**Hollywood in China:** How American Popular Culture Shapes Chinese Views of the ‘Beautiful Imperialist’ (美帝), an Experimental Analysis

**Peter H. Gries, Matthew A. Sanders, David R. Stroup, & Huajian Cai**

**The University of Oklahoma & The Chinese Academy of Sciences**

---

**Abstract**

While most Mainland Chinese today have extremely few direct contacts with either America or Americans, their indirect contacts with both, via globalized American popular culture, are increasing rapidly. Do daily parasocial contacts with American celebrities shape Chinese views of America? Based on two experimental studies, this paper argues that even indirect, implicit exposure to American celebrities via popular magazine covers does shape Chinese views of America. However, the impact of that exposure depends upon both the specific nature of the bicultural exposure, and the psychological predispositions of the Chinese involved.

---

**Measures**

**Dependent:** Feeling thermometer towards ‘America’ (美国)

**Moderator:** ‘National Narcissism’ (Cai & Gries, 2013)

- “China should receive the respect that it is due.” (我认为中国理应获得应得的尊重)
- “I wish other countries would more quickly recognize Chinese authority.” (我希望别的国家能尽早地认识到中国的权威)
- “If China had a bigger say in the world, the world would be a much better place.” (如果中国在世界上能发挥更大的作用，世界将会变得更好)

---

**Results**

National narcissists felt cooler than cosmopolitans towards America—but only when exposed to American celebrities on Chinese magazine covers.

![Graph showing the relationship between warmth towards America and national narcissism](image)

Note. Interaction $\Delta R^2 = .10, F(1, 93) = 3.08, p = .001.$

---

**Discussion: A ‘Kung Fu Panda Effect’?**

Films like *Kung Fu Panda* have been very popular in China.

- Yet some Chinese have decried them as a “cultural invasion.”
- A person by situation interaction
- Both psychological predispositions (e.g. level of national narcissism) and the nature of the parasocial contact shape whether Chinese experience American popular culture as enriching or threatening.
- Lead to integrative and exclusionary reactions respectively (Chiu, 2011).