HOW CHINA'S NATIONALISM WAS SHANGHAIED

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What kind of a nation-state are the Chinese people and their leaders shaping for themselves as they enter the second century of the 'Chinese revolution'? The quest for national greatness and modernization that began with the early reformers as a quest for 'wealth and power' continues. The relationship of nationalism and modernization is unquestionably a fundamental problem in the history of modern China. Indeed, one can ask whether there is any theme about China that is more hackneyed than 'nationalism and modernization'? What can possibly be said that is new on the subject?

What is new is the urgency of the question because we are now seeing, as a part of the worldwide crisis of communism, the unrelenting erosion of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought as the basis of state legitimacy in China. The expectation is that nationalism will have to fill the void created by the 'crisis of confidence' and by the collapse of the myth of socialism as magic. If the future of China lies with nationalism, we had better get a clear understanding of precisely what are the characteristics of Chinese nationalism. What are likely to be the distinctive features of Chinese nationalism in a post-Marxist-Leninist era? More importantly, how will the configurations of Chinese nationalism affect the prospects for the modernization of Chinese society and politics?

It is my intention to argue, first, that the relationship between nationalism and modernization has taken a form in China that is different from what occurred anywhere else. I want to argue, secondly, that in spite of the greatness of Chinese history, in spite of the manifest durability of everyday Chinese culture – that is, in spite of the weight of many of the standard building blocks of nationalism – the historical pattern of China's

* An earlier version of this article was delivered as a Wei Lun Lecture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. That earlier version has appeared, in translation, in the Chinese-language magazine Ershiyi Shiji [21st Century] (Hong Kong), no.9 (February 1992), pp.13-26.

THE AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF CHINESE AFFAIRS, NO.29, JANUARY 1993
modernization has left China with a relatively inchoate and incoherent form of nationalism. Stated another way, the primordial building blocks of ethnicity and cultural habits have in some respects preempted the field and obscured the fact that, for fundamental reasons, nationalism in China has remained nascent and amorphous. Thus, paradoxically, although China produced one of the world's greatest civilizations and still has a powerful and tenacious culture, it now has in modern times a relatively contentless form of nationalism. Yet, even more paradoxically, the Chinese political class, in spite of such a formless nationalism, has been able to exploit the mystique of patriotism to neutralize politically the very Chinese who have been the most successful in modernizing.

Two Elusive Subjects

Before proceeding with the Chinese case it is necessary to clarify and define the two very elusive concepts of nationalism and modernization. When we speak of nationalism and modernization it might seem that we are dealing with straightforward and commonsense topics, but in fact these are two very tricky subjects which are not easily pinned down and analysed. The problem with nationalism is that it properly involves only those sentiments associated with the idea of the nation-state, but people popularly confuse it with a variety of other sentiments associated with basic forms of group identity. 'Modernization' is also popularly a confusion of ideas ranging from Westernization and economic development to middle-class practices. As a result it is often overlooked that the essence of modernization is a blending of parochial cultural values and the universal norms associated with the world culture.

Nationalism has become a very fuzzy concept because we have tended to lump together under its label all manner of group identities and primordial sentiments. Nationalism should not be confused with tribalism, ethnicity, or shared cultural, religious and linguistic identities. Nationalism involves only those sentiments and attitudes basic to orientations toward the nation-state. Frequently these other primordial identities work against the creation of a unifying sense of nationalism. Even when a country is relatively homogeneous in terms of culture and religion the spirit of ethnic identity may not be directed toward the state. In other situations such primordial sentiments can indeed contribute to sharpening the feelings about 'we-ness' and 'they-ness' that are also basic to nationalism. But there is something additional and distinctive in the idea of nationalism because it must include the distinctive set of ideals, myths, symbols, and values that can serve as the inspiration for a nation-state. The primary identities of race, culture, and ethnicity can exist before there is the nation-state, and they can fuel the passions of nationalism after the nation-state is founded, but nationalism must have an additional dimension that is associated with the uniqueness of the particular nation-state. Nationalism
provides not just the basis of loyalty of a people to their nation-state but it also defines the role of leaders, and in so doing sets limits on their conduct.

Students of nationalism correctly insist that nationalism appeared only with the emergence of the nation-state in Europe, and that it has spread to the rest of the world only with the creation of modern nation-states. The age of nationalism came only with the formation of the modern nation-state system. The new era of nationalism was formed by people’s reactions to their own state and to the state system as a whole. Nationalism is therefore a modern sentiment. Hence the traditional Chinese ‘Middle Kingdom Complex’ or the concept of Han chauvinism should not be treated as the same thing as Chinese nationalism. The contemporary sentiments and imagery of nationalism can, however, have their tap-roots in past identities, for history is, of course, a prime source for the ideals that are basic to nationalism. Indeed, it is how people share their collective memories that forms much of the content of their nationalistic identity, and with a loss of those memories there may come a void in their collective feelings. Nationalism embraces the ideals of a society and a people’s sense of how they are distinctive and precious in contrast to other peoples. In the words of John Stuart Mill:

‘The strongest cause for the feeling of nationality...is identity of political antecedents; the possession of a national history, and consequent community of recollections; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past’.  

Modern social science has contributed to the confusion about the distinction between nationalism and other forms of collective bonding. In the earlier works of such scholars as Hans Kohn, Carleton Hayes, E.H. Carr, Robert MacIver and Rupert Emerson there was generally a conscientious attempt to distinguish between those sentiments attached to the nation-state and other feelings of group identity. Indeed, a central issue in much of the debates as to whether a particular colony was ‘ready for independence’ was the question of whether the ethnic, religious and other identity divisions among the people had been superseded by adequately strong sentiments of identification with what would be the new nation-state. However, as scholars sought to uncover the foundations of the spirit of nationalism they tended to blur the distinctions. Thus, Karl Deutsch identified nationalism with basic patterns of social communications which he found to be critical for forming a sense of community. Harold Isaacs carried the analysis even further by identifying all the major elements that can shape group identity – such as skin color, language, and religion – and associated them with nationalism.

2 Deutsch, op. cit.
Yet, if we are to understand better the political role of nationalism it is now apparent that we need to separate such primordial sentiments from those that are focused on the nation-state. We can see that this is the case when we look at what has happened in many of the newly emerging nations of the Third World where such tribal sentiments have not contributed to the creation of enduring bonds of nationalism. In many of the new states ethnic and religious identities not only failed to contribute to the formation of a new spirit of national identity but actually worked against the building of nationhood. As a result the assumptions of the 1950s that strong racial and other primordial sentiments could become the stuff of strong nationalisms proved to be incorrect. The story of nation-building is that primordial sentiments are not enough; there must be a distinct set of ideals, aspirations, heroes, and symbols that are associated with the political system as a part of the larger nation-state system.

Moreover, the identification of nationalism cannot be limited to merely some partisan political party or faction. Nationalism is more than loyalty to party or particular leader. Naturally politicians will try to identify themselves with nationalistic sentiments, and certainly some leaders and parties are ideologically more committed than others to strengthening the ideals of nationalism. However if a group of leaders tries to claim that patriotism is associated only with supporting their partisan positions, and that everyone else is unpatriotic, their behaviour can only be seen as an example of politics and not a manifestation of true nationalism.

So when we look for the substance of Chinese nationalism we have to identify those sentiments that are different from either the Chinese sense of ethnic and cultural identity, or the attitudes towards current policies and leaders. Above all it is important to distinguish Chinese nationalism from all the powerful sentiments associated with Chinese cultural and ethnic identity. Chinese cultural and ethnic realities are, of course, critical factors in shaping Chinese political behaviour, but to understand the likely direction of Chinese historical development we also need to have a clear sense of the more specific ideals, myths, heroes, and symbols that can inspire Chinese nationalism as the Chinese seek the goals of modernization. The extraction of a coherent and inspiring form of nationalism from the all-embracing concept of Chinese ethnicity has not been easy. Sun Yat-sen sought to articulate an early version of Chinese nationalism, but the San-Min-Chu-I soon became merely the orthodoxy of a partisan political party. Mao Zedong could boast that under him China had 'stood up', but aside from his partisan version of Marxism-Leninism he deflated Chinese nationalism when he said the Chinese people were a 'blank sheet of paper'.

Nationalism must also respond to the times, which means that when there is rapid social or revolutionary change the character of nationalism in the particular society can become quite unpredictable. Revolution can solidify nationalism, as in the case of France; but revolutionary changes can also produce a confused and disillusioned people with little feeling of nationalism,
as in some of the corrupted new nations of post-colonial Africa and Asia. This is why the relationship of nationalism to the profound changes associated with modernization is so fundamental to the course of history.

Modernization is an equally elusive subject which, like nationalism, emerged out of Europe during the process of creating the nation-state system, and has spread to the rest of the world as societies have become engaged in the nation-building processes. Initially, it was common to confuse modernization with Westernization, but increasingly we have come to see modernization as being associated with international standards, universalistic knowledge, such as science and technology, and the values and practices appropriate for advanced contemporary societies. Modernization, like nationalism, is fundamentally a state of mind. It calls for a heightened level of consciousness, a capacity for empathy, and a break from the rigidities of traditional orthodoxies.

The relationship of nationalism and modernization is obviously complex. They can reinforce each other or they can be antagonistic. In both nationalism and modernization, there are also tensions between parochial and particularistic considerations, on the one hand, and cosmopolitan and universalistic standards, on the other. The building blocks of nationalism must come out of the historical traditions and legacies of a society, but nationalism has significance only in the context of relations with other nation-states, and thus it is also responsive to cosmopolitan standards. Modernization similarly reflects cosmopolitan values and universalistic norms, but it also has to resonate with the parochial traditions of the particular society if it is to take root and become a significant force. Thus, nationalism and modernization contain within themselves tensions between the parochial cultures of a society and the universalistic norms of the cosmopolitan world. Nationalism and modernization are thus twin driving forces which shape the historic processes of nation-building and political development. They can also work against each other to paralyse progress.

The Chinese Difference

In the 1950s and 1960s it was commonplace for scholars to treat nationalism and modernization as the most important dual forces in the emerging states of the post-colonial world. The study of political development soon expanded to include most of the Third World of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is significant, however, that the study of China was generally not included in this great intellectual endeavour. There were various reasons why this was the case. China at the time was vigorously engaged in pursuing its quest for a Marxist-Leninist utopia, and most American scholars interested in the developing world wanted to get away from Cold War issues. Moreover, China specialists were happy to accentuate the distinctiveness, indeed the uniqueness, of China, and thus they preferred not to put the study of China into a comparative context. Students of comparative Communism also found
Maoism to be distinctive, if not peculiar, and hence China was not treated as a part of their central concerns. For all these reasons China was not included in comparative studies at a time when nationalism and modernization were popular subjects in political science.

Now as we examine in greater detail the themes of nationalism and modernization with respect to China it becomes apparent that perhaps there were deeper and more fundamental reasons why China did not fit the general pattern and thus why it required special treatment. Elsewhere in the post-colonial world nationalism and modernization were reinforcing forces, but in China they have been essentially antagonistic forces. Elsewhere the articulators of nationalism were the most modernized people in the country. Westernized intellectuals were the people who gave voice to the new ideals of independence and nationalism. The anti-colonial leaders of South and Southeast Asia and of Africa were people like Nehru and Gandhi, Nkrumah and Sukarno who were at home in both the modern world and their respective traditional cultures. They had out of their own life experiences a vivid sense of the challenge of combining modern and traditional practices.

In contrast, in China political power, and hence the advantaged position for shaping nationalism, was never firmly in the hands of the best educated or the most modernized people. Those who have held supreme political power in mainland China have reflected mainly the cultures of interior China, and few have experienced deep immersion in the modern world or even spoken a foreign language. Whereas elsewhere, the most modernized people were accepted as appropriate spokespersons for the nationalistic ideals of the society, in China they generally were suspected as being less than fully 'Chinese'. Thus from the Boxer rebellion to the latest 'anti-spiritual pollution' campaign, the Chinese political class has routinely treated modern, Western-educated Chinese as being tainted, flawed people, unworthy of being leaders of Chinese nationalism. It is true that Sun Yat-sen was Western trained and members of the Soong family were politically influential in the 1940s, but these and a few others were the odd exceptions to the general rule that China's political class had few modernized people – especially when compared to the nationalist leadership in the former colonial countries.

The story becomes even more complex because of the distinctive Chinese ways of thinking about the relationship between China's cultural legacy and the goals of modernization. Unlike in other countries, many Chinese intellectuals have at times adopted a totally hostile view toward their own great traditional culture, calling for the complete rejection of the past and a boundless adoption of Western culture. From the May Fourth Movement of seventy years ago through the Maoist years to the television program the 'River Elegy', there have been repeated attacks on China's cultural heritage. The motives, of course, varied and the visions of what the new 'modern' culture should be also have differed. There have also been times when other leaders, and particularly some intellectuals, have gone to the opposite extreme and tried to idealize Chinese traditions. But what was idealized was not the
realities of the living Chinese mass culture; it was abstractions of a romanticized past. Thus, between the two extremes of either nihilistically denouncing Chinese civilization or romanticizing it, most Chinese intellectuals and political leaders have consistently failed to do what their counterparts in the rest of the developing world have tried to do, which was to create a new sense of nationalism that would combine elements of tradition with appropriate features of the modern world culture.

The Chinese difference stems in large part, I believe, from the fact that China’s response to the West was quite distinctive and fundamentally different from those of most African and Asian countries which experienced European colonial rule. The parting in the road became clear in the developments after 1949. In fact, Western scholars such as Joseph Levinson and Mary Wright who were writing mainly against the backdrop of pre-1949 China described the problem of Chinese nationalism in terms very much like those commonly used later for the issues of tradition, modernization and nationalism in the post-colonial countries. However, the differences between China and the rest of the developing world cannot be seen as solely the consequences of China’s commitment to Leninism. They had their seeds in the distinctive circumstances of China’s initial exposure to the forces of the modern world of nation-states. China’s initial contacts with the West set in motion a distinctive history because it led to the unique treaty port system. This system was remarkably effective in helping to modernize significant segments of Chinese society but it also sharpened the distinctions between coastal (including Hankow on the Yangtze) and interior China, thereby intensifying the tensions between nationalism and modernization. The differences between the treaty port system and the various forms of colonial rule elsewhere thus had a lasting effect in making the Chinese experience with modernization distinct.

**Treaty Ports and Colonies: A Fundamental Difference**

The system for managing trade and intercultural relations which evolved out of the treaty ports along coastal China was indeed quite different from what took place elsewhere under direct and even indirect colonial rule. The differences have been obscured largely because Chinese spokespeople of all ideological persuasions have insisted ever since the 1920s that China suffered from imperialism in the same way as did all the other former colonial countries of Asia and Africa. Yet there was in fact a tremendous difference. Elsewhere, colonial rule involved complex human interactions as modernizing natives engaged in intense and direct personal relationships with representatives of the colonizing country. Indians, for example, knew what Englishmen were like and therefore colonialism was not an abstraction. The relationship was a psychologically complex love-hate affair. The Chinese, however, generally had little direct contact with the ‘imperialists’, and therefore for them the threat of foreign penetration and the evils of the ‘unequal treaties’ were abstractions. The psychology was thus totally different.
There is no reason to doubt the genuineness of Chinese feelings of humiliation; indeed, the Chinese may have had more grievances than people who are fully colonialized. Yet, the objective fact remains that China did have a distinct history with respect to the challenge of becoming a modern nation-state. While it is true that there were variations in the forms of the direct and indirect colonial rule from country to country, the treaty system which emerged out of the cultural and power clashes between China and the West was still unique. (Japan and Turkey did experience the constraints of extra-territoriality, but only for a brief period, and hence they were in no way comparable to the Chinese experience.)

John K. Fairbank in his pioneering work detailed the early story of the creation of the treaty port system. He traced what he called ‘the compromise between China and the West’ which produced, in his coined word, a ‘synarchy’ in which there was ‘a joint Chinese and Western administration of the modern centres of Chinese life and trade in the treaty ports’.

Unfortunately, other scholars did not follow the path Fairbank charted when he suggested that China’s experiences were unique. Instead the general tendency has been either to try to fit the subsequent history of Chinese developments into the Procrustean beds of various theories of imperialism or to dismiss the significance of the Western impact entirely and to emphasize domestic developments as autonomous forces in China’s modernization attempts.

The fundamental and lasting effect of the treaty port system was that it provided vivid and all-too-concrete evidence of the weaknesses of Chinese political rule and the apparent merits of foreign rule. The huge mass population of interior China were cursed with the incompetence, inefficiency and corruption of government by warlords, while in the enclaves there was an environment where Chinese could prosper and realize the spirit of modern life. The Chinese who went to the enclaves had undeniably voted with their feet in favour of foreign rule over Chinese rule. Interior China was thus seen as the real China, but it was a flawed and, in modern terms, a disgraced China. For the Chinese in the enclaves there was an inescapable sense of guilt as they became more nationally conscious. For the Chinese of the interior there was shame and humiliation as they became more conscious of modernization.

This was quite different from the colonial world in which there were no options between foreign and native rule and where the contrast was between the realities of colonial rule and the utopian ideal of independence. Nationalist leaders there could articulate ideals that would combine the best of their historic traditions with the best that the West had to offer. The awakening of political consciousness was thus an act of linking nationalism and modernization. Colonial rule, especially in its terminal phase, was designed so that power would flow naturally to those with modern knowledge and skills.

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From India to Indonesia, from Burma to the Philippines, and throughout Africa, people, by becoming in their own lives more modern, were also becoming the acknowledged champions of nationalism. There were often competing career paths between the political leaders in the nationalist movements and the modern-trained administrators – in India, for example, between the Westernized leaders of the Congress Party and the Indian Civil Service – but the two channels were essentially complementary in making nationalism compatible with modernization. The spirit of nationalism that came out of the anti-colonial movements was extremely idealistic so that after a few years of independence there were profound reactions of disillusionment and cynicism in country after country in the Third World. It is also true that many of the modernized spokespersons for the new nationalisms of the emerging nations failed to successfully integrate the symbols and ideals of their traditional cultures and their new national aspirations, so that when their countries ran into difficulties the new spirit of nationalism collapsed and ethnic tribalism came to dominate politics. This development serves, however, to reinforce the major point that it is necessary to recognize the distinction between real nationalism and more primordial sentiments.

In China it was the environment of the treaty ports which produced the most successful communities of modernizing Chinese, but since they consisted of people who had chosen foreign rule over Chinese rule they were not accepted as articulators of Chinese nationalism. The roots of the tension about nationalism in China can thus be largely traced back to the treaty port system which helped create the division between the enclave cultures of coastal China, which gave dynamism to the country’s modernization, and an interior China, with its claim of being the authentic China. This profound division has had enormous consequences in dictating what has been legitimate in the articulation of Chinese nationalism. The divide has fuelled decades of suspicion that modern, cosmopolitan ways are a threat to China’s national spirit. It helped create the belief that intelligent, Westernized Chinese were somehow less patriotic, less worthy representatives of their country than the more parochial people of interior China. All of this was especially unfortunate because it rested upon a serious misunderstanding about the realities of Chinese life in the enclaves.

The Maligned Treaty-Port Chinese

For a number of reasons a huge body of myths and half-truths has grown up about the social, intellectual, economic and cultural nature of the treaty ports, which have conspired to minimize the remarkable achievements of the treaty-port Chinese and to exaggerate the importance of the foreigners’ role in what was accomplished in the enclaves. In the understandable efforts of Chinese to express their frustrations about their sense of humiliation a picture was created of the treaty ports as sordid, immoral cities – squalid places that needed, as the conquering Communists certainly believed, to be totally cleaned out and
brought into line with the standards of life in interior China. Western scholars have contributed to this maligning of the treaty-port culture. Some have idealized uncontaminated Chinese culture and heaped scorn on the spread of Western practices and values. Others have suggested that something 'went wrong' because the treaty ports failed to modernize all of China – something some people thought interior China under Mao was going to be able to do.

The conventional picture that has emerged out of this image-making has, ironically, created caricatures which shamefully deprecated the worth of Chinese and grossly magnified the influence of Westerners. The Chinese in the treaty ports were depicted as either starving beggars or foppish playboys, denizens of unlimited brothels and night clubs. If the number of prostitutes conventionally quoted for the city was correct it would have implausibly meant that one tenth of the women of Shanghai were whores. It is true that Shanghai did have a well established criminal underworld, including the notorious Green Gang, whose influence extended into the realm of Chinese politics. This was in part because, as Frederic Wakeman has noted, 'What made Shanghai special, and more like Chicago than Calcutta, was the Chinese equivalent of boot-legging during Prohibition: refining and selling narcotics during a period when the national government, with the co-operation of the League of Nations, was ostensibly trying to suppress opium addiction'.

The foreigners supposedly lorded it over all Chinese and presumably had no social contacts with the natives. One might get the impression from the myths that there were no Chinese living in the concessions. Fred C. Shapiro, writing in the New Yorker and reacting against the efforts of the current policies of the People's Republic to try to segregate foreigners and Chinese in government-run stores and hotels, repeats the false propaganda of the Communists that '…the only Chinese admitted into their precincts [i.e., the concessions] were labourers, clerks, and servants'. This would suggest that the tens, indeed hundreds of thousands of middle and upper class Chinese simply did not exist. The myth of 'foreigners only' would deny as insignificant the largest concentrations of Chinese professional people – which included a multitude of journalists, writers, lawyers, academics, doctors, to say nothing of merchants and bankers – in the country. This picture of enclaves of only foreigners misses the fundamental fact that Shanghai and all the lesser treaty cities running from Tianjin to Canton were essentially Chinese cities. I have yet to find a single foreigner who went to the Shanghai American School in the 1930s who did not grow up in the French Concession or the International Settlement surrounded by middle-class Chinese families. In the Tianjin British Concession it was almost impossible not to have Chinese neighbours. The myth of the treaty ports as purely foreign settlements as late as the 1920s and 1930s was inspired by political propaganda. Indeed, the

leftist picture of treaty-port society was largely drafted out of the doctrines of
Leninist imperialism in which international capitalism dominated the ‘colonies
and semi-colonies’, and the national bourgeoisie were ineffectual actors.
Today when Marxist-Leninist theories are widely discredited around the world
it is time to look at Chinese developments through other lenses than those
provided by that paradigm. The failure of Leninism calls for a re-evaluation of
the stereotypes produced by Leninist theories.

As a result of these myths and half-truths most people have forgotten, or
were never aware, that between the two World Wars Shanghai was the most
sophisticated and the most cosmopolitan city in all of Asia. Shanghai’s pre-
eminence was based on much more than just its dominant role in international
finance and trade. In the artistic and cultural realms Shanghai stood out above
all other Asian cities. Tokyo at the time was in the grip of its single-minded
military rulers; Manila was more like country club America; Batavia, Hanoi,
Singapore and Rangoon were all sleepy colonial administrative centres; only
Calcutta had much intellectual life, but it fell far short of what was taking
place in Shanghai. Large audiences of Chinese attracted to Asia the leading
concert performers of Europe and America, who then might or might not go
on to other Asian cities. Hollywood films went first to the Odeon in Shanghai
before being sent on to Tokyo and to the other leading Asian cities. The
Shanghai Conservatory founded in 1928 began training international-class
musicians in the 1930s. In one year the Commercial Press published more
titles than did the entire American publishing industry. (There is no way of
telling how many of the books were pirated.) Shanghai had more newspapers
than any other Asian city. There were also numerous sophisticated journals
and magazines including, for example, the Dongfang Zazhi (The Far Eastern
Miscellany), which was an interesting combination of the Atlantic Monthly
and Time magazine. Shanghai was second to none in the size of its community
of writers and artists and intellectuals.

It is therefore wrong to think of the treaty ports as the product of foreign
efforts. Shanghai’s remarkable accomplishments, like Hong Kong’s equally
impressive achievements in the post-World War II period, came almost
entirely from its hard-working, creative, talented middle-class Chinese. As
Marie-Claire Bergère has been arguing for years, it was in Shanghai that
China started its ‘apprenticeship in modernity’ and created between 1900 and
1930 a new ‘civilization of the coast’ composed of a steadily growing middle
class.7 During the inter-war period, an ‘enterprising cosmopolitan urban
society blossomed in Shanghai; it was a new Chinese society. For Shanghai
very obviously was Chinese’. Much of the dynamism did come from

7 See such works of hers as ‘“The Other China”: Shanghai from 1919 to 1949’ in
quotations are from Gregor Benton’s review of La Chine au XXe Siecle, edited by
Marie-Claire Bergère, Lucien Bianco and Jurgen Domes, The China Quarterly, no.122
(June 1990), p.318.
commerce and economic activities, which produced a new 'generation of businessmen and industrialists that included such men as H.Y. Moh, C.C. Nieh, the Chien brothers and the bankers, K.P. Chen and Chiang Kia-Ngau'. Whereas, as Bergère points out, in interior China 'anarchy remained the only alternative to orthodoxy', in Shanghai 'the bridgehead of world civilization was also an outpost of unorthodox China for whom modernization was only the most recent heresy'.

The foreign population of Shanghai was never as large as the myth made it. It was only after the successes of the treaty-port Chinese in creating their modernizing societies that the foreign populations grew. In 1865 there were 55,465 Chinese and only 460 foreigners living in the French Concession. The foreign population of Shanghai reached a high point of less than 60,000 in the 1930s, but this was because the city became an asylum for refugees, first for about 15,000 White Russians and then some 5,000 German and Austrian Jews fleeing Hitler. Another 20,000 residents were Japanese. There were, however, less than 9,000 British, some 4,000 Americans and 2,500 French – a total of less than 15,500 of the nationals who were thought to dominate Shanghai. Living with these foreigners in the International Settlement and the French Concession were nearly one and a half million Chinese, and in the surrounding urban area another four million Chinese. The Hong Kong of today has a higher proportion of foreigners and foreign capital investment to Chinese than Shanghai had in the 1920s and 1930s, and anyone who knows Hong Kong knows that it is a product of Chinese efforts.

Although it is true that the various treaty port concessions were administered at the top by foreigners, the actual management, however, of most of the day-to-day affairs of government was in Chinese hands. As late as 1875 there were only 23 Frenchmen in the administration of the French Concession. By the 1930s Shanghai had less than 500 British administrators and police officials who presided over a civil service that was essentially Chinese. There were only some 100 to 150 Frenchmen in the administration of their concession. In all of the other treaty ports, Chinese personnel were critical for the smooth and orderly running of affairs.

The Chinese population of Shanghai constituted a genuine society that was forging a distinctive lifestyle that was both modern and Chinese. The large middle class was composed of families that were rearing children who could successfully operate in the modern world while also appreciating Chinese traditions. There thus emerged a distinctive and powerful Shanghai culture. It was this culture, as Lynn Pan has pointed out, which produced such outstanding people as An Wang and I.M. Pei (and Yo-yo Ma, born abroad to a

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8 Bergère, in Howe, op. cit., pp.9, 13, 14.
9 Betty Peh-tî Wei, Shanghai: Crucible of Modern China (Oxford University Press, Hong Kong, 1987), pp.67-68.
Shanghaiese family). The propaganda attacks against Shanghai have sought to depict as decadent, a pattern of social life that resolved around regular tea dances, racetrack meetings, and movies and concerts. But these were the pleasures of a people who were engaged in the historically important task of creating a modern, dynamic community of Chinese who could with dignity be a part of the modern world. It is probably safe to say that there never has been another place in which more Chinese lived a middle-class lifestyle in single-family houses than in the French Concession during that period.

The Shanghai schools took the lead in the transition from the traditional Chinese belles lettres emphasis to applied modern knowledge. Middle-school graduates were trained in mathematics through calculus. Shanghai and the treaty ports in general produced a grossly disproportionate number of China’s engineers and diplomats. Even today a high proportion of the technocrats throughout China have a Shanghai background.

The political and psychological significance of the presence of Western power cannot be denied. There was the US Asiatic Fleet with its Yangtze Patrol, and there were the legation guards in Beijing. Nevertheless, while in no way dismissing the Western imperial impact or whitewashing the actions of Western governments, the fact remains that in coastal China there did develop a significant community of modern Chinese who were totally at home in international ways – and who accomplished much for which the Chinese should take pride. I write this in full recognition that the standard view has been to dismiss the treaty-port Chinese as historically insignificant people – in R.H. Tawney’s phrase, ‘a fringe stitched along the hem of an ancient garment’. The conventional view (as vigorously stated by, for example, Rhoads Murphey) was that the treaty ports were ‘failures’, that interior China ‘successfully’ warded off the West, and that Mao Zedong proved that peasant China was the real future of the country. It is conventional from this point of view to say that the crisis of twentieth-century China entailed a need to ward off foreign encroachment and the threat of imperialism. Yet to the extent that this was a key problem, it could be argued that the rising middle class of the treaty ports were in fact China’s most successful defenders against ‘imperialism’. These communities of talented people demonstrated that Chinese could take on ‘international capitalism’ and excel in modern activities to the point of blunting any threat. What they were doing in the pre-war era was exactly what Chinese have accomplished in the post-war years in Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

11 Lynn Pan, Sons of the Yellow Emperor (Little Brown, Boston, 1990), pp.281-82.
Some modern Chinese writers are beginning to appreciate the remarkable accomplishments of the treaty-port Chinese. For example, Lynn Pan, in her interesting study of the Overseas Chinese, notes that 'Treaty-port Chinese were those who succeeded in becoming truly bicultural, behaving in a Western mode without a debasement of their own', and that 'The treaty-port Chinese were better able to do that difficult thing, snap the tough thread of Chinese history and achieve the happy balance which has always eluded their cousins in China: the balance between modernity and Chineseness, between moving with the times and remaining themselves'.

The accomplishments of the Shanghaiese involved far more than just creating a new lifestyle. They built the foundations for many very substantial industrial enterprises which have been remarkably enduring. During the Nationalist period, for a decade from 1927 until the Japanese occupation in 1937, the Nanking government constantly put the squeeze on the Shanghai capitalists. After the establishment of the People's Republic the phenomenon of Shanghai as an economic powerhouse but a political weakling continued. In spite of the flood of refugee capitalists who left Shanghai to help energize Hong Kong's economic miracle, the Shanghai economy they had created continued to serve as the motor force of the PRC economy. For more than forty years Shanghai has been the main source for technical, administrative, and diplomatic talent for the People's Republic. Even though Shanghai has had to dispatch to the rest of China more than two million of its most skilled people, it has remained the work-horse of the Chinese economy, providing during the first decades of the PRC nearly one half of the funds of the national government. As late as 1985 Shanghai was still being exploited, to the extent that it had to contribute between 85 and 86 per cent of its revenue to the central government. During these forty years Shanghai has received almost no replenishments of capital, but it has been strong enough to keep on helping the rest of China. At present the leadership in Beijing may be contemplating helping Shanghai once again become a leader in its competition with Guangdong by putting resources into the 'New Pudong' project.

14 ibid., pp.373-74.
15 There has been a long debate among historians about the relationship between the Kuomintang government and the Shanghai capitalists. The left has generally perceived an alliance between the two. Others have seen a much more complex relationship in which the autonomous state squeezed the capitalists for its own interests. Thus Parks M. Coble, Jr. writes that, '...relations between the two groups were characterized by government efforts to emasculate politically the urban capitalists and to milk the modern sector of the economy. Concern with revenue, not the welfare of the capitalists or the possibility of economic development, dominated Nanking's policies... The capitalists were stymied as a political force and, by 1937, had become an adjunct of the government.' The Shanghai Capitalists and the Nanking Government, 1927-1937 (Harvard University Council on East Asian Studies, Cambridge, 1986), p.3.
16 Wei, op. cit., p.266.
In retrospect it is surprising that it could once have been said that what took place in Shanghai was the exploitation of China. If that was exploitation, it is a pity that there was not more of it throughout China. From today's perspective, it is astonishing that the talented, successful Chinese of coastal China were made to feel that they were somehow flawed people, no longer real Chinese. Worse still, they were made to feel that they could prove their bona fides as loyal Chinese only by deferring to a political class that had its roots in parochial, interior China. Successful entrepreneurs and industrialists generally developed an apolitical mentality, as they concentrated their attention on their private enterprises and minimized their involvement in the nation's business. As a result the social and economic achievements of these treaty-port Chinese were circumscribed, and China did not develop even the beginnings of a true civil society. For all of their accomplishments these modernized Chinese could not produce a nascent establishment which could represent society's interests and serve as a disciplining check on China's parochial political leaders.

At best, as Mark Elvin has shown, these middle-class Chinese did often perform at the local level as an establishment in support of governmental services. In quiet, inconspicuous ways they could at times act to improve local urban governments, but in terms of national politics and the task of creating a sense of nationhood they were essentially impotent.

The Treachery of the Intellectuals

Thus, for all their successes as modernizers, the treaty-port Chinese could not create the bases for a more pluralistic civil society for the country as a whole. Nor could they contribute much to the defining of a new sense of modern Chinese nationalism. One important reason was that the intellectuals, who had also sought out the security of the treaty ports, chose to contribute to the myths about the decadence of the treaty-port Chinese. Many of these modernizing intellectuals, mainly the writers, had adopted quasi-Leninist views about the treaty ports being the evil work of international capitalism.

Indeed, it was profoundly significant for the modernization of China that most of these writers expressed strong antipathies for both traditional Chinese culture and the lifestyle of the most modernized Chinese of the enclaves. They themselves easily became certified as modern thinkers and radicals simply by attacking features of the traditional family system, including arranged marriages, concubinage, and the patriarchal authority of the father. At the same time they caricatured the middle-class society of coastal China. Almost all of these writers lived in Shanghai or other foreign concessions. They had thus voted with their feet in favour of foreign rule. As a result they seemingly shared some deep psychological feelings of guilt and shame over abandoning Chinese culture. Hence the issues of modernization were particularly troublesome for them. By their actions they were saying that so-called imperialism was preferable to living under a Chinese government. To reduce
their feelings of guilt they had to attack all they saw as associated with 'imperialism' and praise what they wanted to believe was the revolutionary spirit of mistreated workers and peasants. Typical of the populism of the intellectuals was the advice of Li Dazhao, a founder of the Communist Party, to his students to 'leave the "corrupting life" of the cities and universities and "go to the villages..." and the "wholly human life" of the countryside'.

By this simple-minded formula of denouncing two abstractions, 'imperialism' and 'feudal practices', leftist Chinese writers were able to avoid engaging in honest introspection so as to confront the hard psychological issues of cultural change. It is quite clear in the short stories that Harold Isaacs collected in Straw Sandals that the most famous of the left-wing authors had little sympathy for the culture being created by the successful Chinese of enclave China, even though they themselves knew that world better than the peasant world of interior China which they generally idealized. In reading many of their short stories today, one is struck with how the characters are little more than stereotypes of the Marxist-Leninist categories of good and bad people. There are the all powerful but heartless foreigners representing imperialism, the pathetic Chinese lackies of the foreigners who are enamoured of all things Western, and of course the exploited but virtuous workers and peasants. Ba Jin, in one of his short stories, portrays a Chinese who was envious even of the life of a foreigner's dog. Even Lu Xun, who found all manner of flaws in his fellow Chinese, was moved to write about how a lowly rickshaw puller showed more human compassion and generosity of spirit than he, Lu Xun, had shown in an accident in which a rickshaw hit an old woman. Content with their superficial politicized fiction, no Chinese writer, except arguable Lu Xun, came close to matching the rich human understanding and the complex subjective worlds that were explored by Indian, Japanese and even Malay and Indonesian writers.

The propaganda theme of the political left that the treaty-port Chinese were decadent, spiritually polluted people was also graphically depicted in numerous Chinese films of the 1930s. Paul Pickowicz has reviewed some of the most popular of those films and shown how they consistently attacked the moral character of the most modernized Chinese. Peach Blossom Weeps Tears of Blood was a simple morality play about a rich city boy falling in love with a poor but virtuous peasant girl; he takes her to the city with promises of

marriage, gets her pregnant, but then his family blocks the marriage and so her father has to take her home where she dies in childbirth. Pickowicz notes that:

The helpless young woman is China. Her innocent and childlike beauty is natural... The slick young man recognizes her Chinese virtues and the uniqueness of her beauty. 'A city girl's beauty', he observes, 'depends on powder and rouge'. Yet, when he takes her to the city, she begins to wear fashionable clothes and to use makeup. When they first meet in the wholesome village environment, he declares, 'How chaste and beautiful! You can never find such in the city!' But, in the end, he seduces and corrupts the virgin.21

In *A Dream in Pink*, a writer becomes the example of the moral decline of Shanghai life. His wife is a pure and virtuous rural girl, a loyal and obedient wife, and a devoted mother. The writer, however, seeks out 'life in Shanghai's glittering entertainment quarters', meets a glamorous night club girl who 'uses make up, smokes cigarettes, drinks alcohol, dances to Western music, and wears new-style clothing that exposes her breasts'. The writer falls for her and divorces his wife, who is 'quite literally left with nothing, on a cold, snowy street'.22 But then the night club girl gets bored and returns to her night life and to new lovers. In the end the writer is saved by his former wife's 'offer to forgive and forget'.

In the *Queen of Sports* a girl from a rural family is sent to a special school for female athletes where she is quickly spoiled by success as a runner. 'She becomes arrogant, neglects her studies, applies makeup, wears fancy clothes, and begins to fraternize with slick, Westernized college lads who seem to spend all of their time smoking, drinking, dancing, and fornicating'. However, 'After seeing a classmate die following a gruelling race, she decides that the pursuit of individual (i.e., bourgeois) glory is wrong, gives up her title as "Queen of Sport" and resolves to serve others as an ordinary teacher of physical education'.23

*A Bible for Daughters*, with the scenario written by veteran Communist Party members, shows the tenth reunion of a class of women who have succumbed to the corrupt and debauched ways of Shanghai. Each in their different ways has lost the virtues of interior China, including one who was a feminist and leader of the women's movement but is now a loose modern woman with a string of lovers.

Other films, such as *Filial Piety, Little Angel, The Pioneers*, and *Children of Troubled Times*, carried on the theme of the evils of the treaty-port people who were ruined by Western spiritual pollution. Rural, interior China in contrast was always shown as upholding purity and virtue. The puritanism of the Mao era and the morality of a Lei Feng were well established by the leftists, largely Communists, of the Chinese film industry long before the

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21 ibid., p.43.
22 ibid., p.46.
23 ibid., p.50.
People's Republic imposed such simple-minded, black and white morality on all of China. Although in all industrializing countries there have been the conventions of praising the 'old values' of the rural society and seeing the city as a source of sin, the Chinese in the 1930s carried the theme to absurd lengths – because of the problem of the treaty ports being the focus of modernization. How troublesome the problem was can be seen from the fact that although the tradition of Chinese morality was always moderation and the Confucian golden mean, on this issue there was extremism. In attacking the modern lifestyle of the treaty ports there were no limits on exaggeration.

By dismissing the achievements of the treaty-port Chinese, the left-wing writers and film makers had no autonomous positions of their own from which to help shape the spirit of Chinese nationalism. Instead their ideological commitments made them easy servants of a Leninist party. After the Japanese invasion, the majority, who identified with the Communists, were already psychologically prepared to accept the dictates of Mao Zedong's Yanan Forum speech in which he made it unambiguously clear that intellectuals were to obey the Party line and not seek individual creativity. Liu Binyan has described how his first experience on joining the Party was to learn that the 'original sin' was individualism as embodied in 'bourgeois ideologies', and hence one must oppose all that enslave China represented.24

There is no need to dwell on the sad story of how Chinese intellectuals lost their voice in post-1949 China. From the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1958 through the Cultural Revolution and down to the contemporary attacks on 'spiritual pollution', Chinese intellectuals have had to defer to a version of Chinese nationalism that was hostile to coastal China and its values.

Chinese Values and Foreign Knowledge

The sad fate of the left-wing writers does not, of course, encompass the whole story of China's intellectuals, for there have also been those who gained foreign technical knowledge and modern scientific skills. Indeed, from the time of the 1898 reform effort through the May Fourth Movement and down to the Four Modernizations of the post-Mao period, a constant theme has been the importance of science and technology for creating China's wealth and power. It is a theme which might have united nationalism and modernization, as happened in the former colonial countries. It is true, as in other spheres of life, that Chinese as individuals have demonstrated remarkable abilities to excel in modern science and technology. However, the political leaders, as guardians of Chinese nationalism, have had an easy time checking the influence of such modern-trained technocrats.

The formula for depoliticizing those with specialized knowledge goes back to the early Chinese formulation of a division between Chinese values, which were at the core, and Western technology, which was only useful,

merely utilitarian. This division between what the Chinese reformers call ti and yong set the stage for checking the political power of technically trained people. The rationale of the formulation was that those who specialize in useful knowledge should yield authority to those who claimed to speak for essential Chinese values. Thus, young Chinese might be encouraged to seek out Western knowledge in the scientific and technical fields, but they were also made to understand that they would have to remain subordinate to the articulators of Chinese values. The tension between nationalism and modernization thus became institutionalized.

At the same time a cap was placed on any dynamic processes for providing form and content to a modernized version of Chinese nationalism. The ti-yong formula which identified Chinese values as being of the essence, and hence to be protected against any form of contamination, was also a formula for making what was seen as 'Chinese' into a rigid orthodoxy. Instead of encouraging a dynamic process in which Chinese values could be creatively adapted to modern times, the formula worked to ossify 'Chinese' values.

It is of course one of the great ironies of Chinese history that Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party leadership were able to turn the formulation inside out, while keeping its anti-modernist bias. The Confucian ethical values, which the early reformers had identified as being of the Chinese 'essence', were replaced by the foreign import, Marxism-Leninism, which could be strengthened by science and technology, but it was not to be polluted by other foreign or modern values. Mao opened the door to a selective but essentially hostile treatment of Chinese traditional culture. He attacked most of China's traditional culture as being 'feudal legacies', but he acknowledged that some elements of it might be preserved: 'To study the development of this old culture, to reject its feudal dross and assimilate its democratic essence is a necessary condition for developing our new national culture...'.

But he never specified what should be preserved of the old, aside from praising peasant life. Rather he stressed that the new culture would be 'Opposed...to all feudal and superstitious ideas.' Most cadres got the point that it was safest to denounce all aspects of tradition in the light of Mao's attack on specific examples of that culture, such as his angry statement about the film The Life of Wu Hsun: 'In the view of many writers, history proceeds not by the new superseding the old, but by preserving the old from extinction through all kinds of exertion, not by waging class struggle to overthrow the reactionary feudal rulers who ought to be overthrown, but by negating the class struggle of the oppressed and submitting to these rulers in the manner of Wu Hsun'.

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26 ibid.
The new *ti-yong* formula thus replaced the old version, in which Confucian values were of the ‘essence’ with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. The result was still a rigid orthodoxy as the core. Worse still, the core had become only the partisan position of a party and hence there was not even a pretence that it could be the basis of a nationalism that was more than just the slogans of a partisan movement. Thus, over time the *ti-yong* formula has turned out to be a serious liability in China’s search for a modernizing nationalism. The idea that it should be possible to separate sharply ‘essential’ Chinese values from ‘utilitarian’ modern knowledge has worked against the necessary integrating of the parochial and the cosmopolitan that is absolutely basic to any form of effective modern nationalism. By setting aside certain values as essential and ‘Chinese’, which must be preserved in uncontaminated form, the spokespersons for the formula have sought to ossify into a static orthodoxy the essential spirit of Chinese cultural identity, and thereby strip it of the dynamic and creative vitality of a living nationalism. A clever intellectual formula turned out to be a spiritually dampening approach.

Forty years of sustained attacks on traditional Chinese culture and the equally vigorous efforts to limit the spread of unacceptable modern ideas, all in the name of Chinese nationalism, has left Chinese nationalism without a substantive core which can be readily articulated. The way Chinese live and bring up their children of course endures, but what is missing for the expression of any substantial form of nationalism are the collective ideals and shared inspirations which can be coherently expressed in meaningful symbols and myths. The ethnic basis of nationalism, a sense of a physical ‘we-ness’ as against the foreign ‘they-ness’ remains intact, but there is a void as to the cultural ideals that can provide the substantive content for Chinese nationalism.

Thus, all manner of manifestations of ethnic identity, usually referred to as Han chauvinism, continue to endure. It is, for example, easy for Chinese to become passionate about the successes of their sports teams in international competition and to take collective pride in honouring them. Such sentiments, however, cannot provide the basis for a politically effective nationalism that can mobilize public opinion for collective tasks, and, equally important, they fail to place limits and constraints on the actions of the leaders.

For nationalism to develop beyond being merely an expression of ethnic or racial identity it has to take on substantive content that can inspire the public while also establishing rules and norms for the behaviour of the leadership. When the content of contemporary Chinese nationalism is compared with other nationalisms it appears to be exceedingly thin. There is little to compare with the substance of American nationalism with its mystique about the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the whole body of values (many even contradictory ones) that Samuel P. Huntington has called the American Creed — all of which makes it possible to think of some behaviour as being ‘un-American’. Similarly there seems to be no counterpart to the British feelings about the
monarchy and parliament and all the norms which made it possible for colonial peoples, such as the Indians, to accuse their British masters of not behaving according to British ideals. It is impossible to imagine a Tibetan expecting to influence the conduct of a Chinese official by saying he was not acting according to Han ideals.

Deng Xiaoping speaks of the goal of ‘Building Socialism With Chinese Characteristics’ but he has trouble identifying those characteristics, which is further evidence of the problem of lack of content in Chinese nationalism. The Party Central Committee journal Qiushi has published a significant editorial that gives the current official view about the content of Chinese patriotism in the wake of Tiananmen. The editorial states that

...Patriotism is history-specific, having different contents under different historical circumstances. Today, if we want to be patriotic, we should love the socialist New China under the leadership of the Communist Party. As was pointed out by Comrade Deng Xiaoping in one of his speeches in 1981, ‘Some people say that not loving socialism is not the same thing as not loving our motherland. Is motherland an abstract concept? If you do not love the socialist New China led by the Communist Party, what else can you love? With regard to patriotic compatriots in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and other overseas areas, we should not expect them all to approve of socialism. But the least they can do is not oppose the socialist New China. Otherwise, how can they call themselves patriotic? When it comes to every citizen and every youth inside the People’s Republic of China, we naturally have higher expectations.’

This authoritative statement by Deng Xiaoping makes it absolutely clear that modernized Chinese cannot legitimately criticize Chinese government policies without being accused of being unpatriotic.

Ming Lizhi, a member of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee, in the same issue of Qiushi went further in insisting on the ‘unification of patriotism and socialism’ when he wrote, ‘...In his National Day speech of 1989, Comrade Jiang Zemin pointed out in summarizing the basic experiences of the past forty years of the new China: “In China today, patriotism and socialism are unified in essence.”’ Ming went on to say, ‘Patriotism is the premise of China’s socialism and socialism is the inevitable conclusion of genuine patriotism. Li Dazhao, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De, Qu Qiubai, Dong Biwu, Wu Yuzhang, and some others of the first generation of the proletarian revolutionaries all underwent the historical transformation from being patriots to being steadfast socialists. They provided concrete and vivid examples of the unification of patriotism and socialism in China.’

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28 ‘Give Full Play to the Patriotism of the Youths of the May Fourth Movement’, Qiushi, no.9 (1990), pp.8-9.
30 ibid., p.17.
Chinese scholars who support the proposal that 'Building Socialism with Chinese characteristics' calls for a 'form of socialism that fits Chinese conditions' have defined such conditions as 'a backward economy, a poor infrastructure, overpopulation, limited arable land, a long history of feudalism, and a continued threat of imperialism which includes now the danger of bourgeois liberalization and a tendency to worship the West' – all of which are then said to call for a kind of socialism that '…promotes productivity as the main task, strengthens a socialist planned commodity economy, sticks to public ownership as the leading force but promotes alternative forms of ownership, and the other features of current official policies'. Such a list provides little substance for defining Chinese nationalism. In no country should nationalism be reduced to merely the sum of current policy preferences. The ideals of nationalism with all of its myths and symbols should have their own domain, well above the arena of contemporary policy programs.

The Search for a New Identity

For much of the twentieth-century, variations of the ti-yong formulation were assumed to provide a basis for defining the essence of Chinese nationalism and for identifying the features of modernization to be welcomed. But now there is a growing crisis. The formula at one time appeared to provide an objective, straightforward way for achieving both national development and modernization in a manner that could spare the Chinese the psychological turmoil common among people in other transitional societies. Paradoxically in China, which has been distinctive in witnessing a fundamental clash between nationalism and modernization, there has until now been relatively little subjective or psychological stress over modernization. Elsewhere in the former colonial world, where there has been objective harmony between the twin goals of nationalism and modernization, there has been more emotional turmoil and psychological stress as people feel torn between two cultures, and with the intellectuals in particular claiming to be essentially rootless. The Chinese escaped such psychological stress because until the last few years the reminders of the awesome greatness of Chinese civilization were so omnipresent that most Chinese, whether coastal or interior, felt little need to articulate their sense of self-identity. Elsewhere in Asia and Africa, at each step of the way, thinking people felt compelled to define who they were as they went through profound processes of social change.

As the Deng Xiaoping reforms began to run into trouble in the late 1980s, there was, quite understandably, rising concern about a 'spiritual crisis', which had already been fuelled by the doubts flowing from the Cultural Revolution. The widespread reactions to the 'River Elegy' television series and the need of

part of the leadership to denounce it as boosting nationalistic nihilism, suggest that many Chinese had arrived at a time of soul searching about their national identity and the meaning of modernization. The tightening of controls since Tiananmen has not stopped the questioning about Chinese national identity. More articles have been published recently which reflect positive views about the relevance of traditional Chinese cultural values than at any time in the last forty years. In an article entitled ‘On Using Traditional Culture as a Wellspring to Build a Socialist New Culture’, Zhang Xinhua of the Shanghai Academy of Social Science argues that while much of Confucian thought was ‘feudalistic’ because it helped to serve the ‘advantages of the feudal rulers’, it also had ‘its positive aspects [which] still contain much value for building culture that should be regarded as an important resource for building a socialist new culture’.\(^{32}\) Most of the positive features of Confucianism turn out, however, to be essentially versions of modern values. Yet there are signs of greater appreciation of the value of the cultural legacy which the Party has been so relentlessly attacking for so long. The same Zhang Xinhua also writes: ‘A decline of traditional culture often follows any social disorders and the destruction of an old dynasty. Culture is the spiritual pillar of the political structure, the economic system, and social relations; it is the wellspring of social cohesion. The loss of a people’s cultural legacy can evoke the destruction of a traditional social structure and a deterioration or loss of national cohesion, leading to social turbulence and confusion. And once traditional culture and social structure undergo turbulence and destruction, a very long time will pass before another stable order can come about. And a new order must be accompanied by the continuity, rebuilding, and flourishing of the traditional culture under new conditions’.\(^{33}\)

There are thus signs among thinking Chinese of a new awareness of the need to try to articulate a more vivid sense of the collective identity of the Chinese people. Because of historical and racial considerations they have no problem identifying those who belong to the collective ‘we’ and those who are the ‘they’. However, beyond this first step in establishing the boundaries of a national identity the difficulties begin to arise because the historical legacies of Chinese culture have been so harshly attacked for so long. Moreover, those who have been the most successful in creating a modern culture have been equally attacked for being unpatriotic. Now that the ideology which interior China has used to defame coastal China has lost its international respectability and now that Marxism is no longer seen as being at the forefront of history, the Party hagiographers of Chinese nationalism are not sure where to turn to find the essence of a new sense of Chinese nationalism.

The problem is serious because the Chinese state now needs the power of an inspiring form of nationalism as it continues its struggle to modernize. The

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32 *Shehui Kexue* [Social Science], no.3 (15 March 1990), pp.31-47, translated in JIRS-CAR-90-049, 11 July 1990, pp.103-106.

33 *ibid.*, p.104.
leadership seems ready to shift from the goal of 'Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' to that of 'building China with socialist characteristics', as Roderick MacFarquhar has put it. But the building blocks for a coherent nationalism are missing because the collective symbols and ideals of the culture have been so severely damaged. The rejection of the melding of Chinese nationalism and modernization, which was taking place in pre-war coastal China, in favour of the less authentic nationalism based on Leninism has left China without a satisfying sense of either modernization or national pride.

Conclusion: Greatness Gets In the Way of Nationalism

The relationship between the two elusive concepts of nationalism and modernization is peculiarly complex as regards China. It is not easy to separate out what might constitute the essence of Chinese nationalism from the sentiments associated with Chinese ethnicity. It is self-evident that the Chinese people share the same blood, the same physical characteristics, the same ancestry and culture and the same written language, but this alone does not constitute a modern sense of nationalism. In a way these basic ethnic factors seem to be almost too overpowering, too all embracing, to leave much scope for the formation of a distinct sense of modern nationalism, particularly because at every turn the emergence of the modern spirit has been dismissed as inappropriate to true 'Chineseness' in the eyes of the political leaders who have politically exploited Chinese ethnicity. The massive force of primordial sentiments tends to overwhelm all other possibilities of group identity, and little room is left for sentiments attached to China as a modernizing nation-state.

Put bluntly, the fundamental problem in China's modernization is that China is really a civilization pretending to be a nation-state. The greatness of that civilization is manifest in every aspect of traditional Chinese culture. The enduring strength of the civilization is what has kept China united as a single entity over the centuries. China today is what Europe would have been if the unity of the Roman Empire had lasted until now and there had not been the emergence of the separate entities of England, France, Germany, and the like. But, of course, it was precisely the breaking up of Europe into the separate nation-states that not only gave birth to the distinct phenomenon of nationalism but which also produced the phenomenon we call modernization.

As indicated at the outset, nationalism, like modernization seen from a slightly different perspective, has to blend what is distinctive in a nation's culture with what is internationally or universally appreciated. For nationalism is not only the expression of a people's basic inner identity but it is also shaped by interactions with other nations as both friend and foe. Unfortunately, those who have for much of this century articulated China's national interests have tended both to despise Chinese folk culture and to see mainly enemies in the outside world. Even before the May Fourth Movement
and even more so after the establishment of the People’s Republic, Chinese politicians and intellectuals have scorned the living culture of the Chinese masses while praising the ‘people’ in the abstract. All the aspects of the people’s folk culture which should be the elements of a new Chinese nationalism have been denounced as superstition and ‘feudal legacies’. All the themes, values, ideals, and symbols that are basic to the daily lives and to the yearly cycles of celebrations of the Chinese people have been dismissed or totally ignored by those who claim to be articulating Chinese nationalism.

China’s national leaders have in a perverse fashion entangled themselves in a pair of contradictions between their symbolisms and reality: they have idealized ‘peasants’ in the abstract but scorned their folk culture in practice, while simultaneously proclaiming the goal of modernization but attacking the successfully modernized Chinese. Some people might have thought that the prime responsibility of those who would formulate a dynamic sense of a new Chinese nationalism would have been to integrate and to give emotional content to precisely the two elements of Chinese life that they have dismissed. The task of nationalist politicians elsewhere has indeed been to try to make popular traditions meaningful in the context of modern social standards. Instead, Chinese political leaders have sought to combine two abstractions, their version of ‘the masses’ and their notion of socialism as being the ‘wave of the future’, while ignoring both the realities of Chinese popular culture and Chinese successes in modernization.

Why have the Chinese leaders turned their backs on this potential focus for a strong and vital sense of nationalism and instead worked to produce a shallow version of nationalism? As we have seen, the way in which the impact of the modern world came to China in the unique treaty port system certainly contributed mightily to this development. The difficulty was compounded, however, because the political leaders of interior China needed to find a new basis of legitimacy for their rule to replace the collapsing Confucian system. The alternative they faced was either to encourage the development of competitive politics or to reserve for themselves the right to define a new moral order to replace the Confucian moral order. The first alternative might have resulted in the intermingling of ideas, ideals, and concrete interests that could have produced a sense of nationalism that would have had the constraining effects on subsequent partisan politics, much as a constitution does in successfully modernizing societies. The political leadership in China from the Republican era to the present could see that until such a strong and disciplining version of nationalism was established, there would be no basis for establishing binding rules for political competition and therefore they feared confusion and disorder. Thus at every turn they have opted for the second alternative, trying to make their partisan political views the basis of the new moral order and to force everyone to accept their views of Chinese nationalism. Fundamentally each Chinese regime since the fall of the Qing dynasty has sought to re-establish the legitimacy of the Chinese state by formulating a new moral order to replace the Confucian order. In doing so
they have in effect tried to establish an essentially traditional political system rather than advance toward a modern one.

In the traditional Confucian system, government was ruled by morally superior people who had the responsibility to uphold a social order based on ethical principles. Most traditional societies similarly saw political authority as the defender of a religious-moral order. The process of modernization, however, has usually involved a transition from legitimacy based on a moral order to a political order based on law and responsive to the interactions of political processes composed of competing interests. Unfortunately the evolution of China did not include such a transition. Instead there was an attempt to re-establish a moral order, this time based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Again China was to be ruled by people who claimed to be morally superior people, and any challenge to the orthodoxy of their announced moral order was a direct threat to their legitimacy.34

The transition to a system based on the open interplay of political forces has been particularly difficult because Chinese civilization had, as one of its cardinal principles of social behaviour, the absolute rule that people should not assert their own self interests. Selfishness was seen as an ultimate sin. The result has been that even as Chinese society became more diversified there has been no emergence of pluralistic interests. The successful people of the treaty ports could not make open demands on the Chinese national government and therefore they never became a significant force in asserting society’s modern interests. Whereas elsewhere modernization has given the forces of society a strong basis for checking and influencing the state, in China the state continues to dominate society.

This pattern has had profound consequences for China’s political development, and especially for the character of Chinese nationalism. In most modern societies nationalism is a product of the awakened collective consciousness that arises out of the clash of group identities and the balance of forces among competing interests. The effort to define the collective interest, and to relate one’s particular interest to it, may evoke the collective memory and appeal to shared symbols and imagery. In the case of China, however, nationalism has not been forged out of the dynamic of competitive politics, but rather it has been based on the ideals associated with an imposed moral order. This has meant that Chinese nationalism has been almost indistinguishable from the partisan interests of the rulers. Hence the tendency to see any criticism of current policies as an unpatriotic act.

The story of Chinese nationalism and modernization is thus a sweet-sour one. On the one hand the irrefutable evidence stands that Chinese as individuals can be outstanding successes in the modern world. Culturally and intellectually they have proved, both in the treaty ports and in their overseas communities, that they have no problem with modern careers and professions.

34 I have developed this argument in greater detail in ‘China: Erratic State, Frustrated Society’, Foreign Affairs, vol.69, no.4 (Fall 1990), pp.56-74.
On the other hand, there is the bitter fact that political authority in China has been a constant impediment to the development of a form of Chinese nationalism that can reflect the abilities and the successes of the modernized Chinese as individuals. The Chinese state continues to restrict the development of a civil society, and without such a society China cannot develop the political and social processes which could create the vibrant form of nationalism that is required to modernize a great civilization. Instead the Chinese state, in trying to uphold a rigid, inflexible orthodoxy as a moral order, has unrelentingly attacked both the modernized Chinese and the traditional symbols and ideals of the collective memory of the Chinese people. At the very time when the Chinese state needs the unifying forces of nationalism, there is very little there that can spiritually mobilize the Chinese people.

There is hope, however, that the goal of modernization still remains an agreed-upon objective at all levels of Chinese society. Eventually it will be necessary to discard the attempt to impose upon the country the orthodoxy of a moral order. The need for a more pluralistic politics will grow stronger. We therefore end with a paradox: Only if the Chinese state can discard its objective of seeking consensus and conformity and allow the disorderliness that comes with competition among the diffuse interests of society will China gain the unifying collective power of a dynamic nationalism. There is also another possibility, and this is that the Age of Nationalism may be passing into history as the homeland of nationalism, Europe, moves toward 1992 and the lessening of national divisions. If this is the way of the future, then maybe China, with its relatively contentless nationalism, is a leader and not just trailing behind. The Chinese, however, still seem to be frustrated as they continue on their search for wealth and power, for modernization and nation-building. For them, the problem of a more coherent nationalism persists.

Cambridge, Massachusetts
September 1992