

## **Chinese Pragmatic Nationalism and Its Foreign Policy Implications**

**Suisheng Zhao**  
Graduate School of International Studies  
University of Denver

Prepared for delivery at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association,  
August 28-31, 2008

## Introduction

During the standoff over the US spy plane that collided with a Chinese jetfighter and landed on Hainan Island, off China's coast, in 2001, *Washington Post* used the headline "New Nationalism Drives Beijing" for front-page story.<sup>1</sup> Such a warning reflects that rising nationalism in China has fed the roiling sense of anxiety in many political capitals of Asian and Western countries about if a virulent nationalism has emerged from China's "century of shame and humiliation" to make China's rise less peaceful and if the Chinese government has exploited nationalist sentiments to gain leverage in international affairs or if nationalism has driven Chinese foreign policy toward a more irrational and inflexible direction?

This political concern is reflected also among scholars. Although some scholars have been cautious in exploring the limits of Chinese nationalism and whether Chinese nationalism is affirmative, assertive, or aggressive,<sup>2</sup> some others have found a reckless nationalism driven by China's traditional sinocentrism and contemporary aspirations for great power status.<sup>3</sup> For example, Peter Gries labels the rising nationalism in China as a new nationalism and argues that an emotionally popular nationalism empowered by "victim narratives" is "beginning to influence the making of Chinese foreign policy."<sup>4</sup> His argument echoes an earlier warning by Richard Bernstein and Ross Munro, "Driven by nationalist sentiment, a yearning to redeem the humiliations of the past, and the simple urge for international power, China is seeking to replace the United States as the dominant power in Asia."<sup>5</sup>

It is indeed not difficult to find evidences to support these warnings. One example is the rising anti-Japanese sentiments among Chinese people, which accumulated in a dramatic signature campaign that gathered more than 20 million Chinese people on the

---

<sup>1</sup> John Pomfret, "New Nationalism Drives Beijing: Hard Line Reflects Popular Mood," *Washington Post*, April 4, 2001, p. A01.

<sup>2</sup> Erica Strecker Downs and Philip C. Saunders, "Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Island," *International Security*, 23:3, Winter 1989-99: 114-146; Allen Whiting, "Assertive Nationalism in Chinese Foreign Policy," *Asian Survey*, vol. 23, no. 8, August 1983, pp. 913-933 and "Chinese Nationalism and Foreign Policy After Deng," *The China Quarterly*, no. 142, June 1995, pp. 295-316; Michael Oksenberg, "China's Confident Nationalism," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 65, no. 3, 1986-87, 504.

<sup>3</sup> Ying-shih Yu, "Minzu zhuyi de jiedu" (Interpretation of Nationalism), *Minzhu Zhongguo* (Democratic China), no. 35, June-July, 1996; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, p. 229; James R. Lilley, "Nationalism Bites Back," *New York Times*, October 24, 1996; and Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, "The Coming Conflict with America," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 76, no. 2, March/April 1997, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Gries, *China's New Nationalism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 12, 134.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, "The Coming Conflict with America," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 76, no. 2, March/April 1997, p. 19.

Internet in early 2005 to oppose Japan's bid to join the United Nations Security Council. Following the signature campaign, thousands of Chinese protesters marched through Shanghai, Beijing and other Chinese cities, shouting slogans and throwing rocks, bottles and eggs at the Japanese consulates, protesting Japan's approval of history textbooks, which they say whitewashed Japanese wartime atrocities, and Japan's recent pledge to help the U.S. defend Taiwan in the event of an attack by Beijing. The dramatic last-minute cancellation of a meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and visiting Chinese Vice-Minister Wu Yi in this past May as a protest to Koizumi's contentious visits to the war-tainted Yasukuni Shrine has plunged relations between Beijing and Tokyo to a perilous low.

The rise of Chinese nationalism has also supported a deeply rooted suspicion over the United States in the recent years. It was certainly to the dismay of many Americans to witness massive anti-American demonstrations in the front of the US diplomatic missions after the bombing of Chinese embassy in Belgrade by the US-led NATO force in May 1999. Many observers were astonished at the time by the quick and automatic conviction of the Chinese people that the U.S. bombing was deliberate.

Chinese nationalism, however, is a phenomenon much more complex than the expression of its emotional rhetoric on the streets. Although the Chinese government is hardly above exploiting nationalist sentiment when it suits its purposes, it has practiced a pragmatic nationalism, which is tempered by diplomatic prudence. State-led and largely reactive, pragmatic nationalism does not have a fixed, objectified, and eternally defined content, nor is it driven by any ideology, religion beliefs or other abstract ideas. It is an instrument of the communist state to bolster faith of the Chinese people in a political system in trouble and hold the country together during the period of rapid and turbulent transformation from a communist to a post-communist society.

From foreign policy perspective, pragmatist nationalism sets peace and development as China's major international goals because economic prosperity is seen as the pathway for the communist party to stay in power and also the foundation for China's rising nationalistic aspirations. In the meantime, political stability at home is emphasized as the necessary condition for the attainment of Chinese modernization. Pragmatic leaders, therefore, have tried to avoid confrontations with the United States and other Western powers that hold the key for China's modernization at least in the foreseeable future. While pragmatic leaders have made use of nationalism for rallying support, they have to make sure that nationalist sentiments would not jeopardize the overarching objectives of political stability and economic modernization upon which their legitimacy is ultimately based. It is certainly not in their interest to let Chinese foreign policy be dictated by the emotional, nationalistic rhetoric on the street. Therefore, although pragmatic leaders have consciously cultivated nationalism against the perceived containment policy by Western countries, strong nationalist rhetoric has often been followed by prudential policy actions in foreign affairs.

### **Nationalism as an Instrument of the Communist State**

The communist state has exploited nationalism because of its utility in compensating for or, to a certain extent, replacing the declining communist ideology in post-Mao years. As communist ideology lost credibility, the communist state was not able to advance any new ideology as an integrative force but simply replaced it with

expedient slogans, such as "to get rich" by "practicing" market competitions. People were urged to consume, to develop themselves as entrepreneurs by seizing business opportunities, and to compete with each other regardless of morality and equality. In this case, when reform brought about such hardships as high inflation, corruption, and unemployment and the regime could find no way to compensate people for their losses, the communist state was left lacking an effective ideology/long-term vision to inspire the people to bear hardship for the sake of a better future. This situation not only greatly weakened mass support for the CCP and eroded its basis of legitimacy but also led some Chinese intellectuals turning to Western liberal ideas and calling for Western-style democracy, leading to the massive anti-government Tiananmen demonstrations in spring 1989.

How to restore legitimacy of the communist regime and build a broadly based national support became the most serious challenge to the post-Tiananmen leadership. The instrumentality of nationalism was discovered. Deng Xiaoping and his successors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, began wrap themselves in the banner of nationalism, which, they found, remained a most reliable claim to the Chinese people's loyalty and the only important value shared by both the regime and its critics. Facing Western sanctions, pragmatic leaders moved quickly to position themselves as the defender of China's national pride and interests. Its nationalist credential has been bolstered in the fighting against Western sanctions and for China's entry into the WTO, stopping Taiwan independence, and winning the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

The discovery of nationalism has coincided with the rise of pragmatism as the dominant thinking of Chinese people as well as their leaders. Chinese people would use any means to become rich and Chinese leaders would adopt any approach that would help the quest for power and wealth. Pragmatism, which by definition is behavior disciplined by neither a set of values nor established principles, was vividly expressed by Deng's "cat theory," i.e., "a cat, whether it is white or black, is a good one as long as it is able to catch mice." Justified by the slogan, "building socialism with Chinese characteristics," pragmatic leaders have made an all-out effort to make China strong by gaining access to the world's most advanced science and technology and creating commercial and cultural exchanges with all foreign countries, including liberal democracies. In the meantime, they have rejected anything that they deem not fitting with "Chinese characteristics," including any ideas interpreted as threatening to communist party rule.

Led by the state, pragmatic nationalism identifies the Chinese nation closely with the Communist state. Nationalist sentiment is officially expressed as *aigu*, which in Chinese means "loving the state," or *aiguo* (*zhuyi* (patriotism), which is love and support for China, a China always indistinguishable from the Communist state. As Michael Hunt observes, "by professing *aiguo*, Chinese usually expressed loyalty to and a desire to serve the state, either as it was or as it would be in its renovated form."<sup>6</sup> From this perspective Chinese pragmatic nationalism is state-centric. The Communist state as the embodiment

---

<sup>6</sup> Michael Hunt, "Chinese National Identity and the Strong State: The Late Qing-Republican Crisis," in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, *China's Quest for National Identity*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994, 63.

of the nation's will seeks for the loyalty and support of the people that are granted the nation itself.

To make maximum use of nationalism, the communist state launched an extensive propaganda campaign of education in patriotism in the 1990s. The campaign appealed to nationalism in the name of patriotism to ensure loyalty in a population that was otherwise subject to many domestic discontents. The core of the patriotic education campaign was *guoqing jiaoyu* (education in national conditions), which unambiguously held that China's national conditions was unique and not ready for adopting Western-style liberal democracy. Instead, the current one-party rule should continue because it would help maintain political stability, a pre-condition for rapid economic development. The campaign, therefore, redefined the legitimacy of the communist regime on the basis of providing political stability and economic prosperity. When pragmatic leaders said that China was bullied and humiliated by foreign powers, they indicated that China's backwardness in economic development should share some blame for China's past humiliation and current weakness. Thus, pragmatic leaders have called upon the Chinese people to work hard and to build a prosperous and strong China.

Reinforcing Chinese national confidence and turning past humiliation and current weakness into a driving force for China's modernization, nationalism has become an effective instrument to enhance the legitimacy of the communist state. The nationalist card is particularly effective when China faces challenges from hostile foreign countries. As a Chinese official said, if Chinese people felt threatened by external forces, the solidarity among them would be strengthened and nationalism would be a useful tool for the regime to justify its leadership role.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to see that although corruption and some other social and economic problems have undermined the legitimacy of the Communist regime, many Chinese people have sided with the communist government when it is criticized by foreigners. No matter how corrupt the government is, foreigners have no right to make unwarranted remarks about China and Chinese people. Many Chinese people have been upset by US pressure on issues of human rights, intellectual property rights, trade deficits, weapons proliferation, and Taiwan because they believe that the US has used these issues to demonize China in an effort to prevent it from rising as a great power.

### **The Shared Dream of a Strong China**

Nationalism is an effective instrument of the Communist state because a historical sense of injustice at the hands of foreign countries is deeply rooted and a *qiangguomeng* (the dream of a strong China) is sincerely shared by all walks of Chinese people.

Nationalism may be defined as a set of modern ideas that centers people's loyalty upon the nation-state, either existing or desired. It did not exist in China before the 19th century as China was an empire, not a nation-state. Chinese political elite begin to embrace modern nationalist doctrines for China's defense and regeneration only after China's disastrous defeat by British troops in the 1840-42 Opium War, which not only led to the eventual disintegration of Chinese Empire but also the loss of national

---

<sup>7</sup> Liu Ji, "Making the Right Choices in Twenty-first Century Sino-American Relations," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 7, no. 17, 1998, p. 92.

sovereignty to imperialist powers. Since then, a recurring theme in Chinese politics has been a nationalist quest for China's regeneration to blot out humiliation at the hands of imperialists. All those who wanted to rule China have to propound and implement a program of national salvation. Almost all powerful Chinese political leaders since the early twentieth century, from Sun Yatsen, Chiang Kai-shek, to Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao, have shared a deep bitterness at China's humiliation and determined to restore China to its rightful place in the world of nation-states.

Sharing similar nationalist aspirations, Chinese leaders have competed to offer nationalist programs for building a nation-state to their like. As a result, at least three strands of nationalism have occurred in modern China. One is ethnic nationalism, which sees nation as a politicized ethnic group and often produces a state-seeking movement to create an ethnic nation-state. The second is liberal nationalism, which defines nation as composed of citizens who not only have duty of supporting their own state in defending national rights in the world of nation-states but also pursuing individual rights of participation in the government. The third is state nationalism, which defines the nation as a territorial-political unit. The state speaks in the name of the nation and demands citizens to subordinate their individual interests to those of the state.

Chinese nationalism started as an ethnic state-seeking movement led by the Han majority to overthrow the minority Manchu dynasty. After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, both the Koumintang (KMT) and Communist regimes have defined Chinese nation as a multi-ethnic political community and endorsed only state nationalism. Ethnic nationalism has remained alive only among ethnic minorities in China's frontiers, such as Tibetans and Mongols, which are denied the right to establish separate states, and, therefore posed a serious threat to the unity of the multi-ethnic Chinese state. It has been thoroughly suppressed by both the KMT and Communist regimes.

Liberal nationalism was introduced to regenerate China through political and social reforms in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Liberal nationalists have identified with the Chinese state against foreign imperialism and, in the meantime, pushed for political participation in the political process against the authoritarian state. Before the founding of the PRC in 1949, liberal nationalists often came into conflict with the KMT regime, which was seen not only incompetent to resist foreign imperialist powers but also repeatedly violating individual rights. Some liberal nationalists, therefore, allied with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which appealed to the Chinese people for building an independent and democratic new China. After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, however, many liberal nationalists quickly discovered that the CCP was not better than the KMT in protecting individual freedom. Taking advantage of the Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1957 to criticize the CCP monopoly of political power, many of them were brutally purged.

Deng Xiaoping's call for thought liberation and Post-Mao reform in the 1980s created new opportunities for the reemergence of liberal nationalism. However, due to the danger of direct criticism of the communist state at the time, many liberal nationalists blamed China's authoritarian culture as the cause for the lack of modernization in China and called for the rejection of Chinese tradition and boundless adoption of Western culture and models of development. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, liberal nationalist called directly for the adoption of liberal democratic ideals as the best means

of promoting China's national regeneration. It was symbolized by the erection of a "Goddess of Democracy," modeled on the US Statue of Liberty, during the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989. As noted by a Western reporter, "the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square began as a patriotic movement by students who wanted to strengthen China through political reform."<sup>8</sup> However, mainstream Chinese intellectual discourse shifted drastically largely in response to the deterioration of China's relations with major Western countries, particularly the US, and the rising advocacy for the containment of China in the Western media in the 1990s. Many liberal nationalists became suspicious that the Western powers were conspiring to prevent China from rising to the status of a great power and therefore became very critical of the Western powers, particularly the US and Japan.

Liberal nationalism has often been expressed in the form of popular sentiments against the perceived infringement of Chinese national interests by foreign powers. It was the popular nationalist sentiments that propelled the young anti-Japanese demonstrators into the streets in April 2005 and anti-American demonstrators in May 1999. From this perspective, popular nationalism has become an important expression of liberal nationalism. Because the popular attack on the "evil" intentions of Western countries, some liberal nationalists are labeled "neo-conservatives" by some Western observers. However, this label is simplistic because although the communist state and liberal nationalists share the dream of a strong China, most liberal nationalists do not identify themselves with the communist state, nor do they stop criticizing the policies of the government. Qin Hui, a professor of history in Beijing vividly expressed this split of personality of liberal nationalism: it is not right to be slaves of foreign powers, nor is it right to be slaves of their own state.<sup>9</sup>

Holding high expectations for the government to fulfill its promise of safeguarding China's national interests, liberal nationalists have called for popular participation in the government in general and particularly in the foreign policy-making, an arena that has long been a monopolized domain of the state. In an interview with Wang Xiaodong, a leading "neo-conservative" intellectual and popular/liberal nationalist, a Western reporter found that "Wang's nationalism begins, surprisingly for some, with an unequivocal commitment to democracy" because Wang demanded accountability of the leaders to the Chinese public for safeguarding national interests. Wang was angry at the failure of the state-controlled Chinese media to report the \$2.87 million settlement Beijing paid for damage inflicted on U.S. diplomatic properties in China by anti-American demonstrators. According to Wang, if China was a democracy, the media would tell the truth, the government would seek people's consent before making this kind of concession to the

---

<sup>8</sup> Henry Chu, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Qin Hui, "Zhiyou zhuyi yi minzu zhuyi de qihedian zai nali?" (Where is the convergent point between liberalism and nationalism), in Li Shitao, ed., *Zhishifengzhi lichang: minzu zhuyi yu zhuanxingqi zhongguo de mingyun* (The Positions of Intellectuals: Nationalism and China's future in the Transitional Period), Changchun: Shidai Wenyi Chubanshe, 2000, p. 385.

United States, and the Chinese people would have the right to vote out of office the leaders they see as inadequately defending their national interests.<sup>10</sup>

Taking on a populist coloration in its criticism of the government's foreign policy, liberal nationalists have routinely charged the communist government as too chummy with Japan and soft in dealing with the United States in the recent years. The communist state is criticized as neither confident enough nor competent enough in safeguarding China's vital national interests.

### **Foreign Policy Implications of Pragmatic Nationalism**

The increasing assertiveness of popular/liberal nationalism has posed a daunting challenge to the communist state that has tried to maintain its monopoly of power. Taking a pragmatic attitude toward nationalism, Chinese leaders have determined to prevent the nationalist sentiment of Chinese people from getting out of control to severely damage China's foreign relations.

Historically, nationalism has influenced Chinese foreign policy in different ways. Nationalism produced xenophobia characterized by fear, hatred, and hostility toward foreigners. It also inspired generations of Chinese intellectuals fighting to resist imperialism and seeking ways to modernize by emulating the West. These different international orientations come from the fact that, pursuing a similar goal of national greatness, Chinese nationalists have been divided on how to revive China and developed at least three different nationalist perspectives: nativism, anti-traditionalism, and pragmatism. Each perspective is rooted in a unique assessment of the sources of national weakness and advocates a distinctive approach to revitalize China.

Nativism regards the impact of imperialism on Chinese self-esteem and the subversion of indigenous Chinese virtues as the root of China's weakness and calls for a return to Chinese tradition and self-reliance. In contrast, anti-traditionalism holds China's tradition as the source of its weakness and calls for the complete rejection of Chinese tradition and boundless adoption of foreign culture and models of economic and political development. Pragmatic nationalism takes a middle road. Seeing the lack of modernization as the reason why China became an easy target for Western imperialism in the first place, pragmatic nationalism would adopt whatever approach that would help modernize China.

The three perspectives of Chinese nationalism have different foreign policy implications. Nativism is often linked with confrontational anti-foreignism, hypersensitive to perceived foreign insults and militant in its reaction to them. The most extreme actions of nativist anti-foreignism in modern China were the strong xenophobia of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 and the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s. Nativism lost its momentum in the 1980s, but regained some ground among elites who reacted militantly to the so-called Western hegemony and cultural colonialism in the 1990s.

Anti-traditionalism is to accommodate to a "progressive" or "modern" international system. In the 1950s, China was to adopt the Soviet model and willing to accommodate a Soviet-led communist world. Liberal anti-traditionalists in the 1980s

---

<sup>10</sup> Susan V. Lawrence, "China--The Say No Club," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, January 13, 2000, p. 16.



called upon the Chinese people to rejuvenate the nation by assimilating nourishment from the West, adopting Western models of modernization and accommodate to the capitalist world system. For this purpose, they demanded a fundamental change in the Chinese mind-set by acquiring the spirit of science and democracy.

Pragmatic nationalism is to adapt to the changing world. It is a national interest-driven doctrine, ideologically agnostic, having nothing, or very little, to do with either Marxism or liberalism. The adaptation took shape in Mao's final years with a non-communist strategy of the Three Worlds. Since the end of the Cold War, Beijing has envisioned a multipolar community of sovereign nations mutually respecting the principle of non-interference and has worked hard to promote and adapt to the multipolar world against the speculation of a unipolar world. In the process, pragmatic leaders have recognized that the failure of the Soviet Union was largely due to its strategy of confrontation against the US in a competition for the world superpower position that exhausted its economic and military capacity. The author of a popular Chinese book, *China Does not Want to be Mr. No*, suggested that, as one of the weaker poles in the multi-polar world, China should not become the second "Mr. No" following the footsteps of the former Soviet Union to confront the US and exhaust itself. Instead, China should defend its national interest by conducting a shrewd diplomacy, which "requires rationality and calmness."<sup>11</sup> Pragmatic adaptation thus seeks to defend China's national interests by making efforts to develop cooperative relations with major powers. Pragmatic nationalists are flexible in tactics, subtle in strategy, and avoided appearing confrontational, although they are uncompromising with foreign demands that involve China's vital interest or trigger historical sensitivities such as the Taiwan independence issue and the territorial disputes with Japan.

Since the inception of market-oriented economic reform, pragmatic nationalism has prevailed in China although nativism and anti-traditionalism continue to lurk in the background. In the sense that pragmatic leaders appeal to nationalism in response to perceived foreign pressures that are said to erode, corrode, or endanger the national interest of China, pragmatic nationalism is more reactive than proactive in international affairs. It is not hard for pragmatic leaders to realize that nationalism is a double-edged sword: both a means to legitimate the CCP rule and a means for the Chinese people, particularly the Chinese liberal nationalist elite, to judge the performance of the communist state. As Nicolas Kristofor observed, "All this makes nationalism a particularly interesting force in China, given its potential not just for conferring legitimacy on the government but also for taking it away."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, if Chinese leaders could not deliver on their nationalist promise, they would become vulnerable to nationalistic criticism. Nationalism thus could become a dangerous Pandora's Box. Without constraints, it could release tremendous forces for unexpected consequences. It is very possible that if the Chinese people in the near future should repudiate the

---

<sup>11</sup> Shen Jiru, *Zhongguo Budang Bu Xiansheng: Dangdai Zhongguo de Guoji Zhanlue Wenti* (China Does not want to be Mr. No: Problems of International Strategy for Today's China), Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1998, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> Nicolas D. Kristofor, "Guess Who's a Chinese Nationalist Now?" *New York Times*, April, 22, 2001.

communist government of China, it could be for nationalist reasons after a conspicuous failure in the government's foreign policy or program of economic development.

Balancing the positive and the negative aspects, pragmatic leaders have been cautious to prevent the nationalist sentiment of Chinese people from turning into a criticism of Chinese foreign policy. Although popular nationalists have called the government to take a hard line against what they perceived provocations from the United States and Japan, pragmatic Chinese leaders know that China's economic success depends heavily upon integration with the outside world and, particularly, upon the cooperative relations with advanced Western countries. Therefore, they have emphasized principles of peaceful co-existence, peaceful orientation, peaceful rise, and peaceful development when China is rising to the status of a great power.

Acting upon these principles, pragmatic leaders have described nationalism as a force that must be "channeled" in its expressions, including restraining or even banning students from holding anti-American and anti-Japanese demonstrations. Indeed, officials in Beijing watched the anti-Japanese demonstrations early this year with great alarm as they knew that it was playing with fire, risking not only being rushed into a confrontation with foreign powers but also turning the passions against the government. Walking on a tightrope, Beijing ordered a stop to the demonstration in late-April when leaders discovered an internet call for even larger scale demonstrations on May 4th, an anniversary of The May Fourth Movement triggered by anger over the Versailles Treaty giving Japan control of parts of China's Shandong Province in 1919 and a symbol of social reform, individual emancipation and resistance to foreign aggression in China—almost a Chinese equivalent of the Boston Tea Party.

To stop the demonstrations, the government sent a blizzard of text messages to mobile phone users in major cities warning against "spreading rumors, believing rumors or joining illegal demonstrations." Several organizers of online petition drives and popular protests were detained. In Shanghai, one major state-run newspaper published a viciously worded editorial warning that anti-Japan protests were cover for an "evil conspiracy" to undermine the government. Police in main cities throughout the nation went on full alert to prevent a recurrence of anti-Japan protests on the sensitive May Fourth anniversary and the months thereafter. Busloads of riot police were stationed outside the Japanese embassy in Beijing, while scores of police patrolled nearby streets. Tiananmen Square was closed to the public for a government-organized coming-of-age ceremony for 18-year-olds, in another apparent attempt to thwart any protests. Shanghai authorities closed the area around the Japanese consulate to traffic, using metal shipping containers to create a barrier. Hundreds of police stood guard around the building.

In fact, this was not the first time that Chinese leaders used heavy-handed tactics to ban anti-foreign demonstrations. Beijing had learned their lessons in a hard way from handling the crises caused by the US bombing of the Chinese embassy on May 8, 1999. Following the embassy bombing, a highly emotional nationalism burst. University students poured into the front of the US embassy in Beijing and consulates in other cities, throwing eggs and stones to express their anger at the US action. The Chinese government encouraged or tolerated demonstrations for the first couple of days. Demonstrations quickly spiraled out of control, not only threatening damage to Sino-US relations but also provoking domestic criticism that the leadership was unwilling to

confront the United States. Two days after the bombing, then Vice-President Hu Jintao made a televised speech in which, while extending government support to student's patriotism, he warned against extreme and destabilizing behavior. In the meantime, the *People's Daily* reported that various Western countries had issued advisories against traveling to China, hurting tourism and foreign investment. Meeting with foreign visitor on May 11, President Jiang Zemin stated that life in China should now return to normal and it was time to turn a new page in the name of economic necessity.

In this case, when the mid-air collision between an US EP-3 plane and Chinese jetfighter in South China Sea took place and on April 1, 2001, pragmatic leaders were determined to avoid a repeat of the anti-American demonstrations one year earlier. In response to rising nationalist sentiments, while Chinese leaders talked toughly, they followed a two-pronged policy. On the one hand, Beijing's public stand was particularly uncompromising on the demand that the spy plane crew would only be released after a formal apology by the US government and the US promise to stop its military spying and provocative activities along China's coast. On the other hand, China made internal principles of "separating the airplane and the crewmembers" and no repeat of the anti-U.S. demonstrations after the 1999 embassy bombing. When Secretary of State Powell used the words "very sorry" for the missing Chinese pilot and aircraft, Beijing accepted the "very sorry" as a close equivalent to an apology and released the crew on the next day. It was a testimony to pragmatic leaders' tactical flexibility that the Chinese official media was instructed to translate Powell's expression of "very sorry" as "*baodian*," which is one word different from but has almost identical meaning as "*daodian*," the Chinese expression of "apology" that Beijing demanded initially. Pragmatic Chinese leaders interpreted the expression of being "very sorry" as a full apology and the American expressions of "regrets" and "sorry" that meant in most instances only for the loss of the pilot and aircraft as meant for the whole incident. This was a face-saving solution for pragmatic Chinese leaders. Apparently, while pragmatic leaders did not alter their tough rhetoric for domestic reasons, they did almost everything they could from their perspective to avoid confrontation and maintain the framework of cooperation with the United States during the crises.

### **Conclusion**

This seemingly contradictory strategy of talking tough but acting in a calculated manner shows that, although nationalism has influenced the making of China's foreign policy, it is pragmatic nationalism rather than emotional nationalist rhetoric that has been influential. The rise of nationalism has not made Chinese foreign policy particularly uncooperative or irrational. Of course, this does not mean that China's commitment to cooperation is endless. Although China has remained a Communist authoritarian state, it is no longer headed by charismatic leaders such as Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping who had the authority to arbitrate disputes in the leadership or personally set the country's course. Current Chinese leaders must cater to a range of constituencies and will be increasingly constrained by the rise of Chinese nationalist sentiments in the society. As a result of reform and opening up, they have become far more accountable to the public opinion than in the earlier years. In particular, the average Chinese are plugged into information by phone and the Internet and have found ways to express their views, including nationalist feelings. Although pragmatic leaders have remained in full control

and nationalism has not got out of hand so far, it remains to be seen how long this type of authoritarian control can last.