

## CHINA'S STATE-PARTY NATIONALISM: SEEKING WEALTH AND POWER UNDER CHINA'S DREAM OF GREAT REJUVENATION

*O Nacionalismo do Estado-partido da China: a procura por riqueza e poder no contexto do Sonho Chinês de Grande Rejuvenescimento*

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## ABSTRACT

As economic growth fades, China resorts to nationalism to maintain the regime's legitimacy and popular support. But Contemporary Chinese nationalism is multifaceted and also embedded in the historical processes that led China to face foreign expansionism and its own backwardness. For this reason, the quest for wealth and power is a permanent force that guides Chinese nationalism. In this article, I lay out the foundations of Chinese nationalism of the late-nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries. This is followed by the analysis of Chinese nationalism under the CCP rule since 1949, and a final section in which I identify the main trends in contemporary Chinese state-party nationalism. With present-day wealth and power, the CCP and the Chinese society believe it is time to restore China's "rightful place" in the world. State-party nationalism is reshaping the past to project the future, but it is not a *fait accompli*.

**Keywords:** China; Nationalism; Wealth and Power.

## RESUMO

Com a desaceleração econômica, a China recorre ao nacionalismo para manter a legitimidade do regime e o apoio popular. Mas o nacionalismo chinês contemporâneo é multifacetado e está inserido nos processos históricos relacionados ao expansionismo estrangeiro e seu próprio atraso. Por isso, a busca por riqueza e poder é uma força permanente do nacionalismo chinês. Neste artigo, apresento as bases do nacionalismo chinês do final do século XIX e das primeiras décadas do século XX, seguido pela análise do nacionalismo chinês sob o governo do PCCh desde 1949, e uma seção final na qual identifico as principais tendências do nacionalismo do partido-estado chinês contemporâneo. Com a riqueza e o poder atuais, o PCCh e a sociedade chinesa acreditam que é hora de restaurar o "lugar de direito" da China no mundo. O nacionalismo do partido-estado está remodelando o passado para projetar o futuro, mas ele não é um fato consumado.

**Palavras-chave:** China; Nacionalismo; Riqueza e Poder.

## INTRODUCTION

As Xi Jinping, president of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Secretary-general of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), welcomed former US President Donald Trump at the Forbidden City, in 2017, he confidently proclaimed that the "people like us [Chinese] can be traced back to 5,000 years ago; [...] we call ourselves descendants of the dragon." Contending the continuity of Chinese civilization through millennia, this rhetoric has gained a boost over the past decade and is the basis of China's renewed nationalism. However, this idea wasn't always present in the CCP's framing of history. Quite to the contrary, much of the nationalism spearheaded by Mao Zedong in the first three decades of the PRC highlighted the backwardness of the traditional Chinese society. CCP's fundamental goal was to upturn China's lost sense of national pride with the realization of Chinese communism.

Common to both is, nevertheless, the idea that they would carry forward the centuries-old mission of transforming China into a rich and powerful country. Traced back to the nineteenth century, “wealth and power” (*fuqiang* 富强) were central to the first nationalist discourses and, to a great extent, are the backbone of contemporary nationalism. However, the search for wealth and power does not suffice to explain the nationalist push witnessed today. In the present, China’s nationalism is conceived as a devotion to the nation as much as it is a devotion to the Party, but it is also multifaceted and manifested by different voices. What exactly are the historical forces and present contexts within which China’s nationalism is embedded? To better understand present-day nationalism in China, therefore, we must take into account a myriad of factors that affect not only the CCP’s agenda but also the perceptions of the Chinese people vis-à-vis their history. Here, I follow the theoretical assumption that historical forces and how we conceive our past have a profound impact on our present, how we behave and understand the world.

As economic growth fades, Peking University’s Zhang Qingmin reckons, the CCP resorts to nationalism to maintain the regime’s legitimacy and popular support. Departing away from Deng Xiaoping’s cautionary stance to development – encapsulated in his “keep a low profile” (*tao guang yang hui* 韬光养晦) dictum –, the Chinese are now incentivized to feel proud and protective of contemporary achievements. Within this context, Xi Jinping’s China Dream (*zhongguo meng* 中国梦) is a strong narrative that compensates the lack of economic dynamism and the lost appeal of communist ideology with the reinvigorated sense of the Chinese “self,” one that is connected to its past of struggles and hardships, and destined to realize the “Great Rejuvenation” (*weida fuxing* 伟大复兴) of the Chinese civilization. This, of course, is under the unswerving, indispensable leadership of the CCP. Nationalism with Chinese characteristics has emboldened the search for wealth and power with CCP’s ambition to perpetuate in power.

Chinese nationalism, however, is not only a story of CCP’s top-down ideology to forge people’s minds, but rather the cumulative phenomenon of Chinese society’s search for its place in the world. This is related to the territorial sovereignty of the PRC, the techno-nationalism of Chinese companies, and the ever-growing vocal *netizens* – almost a billion Chinese connected to the internet and engaged in upholding China’s reputation online. Nationalism is an enduring force in contemporary Chinese society, permeating all movements and ideologies (Townsend, 1992), and its development affects us all. Accordingly, this article seeks to answer the abovementioned question by analyzing the foundations of Chinese nationalism and its empirical manifestations, from the incipient movements of the late-nineteenth century and the key concepts related to China’s national development to the present idea of China’s Dream of Great Rejuvenation. As I later show, “state-party nationalism” has emerged in China, entangling Chinese history with an updated sense of nationalism that is based on the CCP’s conception of the Chinese “self.”

Relying on a comprehensive review of the literature, official statements, and empirical observations between 2017 and 2020, I dialogue with the debate on the rise of nationalism worldwide, highlighting Chinese nationalism as a force set to shape much of the twenty-first

century world affairs. In the next section, I lay out the foundations of Chinese nationalism of the late-nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries. This is followed by the analysis of Chinese nationalism under the CCP rule since 1949, and a final section in which I identify the main trends in contemporary Chinese state-party nationalism, from territorial to technological nationalism, touching upon the China Dream and bottom-up forces of nationalism. I then conclude with the main implications for China and the world.

## 1. CHINESE NATIONALISM EMERGES

China did not embark on the first tide of nationalism<sup>2</sup> that flooded Europe during the formation of modern nation-states. Rather, it was not until the late nineteenth century that the Chinese elite began to think of themselves more in terms of a national group than as the true, and sole, world civilization. Townsend (1992), for instance, advocates for a “culturalism to nationalism thesis,” in which “the history of modern China, then, is one in which nationalism replaces culturalism as the dominant Chinese view of their identity and place in the world” (p. 97). Before European imperialism could ignite this transition, the Chinese elite – and people – tolerated the many instances that non-Han ethnic groups conquered and governed the Empire. Since all of them adopted Han cosmology and Confucian morals as the foundation for their dynastic legitimacy, the “Chinese” civilization remained intact, notwithstanding the territorial and political skirmishes throughout the centuries.

As it was for the elite, popular nationalism would not emerge either, since the Chinese lived their agrarian lives, isolated from the outside world and themselves – because not even a common language they spoke – until mid-nineteenth-century when foreign powers started their colonial expansion in China. Far from the imperial capital and major port cities, despite their acceptance of the imperial order “all under heaven” (*tianxia* 天下), Chinese people for millennia identified more with local roots, their families, and lineage. After all, nationalism is a relational concept, one that is based on the self-recognition of being part of a larger national group vis-à-vis the existence of other nationalities. Past conflicts and dynastic ruptures in China, conversely, were framed under the idea of social restoration to a lost moral standard, which legitimized the Emperor’s rule “all under heaven.”

Nationalism was born with the self-recognition by the Chinese elite of their imperial decline. The turbulent nineteenth-century concatenated the Empire’s moral decay, popular rebellions, and foreign invasions. This latter, inaugurated by the First Opium War in 1839 and culminating in the Chinese defeat in the Sino-Japanese war in 1894-95, catalyzed the elite’s

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper, nationalism is both understood as a historical phenomenon that coincides with the formation of nation-states in Europe, most precisely in the aftermath of the French Revolution, when nationalist movements advocated for national independence, and as a concept related to the identity of certain groups with collective symbols, such as language, territory, and cultural traits, coinciding with a sense of belonging to a specific country. This study does not intend to enter a conceptual debate around nationalism, but rather understand its empirical manifestations in China and how they are entangled with its modern history. For a discussion about nationalism in Europe and other countries, see Hobsbawm (2021); For a theoretical discussion of nationalism, see Breuilly (1993) and Cox (2021).

acknowledgment of their backwardness and the urge for national revival. It is in this context that intellectuals revived the notion of wealth and power (*fuqiang* 富强), a concept first coined in the Warring States period (476 to 221 B.C.E.) by the philosopher Han Feizi (Schell and Delury, 2013). According to Schell and Delury (2013), “for Chinese reformers since the early nineteenth century, these two characters have repeatedly stood in for the profound desire among China’s *cognoscenti* to see their country restored to the kind of greatness their ancestors had once taken for granted.” Foreign invasions and humiliating treaties put the Chinese into a position of great “inferiority and hopelessness,” leading to a yearning for the wealth and power of past dynasties that lasts to this day.

In the face of evident national decay, the imperial intelligentsia, spearheaded by Empress Dowager Cixi, promoted the use of Western techniques (*yong* 用) but maintaining the Chinese core (*ti* 体). For them, the dynastic rule was the apogee of the civilization’s moral order, so foreign knowledge would only be an instrument to China’s “self-strengthening” (*zhiqiang* 自强) movement. A series of reforms were carried out, especially in the military, where the naval fleet was fully renovated. However, after losing territory and warships to Japan in 1895 and the disastrous Boxer Rebellion in 1901, Cixi recognized that radical changes were necessary to the dynasty’s revival. She abolished the imperial examinations and put forth an educational reform that eventually shaped the minds of the republican nationalists. The Boxer uprising was tainted with popular, xenophobic nationalism – and may be considered one of the first popular manifestations in support of the Chinese empire against foreign powers (Fairbank and Goldman, 2008). The outcome could not have been worse: instigated by murders and besieged legations, foreign powers decided to wage another war in China. The days of the Qing dynasty were coming to an end.

Witnessing the disastrous Opium wars, the Sino-Japanese War, the Taiping and Boxer rebellions, the extraterritoriality and land concessions to foreign powers, etc., several intellectuals turned against the Manchu empire. Liang Qichao, for instance, resorted to social Darwinism (Fairbank and Goldman, 2008) to explain China’s decay and demoralization. Along with Sun Yat-sen and other intellectuals, they advocated for the “destruction of the old to make way for the new.” Hence, in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, intellectuals started to question the very core (*ti* 体) of China’s traditional culture, “fearing that China’s backwardness and inability to adapt to the modern world was rooted in Confucian values themselves” (Schell and Delury, 2013). They deeply influenced the Republican Revolution in 1911, blazing the trail for the two biggest nationalist movements of the 1910s and 1920s: the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement.

In addition to the tremendous task of setting up a new constitutional order, Republican China faced increasing aggression from Japan, culminating in the Twenty-one Demands in 1915. As Callahan (2004) reminds us, this event marked the organized form of the political discourse against “national humiliation” (*guochi* 国耻), with newspapers and intellectuals throughout the

country urging people to “never forget national humiliation” (wuwang guochi 勿忘国耻) – a catchphrase used to this day to evoke nationalist feelings. The New Culture Movement is then born in this context, from the academic upsurge in China, when modern universities were created, such as Peking University and foreign-sponsored Tsinghua University. Intellectuals questioned the profound forces of Chinese culture that allowed foreign powers to take advantage of the Chinese people. There was much to blame the imperial order and the foundations of the Chinese civilization – even the classical Chinese language was challenged – as there was to “celebrate national humiliation”. Nationalism in China was now recurring to Western theories – not only techniques – in its quest for wealth and power on the road to “national salvation.”

Tumultuous years ensued with World War I and made room for yet another ardent manifestation of nationalism in China as a defensive weapon against foreign aggression. Contrary to all Chinese expectations, the Treaty of Versailles, which put an end to the Great War in 1919, transferred to Japan the Chinese lands under German concession. This sparked widespread protest across China, and around three thousand students from Peking University and sympathizers demonstrated at the Tiananmen square. Following the government crackdown on students, protests and strikes reached the lower classes, which supported the nationalist stance of the movement. The May Fourth participants shared the ideology with the New Culture Movement, despising the traditional Chinese culture and the imperialist politics of foreign powers (Fairbank and Goldman, 2008). This movement would also become the cradle to the Chinese Communist Party, which was created in 1921 – ironically, the CCP took advantage of the fact that Chinese nationals had more freedom of expression in Shanghai’s French concession than in the territory controlled by the Republicans, using that location as its headquarters.

From the 1920s until the late 1940s, the Chinese toiled between internal political instability and Japanese expansionism. China hung on the balance until 1931 when Japanese forces invaded northeastern China and established a puppet state named Manchukuo. Japanese aggression would reach its peak with the “Massacre of Nanjing,” in 1937, and the ensuing conquest of vast territories across China. Accordingly, Chinese nationalism turned its all attention to the “fight against Japanese aggression” (kangzhan 抗战). These traumatic events forced an alliance between Nationalists and Communists under the common flag of the struggle for Chinese survival. They reinforced the yearning for wealth and power to repel foreign imperialism and convincingly promoted Lu Xun’s idea of China’s “culture as one of servitude to masters that triumphed over the people’s misery” (Fairbank and Goldman, 2008, p. 250), which greatly contributed to China’s deplorable and humiliating condition vis-à-vis the world.

## 2. NATIONALISM IN THE PRC

On October 1st, 1949, Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the People’s Republic of China. The Helmsman, irrevocable leader of the Communist Party, triumphantly discoursed that “Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We have stood up” (cited by Callahan, 2004). His speech was filled with nationalist pride, leaving in the second plain the

socialist revolution. For this reason, Mao inherited the political impulse of the New Culture and May Fourth Movement with the wholesale negation of traditional Chinese culture and used the class struggle as a means to the creation of a new China. Having the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as its most extremist form, the period that ranges from 1949 until Mao's death, in 1976, questioned every aspect of what meant to be "Chinese." For example, Mao Zedong and the CCP under his command were deeply worried about national unity: the nation was not only comprised of dozens of ethnic groups, who spoke different languages, but was splintered into foreign concessions and lost territories. Despising their past, some even proposed the abolishment of the Chinese characters, which were reckoned as the most, undeniable trace of the Chinese culture (Moser, 2016). Confucian classics were demonized along with whatever was deemed as capitalist. In the end, a united China yearning for its glorious revival out of a century of humiliation translated into shunning away oppression with party loyalty.

Mao cut so deep through the Chinese society that future leaders would be very hesitant in rescuing the values and concepts of China's traditional culture. The Chinese people, after decades of intense cultural campaigns and political purges, partially lost their cultural roots. Consequently, Chinese nationalism under Deng Xiaoping's era took incremental steps towards the reckoning of their past. Economic experimentalism from the Reform and Opening (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) reflected in a "national humility," revealed in the many delegations sent to Singapore, Japan, US, to "learn with the world." Party loyalty and the century of humiliation were still at the core of state nationalism, but, with the relative freedom enjoyed by the Chinese in the 1980s, concurrent narratives emerged. The 1989 Tiananmen Incident evidenced that a new generation of young patriots, detached and uprooted from their past, were reaching out to other sources of national identity, including democratic values.

The CCP's severe crackdown was followed by the Patriotic Education Campaign in 1991, which modernized the curriculum in schools and boosted Party propaganda to foster state-led, patriotic nationalism. Starting timidly in the 1980s and with great impetus in the 1990s, the CCP promoted the study of Chinese history and Confucianism to "re-sinimize" China (Carrai, 2021). These campaigns were followed by manifestations of popular nationalism (Gries, 2004), especially in cases such as the 2001 imbroglio with the US over the spy-plane crash in the South China Sea and the 2005 widespread anti-Japanese protests in China (Wasserstrom, 2005).

Chinese nationalism only fully and explicitly recovers its pride for the past in the Xi's era, which cements a tectonic shift away from the late-nineteenth century and New Culture intellectuals that set the conceptual framework for Chinese nationalism in the whole of the twentieth century: the despise of its Confucian roots. With communist ideology long gone and economic growth losing steam, the CCP tries to recall the "past Chinese splendor" and "creat[e] a collective memory of it" as a means toward "a self-legitimizing act through which the current Chinese leadership can justify and strengthen its authority in a way that seems in natural continuity with dynastic history" (Carrai, 2021, p. 8). In hindsight, Xi Jinping looks at the past and sees the answer to China's quest for wealth and power, not its doom. In virtually all of his official

statements, Xi Jinping refers to ancient philosophers, ideas, and values (Vasconcelos, 2017). Trauma, encapsulated in the century of humiliation, still wields considerable importance, but the historical sources now also lie in glory and amnesia (Carrai, 2021).

In the same fashion, differently from the 1980s and 1990s when the Chinese revered Western culture, values, and brands, today's generation is engaging with its "Chineseness" and "value[s] being patriotic, pursuing individuality and taking pride in China's rapid development" at the same time that is repelling what is perceived as negative Western influences to present-day China (He, 2021). As Freymann and Wong (2021) recall, "multiple surveys confirm the nationalistic turn in the Chinese political discourse reflects a genuine change in attitudes, not just a dialing-up of Chinese Communist Party propaganda." Since 2008, state and popular nationalism have thus converged (Zhao, 2013). Consequently, nationalism has gained new consensus in China, which, to a foreign audience, may be seen as a turn to aggressive or chauvinistic nationalism.

### 3. REINVENTING THE PAST TO PROJECT THE FUTURE: CHINA'S STATE-PARTY NATIONALISM

In China, historical memories are selectively used to serve the CCP's political and strategic objectives, shaping nationalist discourse according to their interests (Zhao, 2015; Carrai, 2021). According to Hussaini (2021), since Xi Jinping's ascension to power, nationalism is a mix of pride about China's rapid economic development, the bemoaning of the century of humiliation, a backlash to foreign "provocative" acts, and the CCP's deliberate promotion of nationalist sentiments – from educational campaigns about China's unique civilization to its territorial needs. These sources of nationalism are worked out within frameworks that selectively rescue past glories and traumas (Carrai, 2021). Hence, Xi Jinping sees the century of humiliation as the antithesis of China's Dream of Great Rejuvenation and, as such, should be avoided at all costs. The century of humiliation, as the CCP believes, has inflicted upon China the "Three sufferings and injustices": the loss of territory, the loss of control over internal and the external environment, and the loss of international standing and dignity (Carrai, 2021, p. 17).

Contrasting this trauma, the CCP now recognizes the past glories of Chinese culture. China's decline during the century of humiliation would be no more than a "parenthesis" in China's centrality in the world (Jacques, 2009). Thanks to this renewed sense of cultural identity, the CCP is reviving concepts such as benevolence (ren 仁), great harmony (datong 大同), and even "all under heaven" (tianxia 天下). As CCP official Dai Bingguo translated the CCP narrative, in 2010:

"Throughout our history of thousands of years, benevolence and harmony are at the heart of our political and cultural tradition, which values harmony, good-neighborliness and friendship with all. China never sought expansion or hegemony even in its heyday centuries ago, when it accounted for 30 percent of the world's GDP" (cited by Carrai, 2021, p. 20).

But to operationalize this dichotomy between trauma and glory and cements its legitimacy, the CCP also needs to promote amnesia (Carrai, 2021), "forgetting" Chinese expansionism under the Qianglong Emperor in the eighteenth century, the many instances that China was splintered



into smaller states or conquered by non-Han ethnicities, and the 1989 Tiananmen incident. These facts don't suit the "original aspirations" of a peaceful, unified nation.

Against this backdrop, with trauma, glory, and amnesia, China is producing what I call "state-party nationalism." According to a Peking University professor<sup>3</sup>, in the aftermath of the 2018 constitutional reforms, China began to transit from a "one-party state" towards an enormous party that is confounded with the nation itself – therefore the name "state-party." The state bureaucracy is coopted by the Party apparatus in a "constitutionalized fused system" (Lin, 2019), which conveys its agenda through institutional means as if the nation represents the CCP and not the other way around. In this context, the state-party creates blurred lines between the Chinese nationalism related to its cultural roots, shared language and customs, and the very CCP's rule. In this sense, there is no Chinese nation without the CCP's leadership. The goals of the CCP have thus become the nationalist guidebook to the Chinese patriot. In the words of Xi Jinping:

"Since its founding, the Communist Party of China has made great sacrifices and forged ahead against all odds. It has rallied and led the Chinese people in transforming the poor and backward old China into an increasingly prosperous and powerful new China, thus opening a completely new horizon for the great renewal of the Chinese nation. Our responsibility now is to rally and lead the entire Party and the people of all ethnic groups in China in taking over the relay baton passed on to us by history, and in making continued efforts to achieve the great renewal of the Chinese nation [...]" (Xi, 2012).

State-party nationalism materializes this new *modus operandi* of the Chinese nation, reproducing past narratives, but also innovating in vocalizing the needs of a China that has returned to its "rightful place" of wealth and power. Here, I digress with three main sources of Chinese state-party nationalism that have incarnated the past glories and traumas, leveraged the current status, and are proving to be long-term forces within Chinese society: territorial nationalism, popular nationalism on the internet, and techno-nationalism.

Territorial nationalism is embedded in the idea of the national unity that a century of imperialism has broken in China. Since the First Opium War, China's territory was invaded and conquered, which reflects today's claims over Hong Kong, Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the Diaoyu islands. Along with them, China also feels threatened by movements that advocate the independence of Tibet, Xinjiang, and, to a lesser extent, Inner Mongolia. To the CCP and a large part of the Chinese society, these territories are inalienable components of the nation and should be unified under the CCP rule. Recent events in Hong Kong (Al Jazeera, 2021), for example, demonstrate the CCP's resolve to regain total control over the territory. The 2020 National Security Law in Hong Kong is criminalizing dissent and incentivizing conformity to the Mainland judicial system. Moreover, in March 2021, the Chinese Congress approved a reform of Hong Kong's electoral system to allow that only "patriots" could govern the territory. The CCP sees as "domestic affairs" the handling of these claims, promoting the Chinese sentiment that they should support the Party in retrieving parts of the nation that were taken away from them by force. This

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<sup>3</sup> Here I chose to preserve the professor's anonymity.

is evident when we look at the official map of the People’s Republic of China, where the abovementioned territories are all within China’s borders (see image below). These maps are scattered through schools, public offices, and private companies as a friendly reminder to the Chinese of their unified territory. As a consequence, media outlets, book publishers, and regular citizens that inadvertently got caught reproducing “unpatriotic” maps stirred anger and were equally boycotted as they “harmed the dignity and emotions of the Chinese people.”

**Image 1:** Official Map of the People’s Republic of China, Source: China (n.d.)



Note. On the map above, Taiwan (*taiwan* 台湾) in green and the Diaoyu islands (*diaoyudao* 钓鱼岛) right north of Taiwan. Along with the South China Sea (*nanhai* 南海), they are surrounded by the ten-dashed, purple line, depicting the Chinese territory.

These territorial claims have also instigated popular nationalist manifestations. In March 2021, *netizens* bashed international brands for criticizing the cotton production in Xinjiang, which they deemed as “forced labor.” Boycotts and intense online debate led these brands, such as H&M and Nike, to be shunned away from the Chinese market. This kind of nationalist resentment became relatively common in the past years: international brands, actors, or institutions that backed Tibet independence or were involved in sensitive topics related to Hong Kong, Taiwan, or anti-Asian racism, suffered prompt retaliation from *netizens*. Furthermore, popular nationalism can also be seen in recent television productions, such as the movies *Wolf Warrior* and *Eight-hundred*, and TV series, such as “Like a flowing river” and “New World,” not to mention the iconic celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> year of the PRC “My People, My Country” (wo he wo zuguo 我和我祖国). I have also seen in school classrooms banners hanging on walls calling students to “rejuvenate China” (zhenxing zhonghua 振兴中华)<sup>4</sup>. They mix a sense of pride for recent achievements and CCP’s struggle to improve the lives of the Chinese. When these popular manifestations reproduce what the Party conceives as truly nationalist, they easily reverberate in the state media outlets, most notably the *Global Times* and *Xinhua*.

Like the internet, technology has emerged as a great source of Chinese state-party nationalism. Modern, smart cities, financial technologies, Artificial Intelligence, and high-tech products are among the recent developments of China’s economy that are making nationalists feel proud of their country. As they climb the ladder of technological advancements, with Chinese giants, such as Huawei, Alibaba, and Tencent, increasingly leading in many fields, other countries are waging a technological war against China. This, however, only creates more incentives for China to look inward: techno-nationalism dictates that people should consume Chinese goods, and let go of the foreign brands. The Chinese government backs this move with industrial policies, such as the “Made in China 2025” and the recently launched “Dual Circulation Strategy.” Virtually all of the big, private tech companies’ executives are CCP members. But the Chinese society is also on board. Self-reliance on technology is deemed as one of the most important endeavors for the twenty-first century, and techno-nationalism in China is helping to foster a sentiment that all support for Chinese tech companies is at the common good. Techno-nationalism encapsulates the battlefield for China’s twenty-first century quest for wealth and power since it is seen as the gateway to a more prosperous nation. For this reason, the CCP is also expanding its tentacles with Party branches and regulatory frameworks that also subjugate tech companies to their interests (see *Economist*, 2021a, and *Economist*, 2021b).

State-party nationalism thus engenders centuries-old desires and emotions backed up by twenty-first century technologies, all encompassed within the CCP rule. Jude Blanchette (2021, p. 96) goes on a similar vein: for him, “In Xi Jinping’s case this is a very specific form of nationalism, and its first concentric circle is about the CCP. Nationalism equates to support for the party. [Xi’s nationalism] puts the party first before you get to any abstract notions like language, blood, and

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion about the many facets surrounding nationalism and education in Xi’s China, see Hao and Hua-Yu (2020).

territory, which are many of the inputs for nationalism elsewhere.” As state-party nationalism equates the nation to the Party, the battle for technological leadership or people vocalizing their nationalist feelings online must be framed within the boundaries of the CCP rule. This is to say that other nationalist manifestations that do not adequately fit the CCP “guidebook” are sidelined, repressed. But, at the same time, “Nationalism takes many forms. It does not have to be nationalism that conforms to a specific bureaucratic political arrangement” (Blanchette, 2021). Although some of the recent manifestations of state-party nationalism, as analyzed above, stem from genuine popular voices, state-party nationalism coopts these voices and reproduces them through its apparatus.

State-party nationalism creates a continuity between the glorious imperial past and recent accomplishments under the CCP leadership. It detaches from the old nationalism that saw the Chinese culture as a backwater and now tries to advocate for its superiority – translated, for example, in the Great Rejuvenation campaign. The struggle for technological upgrade and the online battle to protect Chinese values and territory are the twenty-first century version of China’s search for wealth and power. And, following the argument, the CCP is the sole legitimate political organization to lead the Chinese people on this quest – without the CCP, China as a sovereign nation wouldn’t even exist. As I have once seen in a newspaper, which illustrates this new era: “Loving China and loving the Party are identical” (aiguo he aidang shi yizhi de 爱国和爱党在中国是一致的). In this manner, I agree with Zhao (2013) that state and popular nationalisms have converged in China, but with the caveat that only those popular manifestations that show seamless devotion to the nation as the extension of the Party are granted with recognition as equally legitimate sources of Chinese nationalism. This goes hand in hand with China’s recent re-centralization of its authoritarian rule (Economy, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The first high-level meeting between China and the United States’ Biden administration took place in March 2021 with equally high expectations. The encounter gained the headlines both in Western and Chinese media due to the animosity that was felt in the air. In Chinese media outlets, the meeting was compared to another event, in 1901, when China had to face Western powers and sign the Boxer Protocol. On that occasion, a debilitated China could only nod and accept what they deemed as humiliating terms. But now, as the Chinese interpreted the event, China could stand by herself and “speak truth to bullies.” Prophetically to this meeting in 2021, one of Hu Jintao’s top officials concluded, years ago (cited by Schell and Delury, 2013):

“China was bullied by foreign powers in modern times... a major reason for that was that China was chronically poor and weak. Since then, the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has become the unswerving goal that each Chinese generation has striven to realize.”

They have both conveyed evident reference to the century of humiliation in these two occasions, but also that now they feel proud and confident about their national condition (guoqing 国情). The Great Rejuvenation appears to be palpable with China’s wealth and power on the rise.

Recent accounts in the West have warned about this rising nationalism in Xi's China. Oxford Professor Rana Mitter, in a recent essay to Foreign Affairs, for instance, contended that "The CCP's newly confident and antagonistic character marks a significant departure from the more hesitant version of authoritarianism that preceded Xi" (Mitter, 2021). Bhattacharya (2019) also perceived Xi's nationalism as levers to a more belligerent foreign policy. But similar narratives since the 1980s resembled this "China threat" mindset: observers cautioned against "assertive nationalism in Chinese foreign policy" and a "confident nationalism" (Townsend, 1992), including the more than obvious book *The China Threat: How the People's Republic Targets America*, written by Bill Gertz (2000). Likewise, Callahan (2004, p. 201) shows that, in the 1990s, Chinese patriotic nationalism was of great concern to the post-Cold War world. It is, therefore, legitimate to question whether an "assertive" Chinese nationalism is a sole contemporary phenomenon, related to Xi's China Dream of Great Rejuvenation. As I exposed, conversely, it remains a constant force in China's modern history – which makes it even more essential to understand these historical roots of present-day nationalism.

This China Dream of Great Rejuvenation, as I have shown, is indissociable to "party-state nationalism." As celebrations to the 70th year of the RPC were approaching, in 2019, I could witness that in Kunming, Yunnan Province, the residential communities (xiaoqu 小区) were preparing for a great choir competition. Daily, for months straight, people would gather after long work hours to rehearse and show off their patriotic feelings. Holding and swinging the red RPC flag, they sang their love for the nation and their loyalty to the party. Participation was not mandatory (as far as I was concerned), but there existed an unwritten rule that put together thousands and thousands of people to devote their time to the party-nation. Was this unwritten rule genuine gratitude and pride for the last 40 years of great economic prosperity? Or was it an invisible force from an authoritarian regime that requires from its citizens total allegiance? Either way, this event depicted how powerful state-party nationalism is in its ability to lure the Chinese to vocalize their emotions for the nation and the Party.

As intended in this article, I demonstrated how various concepts related to contemporary nationalism in China, be it state-led or popular manifestations, date back to the nineteenth century. Narratives were shaped throughout historical events and absorbed into new social technologies. It is true that Chinese nationalism is pulsing in schools' walls, on the internet, through tech companies, etc., and has become more responsive to the antagonistic views toward China in the West. At the same time, however, it is crucial to ask to what extend Chinese nationalism as depicted in the West is not a political discourse to sustain hawkish views that advocate for Western supremacy. Mahbubani (2020) asks a similar question in his latest book, *Has China Won?*, and believes that deep misconceptions permeate the political establishment in the West. Whereas Western pundits and politicians lack the flexibility to understand China's stance in a multipolar world and see an unequivocal "Chinese expansionism" led by their nationalist fervor, Chinese nationalism would, in fact, be defensive and reactive in nature. As Mahbubani bluntly puts it, China doesn't want to "sinisize the world" (Mahbubani, 2020).

Thus party-state nationalism, as a formula that intertwines CCP's agenda with state-led and popular nationalisms, evokes emotions and political action to "re-size" China under the Party's assumption of Chineseness. It is looking inwards. However, it raises competing narratives in China and abroad. Internally, it still needs to reconcile with the ethnic diversity and non-party nationalist manifestations; externally, Chinese nationalism is still seen with suspicious eyes. In this regard, opposite to the alarmist discourse in the West, the multifaceted nature of Chinese nationalism does not deviate from modern nationalism worldwide. But with present-day accumulated wealth and power, the CCP and part of the Chinese society believe that it is time to restore China's "rightful place" in the world. In the end, although I agree with the notion that nationalism is a permanent force in China's modern history, state-party nationalism is not a *fait accompli*. The rise of an aggressive Chinese nationalism depends on how the Great Rejuvenation is perceived at home as much as how Western powers, which inherit the imperialist mindset of the universality of their values, will deal with China's growing centrality in the twenty-first century. State-party nationalism is in the making.

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