this aggressor organization.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I was on “Meet the Press” . . . right after the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Kosovo [he meant Belgrade], and the [Chinese] ambassador [Li Zhaoxing] was on before me. And if you remember, he’s kind of an obnoxious fellow and he’s screaming and yelling about how bad the Americans were, and I had had it up to about here.

So he’s coming off the stage and I’m going onto the stage and I intentionally walked up to him and blocked his way. . . . I grabbed [his] hand and squeezed it as hard as I could and pulled him a kind of little jerk like this and I said: “Don’t take the weakness of this president as the weakness of the American people.” And he looked at me kind of funny, so I pulled him real close, nose to nose, and I repeated it very slowly, and said, “Do—not—take—the—weakness—of this president as the weakness of the American people.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Face* as a universal human concern can help us overcome the opposition of reason and passion common in social science, providing a more nuanced account of human motivation. There are both emotional and instrumental motivations for defending the “self shown to others.” As sociologist Erving Goffman, pioneer in the Western study of *face*, observes, “a person . . . cathects his face; his feelings become attached to it.”27 People become emotionally attached to the image they present to the world. If *face* is assaulted, feelings are often hurt. But maintaining *face* also means maintaining authority. He who “loses face” loses status and the ability to pursue instrumental goals. An example of how emotions and authority both motivate public efforts to save *face* is the 1997 suspension of former Golden State Warriors basketball star Latrell Sprewell for physically assaulting his coach, P. J. Carlesimo, during a team practice. The athlete millionaire, it turns out, did not like his coach’s “in your face” style. The incident quickly became national news. Dennis Wolff, Boston University’s basketball coach, explained the dynamic: “If you tell a guy that you want him to improve his free-throw shooting, he takes it that you don’t like him. You know, ‘You’re dissing me’. . . . You can’t embarrass players in front of the group. . . . But if you allow guys to dictate to you it’s over.”29 In social settings—“in front of the group”—(dis)respect or saving *face* is no mere emotional matter: it is a way of maintaining authority. As Goffman has also noted: “Every day in many ways we can try to score points, and every day in many ways we can be shot down.”30 Both power and passion are implicated in such face-to-face combat.

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

As “dissing” suggests, the language of *face* varies across both time and place. In the West, we are most familiar with the language of “honor.” In an elegant essay written almost seventy years ago, Hans Speier argued that, “A man’s honor neither springs from his personality nor clings to his deeds”; it has a “double aspect,” both dependent upon others’ valuations yet also independent and absolute. Speier maintains that our current preference for the latter over the former is the product of a specific historical circumstance: the bourgeoisie’s revolt against the nobility. “The modern individualistic notion of ‘personal honor,’ as independent from any others’ opinion, is a polemic conception which served the middle classes in their struggle to overthrow the feudal conception of honor. The conspicuously honorable behavior of the nobility was devaluated to mere gestures, irrelevant politeness . . . against which was set up a realm of ‘natural’ inner quality accessible to everyone alike.”

This conflict is ably captured in the 1995 movie *Rob Roy* about an eighteenth-century Scotsman’s revolt against the local nobility. Liam Neeson, playing Rob Roy, explains to his son, “Honour is what no man can give you and none can take away .... Honour is a man’s gift to himself.” I disagree. Although we in the West may dislike it, honor, like face, depends in part on the opinions of others. In the movie, Rob Roy may reject the judgments of the nobility, but his honor depends in part on the respect his fellow Scotsmen confer upon him.

The language of honor is not just the stuff of Scottish legends; it continues to inform life in the West today, although it does so differently in different places. In their fascinating *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South*, social psychologists Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen found that insults are a much more serious matter for Southerners than they are for Northerners. In a series of experiments conducted at the University of Michigan in 1995, students walking down a hallway were bumped into and called an “asshole!” Southern students were much more likely than northern students to respond aggressively to any subsequent affronts. For instance, Nisbett and Cohen sent their students down a hallway one at a time and had a burly football player walk down the center of the hall on a collision course towards them. Northerners were more likely to get out of the way quickly; Southerners were more willing to play “chicken” against the oncoming Wolverine. The differences were so
striking that Nisbett and Cohen suggest that the students may have interpreted the “asshole!” comment in qualitatively different ways. Northerners were likely to see the comment as reflecting upon the other person, not themselves, while Southerners were much more likely to take it personally as a question of masculine honor.34

If the norms regulating face can differ within one nation, they can certainly diverge between nations. The Chinese and American cultures of face are governed by very different sets of rules. Since foreign policy invariably involves the projection of domestic social norms onto the international arena, Americans and Chinese often expect international society to operate by the same rules that govern their own domestic societies. And because these rules often differ, the efforts of Americans and Chinese to maintain face on the international stage can easily become conflicts. Like Sprewell and Carlesimo, Americans and Chinese may take different expectations about appropriate conduct into their interpersonal and international encounters.

To better understand Chinese nationalism, Americans must understand the “rules of the game” that Chinese take into interpersonal and intergroup encounters. An interrogation of China’s face culture reveals the social norms that regulate the negotiation of identity and authority in China. Chinese views of face can be understood at two levels: lian and mianzi.35 Sociologist Hu Hsien-chin defines the former as “decency” or “good moral reputation” and the latter as an “extra reputation” achieved through social accomplishments.36 I focus on the social mianzi; my references to face in the Chinese context are thus to mianzi, not lian. Chinese discussions of face use theatrical allusions, suggesting performances before audiences of popular opinion, whether these are individuals or groups.37 A person or group may “give” face to another through public praise or deference, or it may “leave” another face by not publicly exposing a faux pas. Conversely, public criticism prevents one from “getting off the stage”—stuck in the spotlight of public scrutiny.

In Chinese, therefore, face is not always a bad thing. In English, however, face is invariably used as a pejorative, as in “two-faced.” It may be helpful for the Western reader to think of face as denoting the more neutral term “honor.” The “face game” is a battle over the zero-sum resource of social status.38 Face is thus fundamentally political, involving a contest over power. Parties vie for face. Indeed, the metaphor of exchange is implicit throughout face discourse, but even explicit at times: one can try to “buy” and “sell” face, for example, in exchange for goods and services.39 Transparent attempts to buy face are not always successful, as the nou-
veaux riches will readily attest. Face does not, therefore, imply that Asian political cultures are always “harmonious.” The idea that Japanese have a “wa culture” of harmony is as absurd as arguments that Japanese are born into a “samurai” or “kamikaze” culture of violence. All societies experience cooperation and conflict. China is no exception. Chinese will sacrifice relationships to protect face. It is not uncommon, for instance, to discover brothers who have lived in the same small village for years without talking. But face can also facilitate social intercourse. The fear of losing face can constrain behavior, promoting sincerity in social relations. The desire to maintain face can thus act as both a barrier to and a facilitator of social interaction.

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

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

tionalists everywhere frequently engage in such face-saving self-deception. Many Chinese narratives of Sino-American and Sino-Japanese military encounters, we shall see, transform defeats into heroic victories with an Ah Q–like magic. Such subtleties allow the authors of these accounts to maintain face.

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

American Arrogance and Chinese Vanity

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

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

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

Fortunately, most Chinese would likely agree with the Analects’ dictum that “a superior man is broad-minded, whereas a petty person is always resentful.” They recognize, as the Analects also cautions, that “Intolerance of minor insults will ruin great projects.” If they are secure in the belief that China’s national face is respected in the international community, the Chinese people will marginalize parochial nationalists like Li Fang and demand that their leaders behave like superior men.