



10/15/2023

# National Identity as a Driver of Foreign Policy: The Chinese Example

Master's Thesis

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## Abstract

China's rise has long been a fact and its consequences are evident. With its population of 1.3 billion people there is no denying the impact that its integration into the world economy has had on the globe. China's rise, while having slowed down, is not over, and we are already starting to see the impact a more powerful China is having on international politics in a more general sense.

This paper delves into the profound impact of China's rise on the global landscape, spanning the realms of economy, security, and international politics. Understanding China has become paramount, and while realist theories offer insights, they often fall short in capturing the intricacies of China's stance, especially concerning sensitive issues like Taiwan. This is why I suggest 'national identity' as a tool for deciphering Chinese motivations.

This study illuminates how China's unique interpretation of state sovereignty, rooted in historical translations and influenced by the Qing empire, significantly shapes its foreign policy, notably evident in its delicate balancing act within the United Nations. The failure to comprehend these nuances has previously derailed international negotiations, as seen in the 2009 climate control talks.

Additionally, this paper explores the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) deliberate efforts in shaping national identity to bolster its legitimacy. The CCP's success in fostering a potent sense of nationalism has inadvertently swayed its foreign policy decisions, exemplified by the Taiwan issue. Here, national identity intertwines with CCP's sensitivity, illuminating the island's strategic significance. The aggressive posturing towards Taiwan, driven by nationalist pressures, underscores the profound implications for global politics, influencing initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and escalating tensions with other nations.

The study concludes by highlighting the constructed nature of national identity, shaped by historical interactions and contemporary actors. It emphasizes how China's national identity, largely molded by Western interactions in the 19th century, indirectly guides its multilateral engagements and hawkish foreign policies. This nuanced exploration underscores the complexity of China's global role and serves as an invaluable resource for policymakers striving for effective diplomacy in the evolving landscape of international relations.

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## Introduction

The rise of China is a well-documented process that has been addressed and analyzed exhaustively in the past couple of decades. It is only natural that this process receives much attention and when it comes down to it, it is because of the important fact that China encompasses the largest population of any nation in the world. What this means is that China is number one in the most basic of resources: People. What people represent is potential. As the building block of society, all activity and production is first and foremost limited by the amount of people in a given (nation in this case).

Despite China's premier position in the most fundamental of resources, it does not hold a corresponding position in terms of economy (GDP). This means that theoretically there is much room for growth and expansion, economically as well as technologically etc. The world as a whole has long experienced the effect of China's induction into the world economic system, and since then, it has become clear that as a result of globalization and the general interconnectedness of world economies, China's fate is tightly interwoven with that of the rest of the world. The economy is only one aspect however, wherein China's fate will undoubtedly affect the world system.

Along with China's economic rise has come its political rise, specifically the rise of its political status. This is the other side to the rise of China which makes it relevant to so many spectators and analysts of the world. From the perspective of international relations, China's rise has long been reported as either a looming threat or an economic miracle, what was and is certain is the considerable impact it has had on the world order and will continue to have.

This brings us to the objective of this paper. It has already been established how China's role in the world is increasing and how its fate is entangled with that of the rest of the world. For this reason, it is important for governments in other countries to understand China in order to predict its actions, furthermore, understanding is important in order to best carry out any diplomacy with the giant nation. Understanding the motivations and essence behind a country's politics and foreign relations is a stark task that is arguably impossible to do completely. There are many aspects that go into the motivations that push a nation's political apparatus, and in a nation as large as China, which happens to be the oldest existing civilization in the world, there are a lot of factors to be weighed and analyzed in the pursuit of such understanding. With that being said there is a concept which can be very substantial in understanding the behavior of a given nation and I would argue that it provides both a good understanding of Chinese culture and contemporary politics. It is the concept of 'national

identity’.

National identity (NI) is a heavily researched topic that refers to the sense of belonging that one has to one’s nation, based on an understanding of the nation as a cohesive unit built up around common traditions, culture and often language. The idea is that in theory national identity is based on culture and history, however, as has been pointed out in identity research before, it is something that may be shaped and appropriated, most commonly by a nation’s leaders. One may point out that this means that national identity is not purely objective and perhaps therefore not something that is suited to analyze and predict intent, however I wish to point out how the appropriation of national identity by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) tells us exactly what their agenda is. While doing so it can be interesting to also note the discrepancies there may be between Chinese history and the national identity that the CCP tries to present.

The research question that therefore guides this thesis is “how has national identity shaped Chinese foreign policy since the ascension of Xi Jinping?”

## Methodology

### Research strategy

In order to answer the question “How has national identity shaped Chinese foreign policy since the ascension of Xi Jinping?” I am going to first establish national identity as a theory based on social identity and constructivism. With this information I am going to look at some crucial aspects of Chinese history and political philosophy that have shaped Chinese national identity as it is today. In the analysis I take on a qualitative/interpretive approach, meaning that my analysis is based on the interpretation of an amalgamation of different research, which highlights different ways in which national identity affects Chinese foreign policy. National identity is a vast concept which encompasses many things, in this paper the focus is on aspects of political national identity as I find them to have the most clear and provable impact on foreign policy.

The reason for focusing the research on China under Xi is that he is the current secretary of the CCP and with the power the secretary holds, China’s policies are heavily shaped by the current secretary. The point is to be able to understand and interpret China in the future, so it makes the most sense to focus on current issues and not how politics was conducted many years ago.

### Choice of data

There are a variety of different types of sources that have been utilized in the making of this thesis. First and foremost, there are the different books and peer reviewed journal articles that provide the necessary explanations of the theoretical concepts relating to identity and constructivism etc.

Likewise, the analysis relies on books and articles that research the CCP with the intent of mapping the winds of influence that push the political agenda within the party, quite similar to the type of research that this thesis attempts to conduct. That is, however, only part of the data used to conduct the analysis. The other part includes firsthand sources in the shape of official statements published by the CCP as well as Chinese government websites. These statements include transcripts of speeches, released statements etc. that mostly relate to the different foreign policy examples that are being analyzed. These statements are arguably the best way to gauge how national identity plays a role in Chinese foreign policy because it is very likely to be mentioned as a justification for any given policy, especially policy that can be interpreted as antagonizing other countries, of which there is certainly some to choose

from in China's case.

One may consider that official statements are PR and not necessarily trustworthy, however since the point of this research is to understand the role that national identity plays, it is equally telling what the statements say even if they are lies. The matter of fact is that these statements are curated messages that have been vetted before being sent out, so they are assured to feature party sanctioned messaging. This means that these statements are the perfect target for analysis of what message the CCP wishes to send including messages regarding national identity.

### Theoretical framework

The main theory of this paper is that of national identity, which is a development of social identity theory. Social identity theory posits that people develop identities based on social groups to which they belong, and that their behavior is affected by their social identity. National identity is then the identity derived from one's country. This theory is of the constructivist paradigm because it assumes that things like identities and nations etc. are social constructs, that are subject to change and manipulation.

Since there is no dedicated theory to national identity on its own, I have chosen to make my own definition of the concept, based on social identity theory, which will be found in the theory section. As far as I can tell, other scholars also go by this understanding, however they rarely define the concept, which is why I went ahead and did it for the purposes of this paper.

### Limitations

The most apparent limitation to doing this research is my inability to speak Mandarin. It is far from all first-hand sources that have been translated into English, which limits the data I can interpret. Furthermore, it would be nice to be able to understand the differences in Chinese and English words for complicated concepts such as "sovereignty/zhuquan," however in this regard I am forced to rely on the translations and interpretations of others.

The paper is also limited in the fact that it does not cover all angles and aspects of national identity, specifically behavioral culture is something that I think would be interesting to expand this research into, meaning how does different cultural dimensions such as collectivism etc. play a role in how policy is formulated and carried out.

Finally, it is important to note that interpretive research such as this relies to some extent on the competence of the author, which means that the conclusion that I reach is going

to be affected by my choice of data and my ability to interpret things such as CCP statements. Most of the time, however, I will be basing my claims on the research of other authors.

### Expected outcomes

The aim of this paper is to both predict and understand Chinese political motivations, specifically in the international realm. The point is to present some aspects of Chinese identity and how they were constructed and show examples of how they affect foreign policy today. All of the examples I use are part of long-standing trends which suggest that knowledge of these concepts will be relevant for a long time.



## Nation State

Before I dive into the theory, I feel the need to define the concept of a nation state, as it relates to national identity. The terms nation and state are widely used in the world today; however, they are also terms often misused and therefore it is necessary to define them. It is important because national identity is something that springs directly from the concept of a nation state and in this paper, we will be exploring the very idea of China as a nation and a state.

A nation state is a relatively new concept that came about with the rise of modern state systems in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the same kind of state system that is seen virtually everywhere to this day. It is the merging of the two concepts ‘nation’ and ‘state.’ Colloquially, and even in academic texts, the two words are often used interchangeably. This is likely the case due to the modern state system of nation states having come to encompass the entire globe long ago, thus the two terms have been joined at the hip. Nation is a term that has proven difficult to define as there are countless proposed definitions and none that are free from critique, however what it generally refers to is a collective of people that share some sort of cultural connection as well a shared territorial self-determination, specifically a belief in the right of territorial control of their “national homeland.” A state on the other hand is the political apparatus that is connected to a certain populated territory, rules via its institutions, and participates in the international system. A nation state is then when these two things correlate.<sup>1</sup>

China for example is a nation – it was mentioned previously how the Chinese civilization is the oldest currently on earth, this does not mean China has been a nation throughout this period. It can be argued when exactly China could be classified as a nation, but at the very least since the fall of the Ming empire in 1912. China is also a state. China is the name and the identity, but in practice it is the CCP that is the entire Chinese political apparatus, and it is the main target of analysis of this thesis. If you ask a party member of the CCP whether Taiwan is a nation, according to our definition, they will likely say no, and that they are part of the Chinese nation, even while acknowledging the existence of the state that is Taiwan. On the contrary, there are also people in Taiwan who would argue that Taiwan is a nation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lowell W. Barrington, “‘Nation’ and ‘Nationalism’: The Misuse of Key Concepts in Political Science,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 30, no. 4 (1997): 712–16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/420397>, 712.

<sup>2</sup> “What Taiwanese Think of China | Street Interview,” YouTube, January 3, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COYGLDafG1o&t=1153s>.

## Theory

### National Identity

National identity does not have its own dedicated theory, rather it is a concept that is used in different fields and has slightly different understandings based on the context. Much like the words, nation and state, national identity is used quite loosely. National identity as a theoretical concept is an offshoot of social identity theory.

Social identity theory was first proposed by Henri Tajfel in 1972 as a way to explain intergroup behavior. The central idea of the theory is that people derive their social identities based on the groups they identify themselves with. In later publications he would team up with John Turner and go on to further explain how our social identities thoroughly impact us on a deep level. First and foremost, the social identity we derive from groups provides us with a sense of belonging and is an important source of pride and self-esteem. Furthermore, they proposed that through a process of self-categorization we divide the world into them and us, creating a host of further effects. Tajfel asserted that due to the concept of stereotyping and people's tendency to categorize things in their head, two processes would be exaggerated: The perceived differences between groups, and the similarities of things in the same group.<sup>3</sup>

So, the idea is that people are often very attached to their groups (for example nations) and that they often derive pride from them. This creates an environment where people will look for negative aspects of an out-group in order to enhance their self-image, being connected to the in-group. In general, this dynamic creates favoritism towards the in-group and discrimination towards the out group. In fact, Tajfel even proposes that there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that in certain settings, for example extra competitive ones, the "maximum difference" becomes more important to members of a group than "maximum in-group profit." This means that besting a rival becomes more important for members of a given group than maximizing the group's profit, profit being anything that is related to the success of the group.<sup>4</sup> Combining this with the exaggerated perception of differences between groups, it is not hard to understand how competitiveness and even hostility between groups can escalate quickly and linger for long.

Social identity theory was proposed with a limited scope in mind. The aim was first to predict and specify the circumstances under which people will act as their individual selves,

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<sup>3</sup> Henri Tajfel, "Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour," *Social Science Information* 13, no. 2 (1974): 65–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847401300204>, 76–78.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Tajfel and John Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," essay, in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co., 1979), 33–37, 37.

and when they will engage in intergroup behavior. Then, Tajfel and Turner would get into the consequences social identity has on individual perceptions and behavior. It was not until over a decade later that academics extrapolated the theory to the national/international stage, using the theory to explain the behavior and conflicts that arise between nations. Ashmore et al for example, point out that nationality is often a potent source of social identity and highlight the many ways in which social identity shapes international relations.<sup>5</sup> This was when scholars started using the word “national identity” to refer to the social identity we derive from our countries.

Following up on Anderson’s seminal work on countries and nations as “imagined communities”, Jessop identified three types of nations based on three forms of national identity:

1. Nations based on ethnicity. This category is fairly self-explanatory; however, it is important to note that more and more nations are becoming increasingly multi-ethnic and therefore this type of identity is in decline.
2. Nations based on cultural identity. This category is much like the first one, except instead of being based on the ethnicity of the native people of the country it is based on the cultural identity of its inhabitants. The issue with this form of identity is that culture is very malleable and open to negotiation, which we will get into later. More often than not, states in particular, steer this form of identity and so it is often not exactly the most authentic identity. This is also something we will be analyzing later.
3. Nations based on loyalty towards the constitutional and political order. This refers to nations that are marketed as following some sort of idealistic politics. These nations are often multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. The US is a good example of one such nation, as they value their constitution and political identity above all else, but you could also say that China is a nation based on loyalty towards the political order, specifically towards the Party.

What is important to point out is that all these are facets of national identity, and it is rare to find a nation that is based exclusively on one or the other, however often it is one of these that dominates the identity associated with a given nation. In an example like China, I would

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<sup>5</sup> Richard D. Ashmore, Lee J. Jussim, and David Wilder, *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

argue that it is a nation based on all three of these forms, but we will discuss that later.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of national identity, I would argue, is well agreed upon, based on publications online, both academic and journalistic. Since national identity is a cognitive understanding in one's own head, that is primarily created by oneself, there are no bounds to the shapes that it may take. Where the incongruity arises is when the term is applied analytically. Here authors sometimes use the term to refer more shallowly to formal symbols etc. and in one case, a BBC writer even used it in lieu of 'soft power'.<sup>7</sup> The way I use the concept of national identity in this paper is to refer to the concept as delineated from social identity, meaning that national identity is the subjective picture a person has of a country and also the imprint that your sense of belonging to a certain nation has on your thoughts and behavior. At its core it is a subjective understanding that we forge in our minds, and so representations of a given national identity may take countless different shapes.

The role of identity in politics has long been researched and recognized as being substantial. That is because ideology and political affiliation are things that are closely related to one's identity and therefore, in turn, identity tends to lead to political conflict as per social identity theory. While not as prevalent in the archives of social science research as political identity, national identity has not remained entirely unappreciated in the field of international relations.<sup>8</sup> In his 2018 book Fukuyama argues that identity has become an increasingly important factor in politics, both domestic and international, as part of a shift from economic to identity politics. As far as national identity goes, Fukuyama provides the example of the role of NI in Russian foreign policy and its consequences in recent years. He also talks about the importance of NI for a country's well-being, using African and Middle Eastern failed states as examples.

At this point, it has been alluded to a couple of times that social and national identity is something that is subject to negotiation and change. This is something that even Tajfel asserted back in the 70's and it has been researched in different ways since. This can be referred to as the instrumentalist approach. Instrumentalism is the philosophical approach that generally regards an activity as being an instrument for a practical purpose. National identity through the scope of instrumentalism is a tool that states can use to mobilize and unify people

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<sup>6</sup> Bob Jessop, "Nation and State," *Europe in a Global Context*, 2011, 180–92, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-34423-5\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-34423-5_15), 182.

<sup>7</sup> Zaria Gorvett, "The Intangible Concept That Gives Countries Power," BBC Future, March 17, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20220316-how-countries-get-their-national-identities>.

<sup>8</sup> Richards Ned Lebow, "Introduction," *National Identities and International Relations*, 2016, 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316710982.002>, 1.

for specific goals.<sup>9</sup>

The final concept I wish to explain in this theory section is that of nationalism in relation to national identity. People usually date ‘nationalism’ as a concept stemming from 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, however that is only when the concept was coined, in the context of a post-Westphalia society. I emphasize ‘post-Westphalia’ because nationalism is the product of ancient properties of human nature such as kin-culture affinity, mutual cooperation and solidarity, adapted to the modern age of nation states. Nationalism has evolved as a concept to encompass many ideas such as congruency between nation and state or self-determination, but at its core the concept derives from national identity. Nationalism is focused on the nation or state and NI is the individual’s idea of a nation/state, based on their lived experience.<sup>10</sup>

Nationalism can be seen as both an ideology and a movement, and its core premise is the devotion to one’s state and the promotion of its interests. Since nationalism is the devotion to a national identity there are as many expressions of it as there are national identities. The popularity of nationalism in a country is based on the “strength” of its national identity, meaning how established it is, and the nature of it is based on the nature of the identity. The reason that nationalism is interesting for this research is because it is a powerful force for the mobilization of people.<sup>11</sup> We have mentioned the power national identity has over people and nationalism is in a way the politization of it. Combining this with the fact that it is possible, especially from a state perspective, to influence NI, we have an important and dynamic factor in the formulation of foreign policy, as we will discover later.

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<sup>9</sup> Viera Baçová, “The Construction of National Identity - on Primordialism and Instrumentalism,” *Human Affairs* 8, no. 1 (1998): 29–43, <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-1998-080104>, 35-36.

<sup>10</sup> Azar Gat, “Premodern Nations, National Identities, National Sentiments and National Solidarity,” *The Roots of Nationalism*, 2016, 31–46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9789048530649.002>, 31.

<sup>11</sup> “Nationalism,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, September 4, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/nationalism>.

## China's Identity

It has been explained how national identity is something that exists within the mind of the individual, and so it is personal and unique to each individual. With that being said, people's national identities are generally shaped by the characteristics of their country, or their understanding of these. The reason that people are not going to have the same national identities can be divided into two factors, people do not have the same experiences (different information) and that people are different with different personalities and temperaments. The second one is natural, not something that can be helped, it is no secret however that the first one is quite malleable. People are the product of two things, our genes and our natural environment, and just like our parents play a big role in how we view the world, so do our experiences with media products and the schools we go to. In this section I wish to explain how national identity is shaped in China by interfering with the flow of information as well as how we can try to define Chinese national identity.

### The Mandate of Heaven

As mentioned, national identity is in part shaped by a country's history. While the analysis of this paper is focused on China under Xi Jinping, with the purpose of being contemporary and relevant to the current political landscape, we still must look to history in order to understand some crucial aspects of China's current national identity. The first major concept I wish to present is China's "Mandate of Heaven."

The history of the Mandate begins with a certain King Wen of the Western Zhou Kingdom. King Wen was a very popular and beloved king, so much so that he was considered the "Son of Heaven," which was the highest divine force within Zhou mythology. As the direct descendant of heaven, Wen was seen as the highest authority of the state and of spirituality. In the 1050's BC King Wen started preparing for a rebellion against the sitting Shang dynasty, however he died in 1050 BC before being able to complete his mission. His son, however, King Wu, took over his mantle and overthrew the Shang dynasty in 1045 BC.<sup>12</sup>

Before the establishment of the Western Zhou dynasty, legitimacy based on performance was not an important aspect of state legitimacy. Rather it was legitimacy based on charisma and tradition that underpinned the emperor's rule. When king Wu overthrew the Shang dynasty in 1045, he made an announcement that was to serve as a claim of legitimacy

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<sup>12</sup> Dingxin Zhao, "The Mandate of Heaven and Performance Legitimation in Historical and Contemporary China," *American Behavioral Scientist* 53, no. 3 (2009): 416–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209338800>, 418.

for the vulnerable, newly formed Western Zhou dynasty – the “Announcement of Shao.” In this announcement Wu goes on to explain how former Shang rulers possessed the Mandate of Heaven, meaning they were chosen by Heaven to be the enactor of its will based on their competence. Heaven had now revoked its mandate from the “great” state of Shang due to the state’s moral degradation, for example due to excessive alcohol consumption. He furthermore explained how the former Xia dynasty had held Heaven’s Mandate before the Shang and then likewise lost it due to its degradation and failings.<sup>13</sup>

With this announcement, Wu introduced the idea of Heaven choosing its representative through its mandate and that the holder of the Mandate was only deserving of it as long as he was morally upstanding and a good ruler, meaning that he looked out for his people. During the time of the Shang dynasty a plethora of nature gods as well as ancestors and Heaven were the object of worship, however during the Zhou rule, their perspective of Heaven (Tian) as the supreme divine became cemented in Chinese spirituality and so did the concept of the Mandate of Heaven. King Wu’s father, the original Son of Heaven seems a big inspiration for the concept and would go down in history as one of the most revered Chinese heroes of all time, due to his benevolence and competence.<sup>14</sup>

The Announcement of Shao can be seen as nothing more than propaganda by the Zhou to justify their own conquest, being cleverly constructed so that the mere success of a rebellion served as justification of it since it proved the incompetence of the former state and thereby its loss of Heaven’s Mandate. Propaganda or not, the concept (whether coincidental or not) would align with Confucian political philosophy developed centuries later and has had a lasting effect on Chinese political philosophy till this day.<sup>15</sup>

## Confucianism

Confucianism is the philosophical tradition derived from the teachings of Confucius; a philosopher born in the Zhou dynasty during the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is the closest thing China has even been to a state religion. At its core, Confucianism emphasizes the importance of moral values, social harmony, and the cultivation of virtues in order to foster an ideal society. Central to Confucian thought are concepts such as benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, wisdom, and sincerity. Family relationships, social harmony, and ethical behavior

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<sup>13</sup> Dingxin Zhao, “The Mandate of Heaven and Performance Legitimation in Historical and Contemporary China,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 53, no. 3 (2009): 416–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209338800>, 418.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 419.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 420.

are the goals of Confucianism, and it is asserted that a society is not just nor well-ordered if not mirrored in these values.<sup>16</sup>

During his life he was not famous, nor were his teachings widely recognized. After his death however Confucius teachings started to take root. Confucianism withstood the test of time and was so popular that during the Han dynasty it was adopted as the official state ideology. Since Confucianism is basically a guide to conduct for both rulers and subject alike, it became the guiding ideology of the state apparatus of the Han dynasty and has remained so to some degree till this day. From the Sui dynasty until the fall of the last dynasty the state examination system, meant to test potential scholar officials, was based entirely on Confucian teachings.<sup>17</sup>

Confucianism encountered difficulties in the modern age with the introduction of Western ideologies and Marxism, particularly in the first half of the 20th century. A substantial change in Chinese intellectual and political circles was brought about by the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which advocated for modernization and rejected traditional values. Confucianism was also, along with other traditional views, vigorously suppressed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), as it was seen as a symbol of outdated, oppressive principles.<sup>18</sup>

In recent times, however, the CCP has shown a new-found interest in Confucianism, as we shall see later. Despite being officially atheist, the CCP has acknowledged the cultural and moral importance of Confucianism and traditional Chinese values. Sometimes Confucian ideals like societal harmony, filial devotion, and moral government are invoked to encourage moral behavior etc. Furthermore, academics and policymakers are considering Confucian principles in the context of contemporary governance, wondering how ancient values may coexist with China's current socioeconomic transformation.<sup>19</sup>

In conclusion, Confucianism has had a significant impact on Chinese politics and culture throughout history, specifically due to the way it was tied to the hip of Chinese government for around 1300 years. The philosophy has seen great threats to its influence and relevancy, specifically in the last 150 years, however the philosophy is still to some extent ingrained in the Chinese psyche. Recent decades have also proven that once again Confucianism has survived adversity and once again found a home in the official channels of

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Goldin, *Confucianism* (Durham: Acumen, 2015), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 119-120.



the Chinese state.

It is hard to connect Confucianism to any direct foreign policy formation, however it is still an important concept which will be referred to multiple times throughout the rest of the paper, why is why I decided to keep this section in order to explain the concept.

### The Century of humiliation

The Chinese civilization is one of the world's oldest and the oldest still standing. During most of its time Chinese society was the richest, most powerful, and most advanced in Asia, giving justification for China's native name "middle kingdom." During this time China (as ruled by a given dynasty) was a regional hegemon and Chinese culture was seen as superior in Asia in many ways. Chinese society continued to be the most advanced in its world until the Qing dynasty was introduced to the military might of major Western powers in 1840.<sup>20</sup>

In 1839 the Chinese emperor made it clear that he was willing to uphold the ban on opium that had been instated decades earlier. Since the British made a lot of money smuggling opium into China, they were not happy with this development and decided to invade China with the goal of continuing their opium trade and thereby their trade balance surplus. This – the start of the first opium war would be remembered as the beginning of the century of humiliation. The infamous century of humiliation would go on to be a century long period in Chinese history, stained by subjugation by the West and Japan. During this time China went from being the hegemon of its world (the kingdom in the middle) to being a weak player in the international arena and a nation in decline. Due to the severity of trauma and humiliation associated with this period, the experience left a lasting motivation in China to learn from that experience or at least to avoid one similar.<sup>21</sup>

The century of humiliation was proclaimed over by Mao Zedong in 1949 with the success of the communist revolution and the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The accepted end of the century of humiliation is very important to understanding its strong impact on Chinese foreign policy today, this is because it was linked to the ascension of the CCP, and so the CCP is seen as the saviors of China from the perils of subjugation and humiliation. This has become a part of the CCP's justification for being in power, and so not only is the trauma of the century of humiliation branded into the Chinese common psyche,

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<sup>20</sup> Alison Adcock Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus* 25, no. 1 (2010): 1–33, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1976-5118.2010.01039.x>, 5.

<sup>21</sup> David G. Atwill and Yurong Y. Atwill, *Sources in Chinese History: Diverse Perspectives from 1644 to the Present* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 39.

but it's juxtaposed as the alternative to the CCP or as China without the CCP. With this understanding being enthusiastically pushed by the CCP, it in turn becomes more and more accepted and absorbed by the people.<sup>22</sup>

The effect that the century of humiliation has on the philosophy of international relations that resides within the CCP is well documented, and so is its effect on nationalism, which we shall see later.

### The Construction of China

"History is written by the victors" is a famous quote that is significant because of how great of a power it is to have. The power to write history is the power to alter people's perceptions of reality for countless years to come, including national identities. China is an example of a state that drastically attempts to control the information that its inhabitants receive, specifically with the intention of shaping their national identity. Xi Jinping and the CCP often present their understanding of Chineseness, with the assumption that this view is based on ancient understandings of millennia of Chinese history,<sup>23</sup> however I wish to start off by detailing how much of the construction of China, including geography, nationality, political understanding, and ethnicity all took place during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Previously it was mentioned how China is arguably a nation based on all the three forms of national identity, namely cultural, ethnic, and loyalty towards the constitutional order, and now is the time to dive deeper into this. To define China, I find it reasonable to start with tracing the origins of the word "China" itself. China is the English/international word for what is officially the PRC today, it can be translated into any language, but it refers to the same thing. In Mandarin, the word for their country is Zhongguo (most commonly) or Zhonghua, which basically translates into "central state or central civilization." The term Zhongguo dates back hundreds of years, however it was not until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it came to be the name of a nation. Before then, what is now considered to be China is a vast area that has been occupied by thousands of different tribes, kingdoms, and ethnicities throughout time. According to the most qualified estimates, the first Chinese dynasty (Xia) encompassed less than one tenth of the current PRC in terms of geographical size. Through thousands of years however, the Chinese empire grew to include different areas at different times and grew to rule over countless different ethnic groups and cultures make no mistake,

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<sup>22</sup> David G. Atwill and Yurong Y. Atwill, *Sources in Chinese History: Diverse Perspectives from 1644 to the Present* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 254.

<sup>23</sup> Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2022), 5.

China is a melting pot, even if far in the naturalization process. At times China has even been conquered and occupied entirely by foreign powers, such as the Mongolians or the Manchus.<sup>24</sup>

The earliest records of the word *Zhongguo* date back to the Warring States period (476-221 BC), here it refers to the “central” kingdoms where people were civilized as opposed to the “barbarians” situated around these.<sup>25</sup> It referred to a cultural difference or even a claim of legitimacy and not a nation. Historic evidence also shows that people throughout the dynastic period in China (2070 BC – 1912) referred to themselves as subjects of the current dynasty, such as Han, Ming etc., not as “*Zhongguoren*” (Chinese person in current Chinese.) All this to say that while Chinese politicians and academics will try to convince you otherwise, China as it exists today, is not a millennia old homogenous nation.<sup>26</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Europeans thought of China, they thought of it as a nation state as it was known in Europe, based on the very particular and definable principles of the Treaty of Westphalia. Political culture and understanding in Asia however, before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was not comparable to that of Europe. The Chinese conception of international relations during the imperial age was very self-centered. As mentioned, *Zhongguo* referred to the place of the civilized people who were the subjects of the empire, and around the empire were simply barbarians. The main interaction that the empire had with other kingdoms was receiving tributes from them. The empire was seen as the center of the world, hence ‘*Zhongguo*,’ and the emperor was regarded as the ruler of all land “under the sky” (*tianxia*). This is evidenced by how the Chinese emperor would choose to recognize certain people as legitimate rulers of different places that the Chinese empire had no official control over. The state was named after its ruler, and when a new family took over and the dynasty changed, so did the name of the state, and people would go from being subjects of for example the greater Zhou state to the greater Qin state. As opposed to their European counterpart, Central-Asian politics were about who you served and not about any territorial claims and geographical borders.<sup>27</sup>

The current understanding that we have of China as a nation state today comes from these two cultures meeting. The first time ‘*Zhongguo*’ was used to represent a Chinese state in any official capacity was in 1689 when the Qing signed the Nerchinsk Treaty with Russia

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<sup>24</sup> Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2022), 8-9.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 19.

to settle a border dispute. While one may point to this as evidence of Zhongguo as a state back in the day, it is important to understand that the greater Qing state was represented by European Jesuits at these negotiations, who functioned as mediators and translators. It is most likely that ‘Zhongguo’ was chosen by these Jesuits as the best word to try and encapsulate the essence of a nation state by European standards, so that the two sides may conduct successful diplomacy.<sup>28</sup>

China (as the translation of Zhongguo) did not come to be understood as a nation state by Chinese people until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then, it was the Chinese intellectuals and officials who travelled to Europe to study and to learn, who started adopting the European approach to international relations in their mind. China was in the midst of its century of humiliation and the Qing state was failing, its lack of modernization became clear with its introduction to the Western powers. In the face of the stark differences in power between the greater Qing state and the West, it became clear to many that China needed to modernize, and Chinese intellectuals were inspired by Western society as well as the modernization of Japan.<sup>29</sup> The writings of these people would become the beginning of a reformist movement in China. When the reformist movement turned revolutionary, they eventually wrestled power from the Qing dynasty entirely and formed a nation-state in its wake named Zhonghua Minguo (the Republic of China (ROC.))<sup>30</sup>

The formation of the ROC was a process of re-envisioning the Qing empire as a nation state based on a foreign perspective. It was the Qing political elite along with reformist intellectuals who adopted the idea of “China,” many of whom looking at their homeland through a Western perspective acquired abroad. “China” from the Western perspective was the regional leader in inner Asia, an ethnically homogenous nation with defined borders and a continuous state that can be traced back thousands of years. In adopting this perception of their homeland, the Chinese revolutionaries bought into Western notions of history, geography, and politics, specifically sovereignty, which I wish to talk about as well.<sup>31</sup>

Due to the substantial concessions made by the Qing empire as a result of losing both of the opium wars in 1842, and 1860, respectively, the empire was forced to increasingly deal with the Western powers. Among the Qing political elite, there were two different schools of thought. The conservative school which was convinced of the moral superiority of the

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<sup>28</sup> Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2022), 17.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 33.

Zhongguo and the old ways and was largely uninterested in learning from the new world they had encountered, even in the face of clear military-technological superiority, if nothing else. The other school was that of modernization, if you will. The idea being that the new world seemed superior, at least in military technology if nothing else, and that it might prove fruitful to learn as much as possible about Western technology and philosophy even. The scholar class would fall somewhere on the spectrum between these two schools, generally moving further towards the modernization school as time went on from 1842 till the end of the empire in 1912, due to witnessing the decline of the Empire and what it stood for. It should also be noted that the scholar class had ripe motivation to not sway too far from traditional values and practices as the political philosophy of the Qing was based on Confucianism, and it was their knowledge of Confucianism that qualified scholars to progress in the political bureaucracy. Confucianism was what these scholars had studied and lived by their entire adult lives, and they were not necessarily adept at much else. It was hard to say what role Confucianism could ever have in a modern system, and to many Chinese people at the time, it was too tied to their national identity for them to even consider alternative thinking.<sup>32</sup>

One of the issues that caused much friction and confusion between the Qing empire and Western powers throughout the dynasty's lifetime was that of their different outlooks on international relations. The friction was mostly to the detriment of the Qing. After the first opium war, China was pretty much forced into the international community as shaped by European philosophy and dominance. No matter how unwilling most Qing scholars were to learn anything from the West, especially their political theory, they were forced to deal with the consequences of existing within this alien concept of an international community. Having to accept the gradual loss of all of its tributary states was in particular a painful process which served to help shatter the Chinese conception of tianxia. Without other states pledging their subordination, the emperor lost more or less all their legitimacy as the supposed "ruler of all under heaven."<sup>33</sup>

While the Qing court had desperately tried to keep up appearances throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the situation hit a climax in 1895 which basically marked the end of Chinese delusions of tianxia. In 1895, the Qing were forced to accept the independence of long-standing tributary, Korea, as well accept the cession of Taiwan to Japan, as a result of losing to Japan when trying to enforce their sovereignty. As with past treaties, the emperor tried

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<sup>32</sup> Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2022), 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

keeping the humiliation a secret in order to not look weak and thereby non-deserving of the Mandate of Heaven, but also to keep the illusion of tianxia intact. It did not take long however for the news to be broken and the conservative scholar class to be up in arms. Earlier in the year, due to concessions out of the Qing's reliance on Western military power, the Qing had started receiving foreign envoys in the Forbidden City, as was formerly only reserved for representatives willing to kowtow to the emperor. With Western envoys no longer being treated as second-rate citizens in China, the 'Shimonoseki Treaty' signed with Japan served as the beginning of the end of traditional Chinese politics.<sup>34</sup>

What followed the Shimonoseki Treaty was a turbulent time in which anti-foreign sentiments skyrocketed, due to increased Western control of the Qing empire. It led to a people's uprising emanating from Shandong which has been dubbed the "Boxer Rebellion" in English. The rebellion, not able to compete with the military strength of the "allied forces," failed in 1901. When this happened, the emperor was forced to sign an array of reforms (dubbed the "New Policies") related to ushering in Western political theory in place of traditional Chinese Confucian teachings. At the time this happened many Chinese scholars had to some extent accepted Western conceptions of international relations. They understood the "Law of Nations" and the idea of sovereignty, but they had also learned that in spite of all the laws that the West would preach and cite when beneficial, power proved supreme in the end. Had the Qing state ever attempted half of the transgressions towards European states that they themselves had experienced, European states-people would be crying violations on agreed upon rights, but in the end, firepower always trumped laws and rights. Many conservative scholars though, were at this point still insistent upon the "natural order" of tianxia.<sup>35</sup>

This is the experience upon which contemporary Chinese conceptions of sovereignty were formed. Bill Hayton calls the Chinese conception "sovereignty fundamentalism." He describes it as such: "a hybrid of Confucian chauvinism and American legalism. It melds premodern ideas of the cultural pre-eminence of the zhongguo with Western ideas of fixed borders and independence." Hayton points to the Chinese word for sovereignty: "Zhuquan," and its different connotation in Chinese. Zhuquan was initially chosen as the Chinese translation for 'sovereignty' by an American missionary named William A.P. Martin. He worked in the Zongli Yamen (the foreign office) in Beijing in the 1860's where he translated

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<sup>34</sup> Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2022), 71.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 73.

the book “Elements of International Law” by Henry Wheaton. Zhuquan does not, however, quite catch the same essence as the word sovereignty. A literal translation of Zhuquan would be something like “the authority of the ruler.” This means that the Chinese interpretation carries an implicit understanding that power is absolute and not relative - it is not focused internationally but domestically. It does not just refer to the formal boundaries of states and the right to not be territorially transgressed upon, but also the right to not be forced into complying with other nations’ norms such as international law and human rights.

The last aspect related to the construction of China during the late Qing reign is that of ethnicity/race. As mentioned earlier, the Qing empire was the result of thousands of years of conquest, diplomacy, and assimilation. Up until the ascension of the Qing in 1644, the people of the Zhongguo referred to themselves as subjects of the reigning dynasty or simply as “hua” (civilized). The term “Han” as an ethnic classification originates from inner-Asian steppe-people around the 5<sup>th</sup> century, who were probably inspired by the former Han dynasty and used it to describe its neighbors to the south. It was then introduced to the Zhongguo by the Manchus who founded the Qing dynasty. The term was used by the Manchus to differentiate and demarcate between the different conquered races of their empire.<sup>36</sup>

During the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century sociology as a field was making notable strides in the West, and one of the hot topics at the time was that of race. During this time, the Qing empire was experiencing a tightening in race tensions themselves. Due to the decline of the empire during the first half of the century of humiliation more and more people lost faith in the emperor, and at a time when people were becoming increasingly conscious of race more and more people started connecting their dislike or even hatred for the emperor to their race, the Manchu. In a way, this was already a break with traditional Chinese thinking. The idea of Zhongguo was based on cultural enlightenment and not race, therefore it was possible for anyone to become Hua (civilized). In the case of foreign conquerors, such as the Manchu’s who formed the Qing dynasty, they simply had to follow certain traditions and rituals in order to receive legitimacy, and so they did. The Mandate of Heaven contained no ethnic or racial stipulations and so a foreign entity would prove worthy of the mandate by pure virtue of being able to conquer and oust the former emperor (along with the traditions and rituals).<sup>37</sup>

There were prominent writers who advocated for the existence of a “yellow race,” which was an inclusive idea which saw all east-Asians under the same umbrella and was

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<sup>36</sup> Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2022), 81.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 95.

supposed to create unity between states such as China and Japan in opposition to the “white” aggressors. While this idea received considerable steam during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was the divisive Zhang Binglin who came to have the greatest influence on race thinking at the time. Unlike his largely like-minded colleagues of the reformist movement, Zhang denied the idea of legitimacy solely stemming from enlightened culture. He wanted to clearly differentiate between the Han and the Manchu etc. Zhang argued that lineage was more important than culture and referring to ancient historical texts, he argued that while the Han and the Manchu were the same “yellow” race, they were of different lineages as evidenced by their different surnames. Lineage and ancestry has always been very important in Chinese culture and had historically been a great conduit of conflict. By expanding the concept of lineage (zu) to the national stage, Zhang was able to sow the idea of conflict between the Han and the Manchu’s (the Hanzu and Manzu as he now called them) being not just possible but natural. As a finishing touch to his racist ideology, Zhang introduced the idea of the Yellow Emperor, who supposedly lived during the 27<sup>th</sup> century BC, as the common ancestor of the Hanzu. The Yellow Emperor was already seen as a folk hero of Chinese mythology and the founder of the Zhongguo, so he was a good target to promote national/ethnic unity.<sup>38</sup>

It was when the Qing emperor failed to resist the Western powers during the Boxer rebellion of 1900-1901 that Zhang’s ideology on race became the most prominent in the empire. Due to this, the Qing attempted to adjust to modern times and adopt the modern conception of the division of races and lineage. Soon after the empire fell, and with it, the formal structures of the past, along with philosophy and traditions deemed unfit for the modern age. But Zhang’s conception of the Han as a thousands of years old homogenous ethnicity stayed behind. It proved useful in rallying the people in the name of revolution (particularly against the barbarian Manchu’s),<sup>39</sup> and it has since proved useful for the CCP on countless occasions, which we will get into later.

Reform in the Qing empire had failed so revolution it became. What emerged from the ashes was a brand-new nation state, forged upon the blend of ideas and perceptions of the West and the thousands-year old civilization of the Zhongguo. Chinese identity is so much more than the events and concepts depicted here, but I have evaluated these as the most important factors relating to the formation of Chinese foreign policy today as well as

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<sup>38</sup> Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2022), 96-97.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 99.



analyzing official CCP statements related to it. There are smaller concepts here and there that have not been mentioned in this section but will be explained as we move along in the analysis.

## Communist China

Communism is a political ideology and therefore, as the ideology of the CCP, it naturally shapes its politics, including foreign policy. China's history however is unique and so is its brand and history of communism. Here, I would like to talk about that history and explain how it affects foreign policy today.

Like communism in general, China's history with it is quite short. Communism was officially birthed in China in 1927 when the Chinese civil war began, as the communist revolutionaries, led by Mao Zedong, decided to attempt to oust the sitting government. As mentioned above, this civil war ended in 1949 when the communists won and formed the PRC. 100 years is not long compared to the thousands of years that the Chinese civilization has existed, however the impact of communist ideology on Chinese society and national identity is extensive for a couple of reasons. Firstly, there is the fact that the country as it is known today (the PRC) was formed by the communists, and also that Mao framed it as the end of the century of humiliation, thereby aligning the success of China with the CCP and communism – this point has then only been further solidified as China (arguably inevitably) experienced the history breaking development that it did, following the civil war.<sup>40</sup>

The second factor has to do with social control. Ever since 1949, the CCP has been hard at work limiting speech while releasing communist propaganda. This means that people have been disallowed to share negative opinions on communism and the government, while being brainwashed as much as possible to appreciate these. I say brainwashing because it is not just propaganda in media but also programs in schools, and forced reeducation of minorities that has taken place through time, with the aim of shaping people's beliefs and culture. The prime example of this ideological conflict is the cultural revolution that Mao started in 1966 which lasted 10 whole years. Mao's justifications aside, this was perhaps the most drastic attempt to reshape Chinese national identity that the CCP ever undertook. Basically, it included the destruction of Chinese cultural products that were not related to

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<sup>40</sup> David G. Atwill and Yurong Y. Atwill, *Sources in Chinese History: Diverse Perspectives from 1644 to the Present* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 254.

communist China as well as the arrests of people seen as opposed to the government, the “revolution” resulted in countless armed conflicts over the 10-year period.<sup>41</sup>

### Nationalism in China

Until the death of Mao, nationalism in the PRC was largely based on Marxism, fueled by the Century of Humiliation and the extreme propaganda of the period. Mao had also fostered a cult of personality which saw him as a nearly untouchable, larger than life character, which garnered legitimacy in itself. When Mao died, Marxism had already faded as a driver of nationalism, and faith in the CCP was relatively low. It was then up to the CCP and Mao’s successor Deng Xiaoping to regain legitimacy. It was during this time that China started opening up to the West, and Western ideas such as democracy started gaining traction in the country. This movement more or less ended in 1989, when Chinese aspirations for democracy culminated in the massive 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, which sought democracy and liberal freedoms among other things. As a communist party, the CCP’s survival is endangered by ideas such as democracy. The sheer size of the 1989 protest threatened the CCP and in response they shut down the protests with the military.<sup>42</sup>

Following the “Tiananmen Square Massacre,” as it has been dubbed in the West, China and the West had a period of falling out. The West was both indignant and opportunistic in the face of the “massacre” which made Western countries sanction China in order to pressure the regime even more. Especially in the face of communism’s fall in Europe, it became almost a given that the CCP was bound to lose power sooner rather than later. The Tiananmen protests, however, taught the CCP that openness to Western ideas did not appease the population, rather it made them vie for more. It was in response to this that the CCP once again tightened its social control. This was arguably the start of nationalism in China, as we know it today.<sup>43</sup>

The CCP has always been aware of the ideological pressure it is under and has therefore always partaken in social control in order to stay popular. During a period in the 80’s where relations between the PRC and the West were relatively good and improving but after the Tiananmen massacre the fate of China took a distinct turn. As the world sanctioned and criticized China, the CCP was tightening its social control once again. This included

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<sup>41</sup> Xian Yue Li, “Another Eye to Inspect the Cultural Revolution in China,” *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 16, no. 1–3 (2017): 260–73, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15691497-12341433>, 261–262.

<sup>42</sup> Shameer Modongal, “Development of Nationalism in China,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1235749, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2016.1235749>, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

things such as a new education plan with a focus on “patriotic” education in 1994, as well as an increase in propaganda that antagonized the West. It was in this context we got to see the results of a generation of social control under Mao. Nationalism in the 90’s was less based on Marxism but was probably most of all fueled by the story of the century of humiliation. The CCP has always presented itself as the liberator of China from the perils of the infamous ‘century’ and have in that connection made sure to play up the tragedy of it as well as antagonize the West and Japan. Part of that story includes the greatness that used to be China (the Zhongguo), which is why international reputation is very important. This is arguably why when China was being criticized following Tiananmen, it ignited these sentiments of “patriotic” nationalism, as Modongal calls it.<sup>44</sup> Modern nationalism grew in China from this point forward and has today become a strong force in Chinese foreign policy, which is something we will explore later.

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<sup>44</sup> Shameer Modongal, “Development of Nationalism in China,” *Cogent Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1235749, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2016.1235749>, 5.

## Analysis

In this section I wish to bring the scope to contemporary China, specifically China during the Xi administration. The goal here is to connect the forementioned concepts of Chinese national identity to the direction of foreign policy today. The way I intend to do this is by looking at two different concepts, namely nationalism and sovereignty, how they are related to national identity, and how they affect foreign policy today. Finally, instead of talking about concepts affecting foreign policy, I will look at China's policy on Taiwan and apply concepts of national identity to that case.

### Nationalist Pressure

It has been explained how nationalism evolved after the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 to become more "patriotic," due to tightening of social control and the release of a patriotic education plan. All while China was being sanctioned and snubbed by the West, which angered nationalists due to the importance they place on international reputation. Studies have since shown a linkage between the 1994 "educational" campaign and more hawkish nationalist sentiments. Further studies have shown a link between an increase in nationalism and more assertive Chinese foreign policy and one that is less open to cooperate in the international arena.<sup>45</sup> Here I wish to show an example of how nationalism has affected Chinese foreign policy.

The Senkaku/Diaoyu islands is a tiny island chain close to equal distance between Taiwan and the closest Japanese island. The islands were annexed by Japan in the first Sino/Japanese war of 1894-95. Unlike other territory Japan took from the Qing empire, the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands were not returned in the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco. Beijing has since claimed that the islands have been a part of China since ancient times. The islands make up a meager 7 km<sup>2</sup> of land, however oil, fish, and a strategic location in terms of shipping made China attempt reasserting its claim to the islands in 1978. For decades, (perhaps due to China's relatively weak position back then,) the conflict was relatively quiet and nothing much happened other than some fishing disputes and an increase in anti-Japanese sentiments in China.<sup>46</sup>

The dispute was reignited again in 2012 when Japan bought some of the islands from

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<sup>45</sup> Jessica Chen Weiss, "How Hawkish Is the Chinese Public? Another Look at 'Rising Nationalism' and Chinese Foreign Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 119 (2019): 679–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1580427>, 682.

<sup>46</sup> Zhouxiang Lu, *Chinese National Identity in the Age of Globalisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 167.

a private Japanese owner. This made the issue surface in Chinese news and the result was large-scale public and diplomatic protests in China. Basically, it was the same nationalist response as we saw in the 70's, except now it was adjusted to the scale and intensity of the nationalist sentiments of 2012. By 2012 the rise of “cyber-nationalism” was also well underway, meaning that the properties of the internet had provided incredible reach and popularity to nationalist sentiments, which are readily available all over the Chinese internet. To this day, CCP officials are briefed daily on the sentiments shared on nationalist forums.<sup>47</sup>

The nationalist outrage that flared up online and in the streets in the shape of protests was so extreme that it prompted the CCP to react in a hawkish way in order to appease the public, many of whom were calling for military action. The CCP's calculated response was to send over 800 ships into the islands' territorial waters in 2013, in order to assert that China does not accept Japan's claim over the islands. The number of Chinese vessels traversing the islands' waters vary, however, the situation is still deadlocked like this, and Japan retains formal control of the islands. It is not like the CCP had forgotten about the islands; however, it was not until the issue was revived that public sentiment made Beijing spring into action.<sup>48</sup>

The CCP has produced a couple of slogans to describe their objectives in international relations. Two major ones are “responsible great power” and “peaceful development.”<sup>49</sup> The slogans speak for themselves; however, it is interesting to note how these objectives seem to run counter to the type of action that the PRC has taken in regard to the island chain dispute. Not only are Chinese ships patrolling the islands' waters to this day, but in the weeks following Beijing's initial statement, China sanctioned and even made diplomatic sleights towards Japan. Even on an economical level, this does not make sense for the CCP, which is what makes it even more clear that the policy is carried out, not in accordance with CCP objectives, but despite them. This is further evidenced by the fact that Beijing retracted the sanctions and attempted to mend the relationship shortly after the issue quieted down.<sup>50</sup>

On one hand, one could argue that Beijing's response was tame, at least in comparison to what some nationalists were calling for, but even these actions have reverberating effects. Not only does it generally increase tensions between the two governments, but just like

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<sup>47</sup> Zhouxiang Lu, *Chinese National Identity in the Age of Globalisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 168.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>49</sup> Jinghan Zeng, *Slogan Politics: Understanding Chinese Foreign Policy Concepts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 6.

<sup>50</sup> Zhouxiang Lu, *Chinese National Identity in the Age of Globalisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 169.

Chinese nationalists are provoked by the actions of foreign countries, so are the Japanese equivalents. The result is inevitably that the same kind of nationalist pressure will arise in Japan. For example, after China's response, then-prime minister Shinzo Abe started calling for an amendment to the Japanese constitution that would allow Japan to increase its military strength in the face of Chinese aggression.<sup>51</sup>

I wanted to use this example because it highlights the effect of nationalism based on, not only the typical national pride/sensitivity due to foreign interventions during the century of humiliation, but also the classic Japanese hate which has long been a strong sentiment among many Chinese nationalists.<sup>52</sup> The way of viewing this through the scope of national identity would be that the CCP did a great effort to foster a national identity that would inspire nationalism. They did this by disseminating the story of China as a 4000-year-old homogenous civilization which lived in peace and superiority until 1849, when the West and Japan started abusing the empire, until Mao and the CCP was finally able to win power and save the country in 1949. The effort to indoctrinate Chinese citizens was then sharpened in 1994, and eventually it led to a burgeoning nationalist movement in China, just as intended. The issue now, however, is that the movement has grown large and influential enough to actually shape the foreign policy of the CCP, which has forced the CCP to go against its other interests. The phenomenon has been studied in multiple papers, and even CCP officials have expressed a need to cater to the nationalist segment.<sup>53</sup>

### Sovereignty, Multilateralism and Security Policy

The year is 2009 and the countries of the United Nations are preparing to hopefully finalize a comprehensive agreement on combating the world's climate crisis, in Copenhagen during the 'COP-15.' Barack Obama knew it was going to be hard to have any agreement ratified in the US Congress. He had seen how the Kyoto treaty 12 years prior had been shut down in his own country, in part due to concerns of other countries not living up to their promises. In order to avoid this same fate, the Obama administration included a clause in the agreement to ensure that countries' pledges were "measurable, reportable and verifiable." Motivations to combat the climate crisis were high at the time and so most countries were willing to sacrifice

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<sup>51</sup> Zhouxiang Lu, *Chinese National Identity in the Age of Globalisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 168.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>53</sup> Jessica Chen Weiss, "How Hawkish Is the Chinese Public? Another Look at 'Rising Nationalism' and Chinese Foreign Policy," *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 119 (2019): 679–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1580427>, 694.

a lot for the better of our climate. This included developed countries pledging to cut carbon emissions by 80% and furthermore funding the development of green energy in developing countries. There was one important country however, who was not okay with this new clause.<sup>54</sup>

China claimed to be invested in contributing to the solving of the climate crisis however once the agreement came to include mechanisms to verify countries' pledges, China was no longer willing to participate. The Chinese representative at the summit, He Yafei preached about how the developed countries of the world were to blame for the climate crisis and that China was only willing to make the vague commitment of beginning to cut emissions "as soon as possible." He then demanded a recess for him to convene with his superior, but the negotiations were deadlocked after this stance by China and amounted to nothing in the end. Following the event, attendees all convened that China seemed to have been determined to tank the negotiations from the start. To many it was clear when the CCP decided to send He Yafei, a second-ranked official from the foreign ministry instead of Wen Jiabao, the Chinese prime minister who was refusing to attend because he supposedly did not receive an invitation to the meeting. Only a few attendees have since tried to put blame elsewhere, but they all come from nations that are thought to be under Beijing's influence.<sup>55</sup>

To most politicians and pundits at the time, China's stance and the behavior of its delegation was a mystery. China had expressed interest in cutting carbon emissions and had already taken great strides to facilitate such a change, so why would they be so adamant on not establishing any numeric goals. I would propose two reasons: A realist explanation and a constructivist one based on national identity. Realist theory in international relations contends that nation states are driven by the pursuit of power and the survival of the state. China, being the world's manufacturing hub, was highly reliant on cheap coal and since the CCP does and did put great importance on China's continued rapid growth, they were very hesitant to jeopardize it by committing to climate targets.<sup>56</sup> We have already discussed the insecure rule of the CCP, and even though this is supposed to be the realist explanation, we can talk about how ancient Chinese ideas such as legitimacy based on competence and so on are creating pressure to uphold this rapid economic growth. While most academics would agree with this explanation, it far from captures the full picture. China was already in the process of investing in green energy solutions, so why would that be the case if all they cared about was

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<sup>54</sup> Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2022), 35.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 36.

power/their own development. On the other hand, if China was interested in cooperating/reducing emissions, why tank the COP-15 meeting?

This is where China's uniqueness comes into play, its national identity. We spoke of China's unique conception of sovereignty, and this is an example of how it forges China's foreign policy today. To summarize; Chinas conception of sovereignty is what Bill Hayton refers to as "sovereignty fundamentalism." It is shaped by two factors: China's historical worldview of the Zhongguo as the culturally superior center of the world. Furthermore, the Chinese word for sovereignty (as coined by an American Jesuit) has connotations which imply that the authority of the state is absolute and relative, which fits neatly with the idea of the Zhongguo and may explain why zhuquan has been interpreted the way it has. The other factor is the way in which the concept of sovereignty and Western political philosophy was introduced to China. It cannot be stressed enough how traumatic the experience of the first half of the century of humiliation was for the entirety of the Qing empire. The trauma has had many effects on China's national identity and one of them is its extreme opposition to colonialism and general interference in other countries.

A great piece of evidence for this unique conception of sovereignty can be found a few years back, in relation to the to South China Sea conflict. Here China has for years been creating man-made islands, which often do not amount to more than some "rocks barely emerging above sea level." The issue here is that China is trying to use these islands to claim maritime space, which is not in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). We know it is not in accordance because the issue was brought to court in Hague in 2016 and China was deemed largely unjustified in its undertakings in the South China Sea. Beijing's response confused many people at the time. In response to the ruling, Beijing decided to take the issue up in their domestic "Supreme People's Court," wherein China's claim of the "Nine-Dash Line" as their sea-border was ruled legitimate, which Beijing now cites as evidence of their claim. Here we truly see how national sovereignty supersedes "international law" in Chinese philosophy.<sup>57</sup> Some may point out that the ruling of the Chinese court is probably the result of CCP interest rather than any deliberation based on law, however that misses the point. If nothing else, this court case is a message from Beijing about how China views international relations, and I suggest we listen.

Referring to COP-15: It is hard to determine how much of Beijing's lack of

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<sup>57</sup> Francois Godement, "Expanded Ambitions, Shrinking Achievements: How China Sees the Global Order," March 2017, 9.



commitment was attributable to the constructivist versus the realist explanation, but the fact that China agreed to the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016 should be an indication - the significant difference in the agreement being that contributions are “nationally determined.”<sup>58</sup> It is clear however, that motivations to combat the climate crisis were higher than ever during the 2009 summit, and it leaves one wondering how things could have been different if UN nation leaders understood China’s philosophy earlier, at the very least we had not wasted seven supposedly crucial years before making multilateral progress to save the climate. The Copenhagen summit took place in 2009, which was a few years before Xi Jinping took over as chairman of the CCP (2013). Therefore, I have another example of foreign policy being directed by “zhuquan,” with the purpose of hammering home the point, as well as proving that this is a philosophy that both supersedes and continues with Xi. Furthermore, the example is interesting as it sees the influence of two aspects of Chinese national identity pit against each other to create a quite contradictory stance on UN intervention.

In the past few decades, there has been a new development in security policy within the UN, and China seems to be mostly unhappy with it. Historically, the UN Charter only authorized the deployment of UN troops in case of a risk to “international peace and security.” During the 90’s, however, the interpretation of this edict became increasingly loose. A new concept was emerging in the context of international peace, namely the “responsibility to protect” (R2P). R2P functions as a loophole for the UN to intervene in countries without their consent in case the state is unable to keep its civilians safe, which would officially be a violation of the country’s sovereignty. Since China is one of the 5 permanent members on the UN Security Council, it has the unique power to veto any military intervention by the UN. When the UN started proposing R2P interventions, China mostly went along and only vetoed a single case based on a country’s right to sovereignty. When a UN commission suggested amending the UN Charter to include R2P as a justification for intervention, China first denied the idea, based on their philosophy of zhuquan, however this is where another aspect comes into play.<sup>59</sup>

As previously mentioned, the CCP’s political legitimacy is mainly based on two things: Performance and nationalism – in this case it is the CCP’s quest for the latter which drove them to be very strategic about when and when not to veto things and be the spoiler of resolutions, all to not damage their international reputation. It also drove them in part to

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<sup>58</sup> Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2022), 37.

<sup>59</sup> Tim Nicholas Rühlig, “Chinese Approaches to International Security,” *China’s Foreign Policy Contradictions*, 2022, 40–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197573303.003.0003>, 41-42.

reenter the negotiations and eventually sign the amendment to the UN Charter, once it had been sufficiently changed/watered down. This happened in 2005 and since then China has increased its use of vetoes in R2P cases, specifically 7 out of 16 of all vetoes ever cast by China have been to oppose R2P interventions. This is very telling as 16 vetoes are not a lot compared to other countries on the Security Council and almost half of them are just related to R2P. What we have then is a very contradictory stance where China both accepts many R2P interventions by not vetoing, but also often directly reiterates their philosophy and stance on intervention in general.<sup>60</sup> It is a battle between the philosophy of *zhuquan* and the CCP's need for legitimacy that shapes this foreign policy and the consequences of it are nothing to scoff at, specifically China's determination to influence the shaping of international law and customs will be of significance in the future.

### The Taiwan Issue

I find that I would need a very good reason to not talk about the Taiwan issue, seeing as though it is probably the longest standing and most highly prioritized foreign policy issue of the PRC. It is an issue that for a long time confused many observers around the world since there was little in our academic toolbox to explain Chinese motivations. Since then, the issue has been analyzed to death and it is clear that national identity plays a role in the PRC's policy on the issue in multiple ways.

Let me start off by providing a short summary of the Taiwan controversy. When the CCP won the civil war of 1927-1949, the president of the ROC, Chiang Kai-Shek, fled with his supporters to Taiwan, and basically stayed as the government of the island, thereby splitting China into two entities with different governments. Ever since then, the CCP has prioritized "unifying" China while undermining the legitimacy of Taiwan. The CCP's official stance is that Taiwan is not a nation-state, but simply a province of China, meanwhile Taiwan enjoys full autonomy and many Taiwanese do not see themselves as "PRC Chinese." The issue has been pulled to the forefront in recent decades due to the CCP putting increasing pressure on the conflict by being more and more invasive of Taiwan air and sea space, while militarily preparing for an invasion of the island.<sup>61</sup> Xi Jinping himself linked "peaceful unification" with Taiwan as a necessity for China's "national rejuvenation," which is Xi's macro goal for China, he even went so far as to set the 100-year anniversary of the CCP in

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<sup>60</sup> Tim Nicholas Rühlig, "Chinese Approaches to International Security," *China's Foreign Policy Contradictions*, 2022, 40–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197573303.003.0003>, 48.

<sup>61</sup> Christopher R. Hughes, *Taiwan and Chinese Nationalism: National Identity and Status in International Society* (London: Routledge, 2014), 1.

2049 as the target date for the rejuvenation to be complete.<sup>62</sup>

Before diving into what makes the CCP so interested in Taiwan I wish to talk about the CCP's claims to the island to begin with. The Chinese government has a page on their website which conveniently displays their arguments as to why Taiwan "belongs" to the PRC. What I notice about their justification is that it is mostly based on whatever international-legal resolutions that have taken place and which suggest the PRC is correct. The examples mentioned are the Shimonoseki Treaty, the Cairo Declaration and UN resolution 2758. What is lacking with these is that they don't deal with the real question at hand – how can China claim Taiwan when they have never conquered it? They also point to old international laws of "succession" as proof that the ROC cannot be recognized as a state.<sup>63</sup> If we were to make the argument about the legality of things in terms of international law, one could just as well argue that the Qing empire did not actually fulfill the proper duties in order to make claim to the island as Hughes points out.<sup>64</sup> The website does say that Taiwan has been a part of "China" since "ancient times," but what does that matter. Taiwan has also been under the control of Spanish, Dutch, Japanese, and native rulers through the years. What matters is what happened most recently, and that was the civil war which basically ended in a stalemate and cooled down so much that the PRC even engaged in trade with Taiwan eventually.<sup>65</sup> But if the civil war has ended, then we would have two different states since the PRC maintains no control of Taiwan whatsoever.

The CCP argues that Taiwan has been a part of "China" since ancient times, as if that should give them any claim over the island. A Chinese dynasty did gain official control over the island long ago, but just like with much of what is today known as "China" it was conquered by the Chinese, or should I say the 'Zhongguoren.' Since the PRC's original claim to the island, like with many of its other provinces comes from hundreds to thousands of years old conquest, it should accept that Taiwan is currently under the control of another entity, and unless conquered, it cannot be claimed.<sup>66</sup> This argument is based on a national

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<sup>62</sup> Carlos Garcia and Yew Lun Tian, "China's XI Vows 'reunification' with Taiwan," Reuters, October 9, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-xi-says-reunification-with-taiwan-must-will-be-realised-2021-10-09/>.

<sup>63</sup> Questions and answers concerning the taiwan question (2):What is the one-china principle? what is the basis of the one-china principle?, accessed October 15, 2023, [http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/more/20220812Taiwan/202208/t20220815\\_10743591.htm](http://eu.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/more/20220812Taiwan/202208/t20220815_10743591.htm).

<sup>64</sup> Christopher R. Hughes, *Taiwan and Chinese Nationalism: National Identity and Status in International Society* (London: Routledge, 2014), 52.

<sup>65</sup> "History," Government Portal of Republic of China, Taiwan, accessed October 15, 2023, [https://www.taiwan.gov.tw/content\\_3.php](https://www.taiwan.gov.tw/content_3.php).

<sup>66</sup> Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2022), 184.

identity of China as a thousands of years old nation-state that the CCP are the current inheritors of. As we know, based on the part about the construction of China, this is very misleading. When researching CCP explanations for their claim to Taiwan they also often refer to cultural and ethnic similarities along with shared history. This is an interesting look into how the CCP appropriates history in order to fit its agenda, in this case we see how they like to present China as one constant, homogenous 4000-year-old nation-state, in order to come up with as many excuses as possible to try and convince the world of their claim to Taiwan. The PRC's claims to Taiwan are dodgy, nevertheless Taiwan is clearly important to the CCP and now we shall explore why.

The first thing that is important to understanding Taiwan's importance for the CCP, is the constant pressure that the CCP finds itself in and how it affects policy direction. There are two factors at play here. Firstly, the Mandate of Heaven, which is a doctrine that has affected Chinese rulers since the Zhou dynasty in the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC and the CCP is no different. As mentioned, the Mandate introduced legitimacy based on performance to the Zhongguo and hundreds of years later the idea was fortified by Confucianism. Specifically, it was the famous scholar Mencius who connected Confucianist tenets of responsibility within societal hierarchies to the government in his writings. This idea is what has allowed new rulers to overthrow the old and still receive legitimacy as the new emperor, even if originally a barbarian (foreigner). It is however also this idea that has encouraged countless of rebellions throughout the history of Chinese civilization, both elite coups and peasant uprisings.<sup>67</sup>

The CCP also in a way play into this idea by claiming legitimacy as the Marxist liberator of the working class and of China from Western exploitation. With this being said, it has been noted by observers that legitimacy based on Marxist ideology has more or less died out and is now replaced by other types of legitimacy.<sup>68</sup> The CCP found themselves in the Cold War as soon as they had won power. Not that China played a huge role in the Cold War, but it has been clear since day one that most major powers in the world were in stark opposition to the CCP on an ideological level. The US in particular was putting a great effort into dispelling communism, and when communism officially fell in Europe the pressure became even greater. As the ruling party, the CCP prioritizes staying in power. This is what

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<sup>67</sup> Daniel A. Bell, "Political Legitimacy in China: A Confucian Approach," *East Asian Perspectives on Political Legitimacy*, 2016, 78–106, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316466896.005>, 81.

<sup>68</sup> Yuchao Zhu, "'Performance Legitimacy' and China's Political Adaptation Strategy," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 16, no. 2 (2011): 123–40, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-011-9140-8>, 126.

has motivated the CCP to engage in so much social control through the years,<sup>69</sup> one of the great, intended consequences being the rise of legitimacy based on nationalism.

What I wish to imprint with this is that the CCP is in a way a very sensitive regime, due to pressure from the many threats that face the existence of the party, partially based on national identity, and partially based on ideology. This is where Taiwan comes in. Taiwan exists as a thorn in the eye of the national identity and self-understanding that the CCP has been aggressively trying to promote since its inception. The CCP presents themselves as the saviors of China and the architects of China's rise. In fact, typical CCP jargon includes the claim that it is only "socialism with Chinese characteristics," as they call their ideology now, which is able to develop China, given China's supposed uniqueness.<sup>70</sup> Taiwan, however, stands as a giant contradiction to all these positions. Not only was Taiwan developed with democracy and capitalism, it was developed by the CCP's very enemies, who they claim to have saved China from. Furthermore, Taiwan is a burgeoning economy, ranked 21<sup>st</sup> in the world in GDP per capita, which was built upon the so called "Taiwan Miracle" which started already in the 50's.<sup>71</sup> This means that not only does Taiwan have a better economy than the PRC, but it also developed much faster without the many decades of mortifying experiences, such as the "Great Leap Forward" and the Cultural Revolution under Mao's rule. Due to all these factors, it is in the CCP's greatest interest to undermine Taiwan's legitimacy and unify with the island.

Taiwan has been an important issue for the CCP for a long time, and the importance of the matter has caused the CCP to focus a lot of propaganda around the issue. Since the issue has been highlighted such in recent decades, it has become an important issue for the nationalists as well, who care a lot about China's international reputation. Just look at the outrage caused over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Sure, the factor that Japan is the adversary in that case has surely caused the issue to become more inflamed in China, however Taiwan has been spoken about much more than any other contested territory in China, and the propaganda machine has been hard at work on the issue compared to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands for example. Taiwan has been presented as a huge priority for the CCP, which means that at this point, it is not nationalist pressure that controls China's objective of "peaceful

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<sup>69</sup> Yuchao Zhu, "'Performance Legitimacy' and China's Political Adaptation Strategy," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 16, no. 2 (2011): 123–40, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-011-9140-8>, 130.

<sup>70</sup> "Xi: Only Socialism with Chinese Characteristics Can Develop China," [new.cgtn.com](http://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514e3151544e78457a6333566d54/share_p.html), April 5, 2018, [https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514e3151544e78457a6333566d54/share\\_p.html](https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514e3151544e78457a6333566d54/share_p.html).

<sup>71</sup> Christopher R. Hughes, *Taiwan and Chinese Nationalism: National Identity and Status in International Society* (London: Routledge, 2014), 129.

reunification,” it is their own motivations, specifically it has become an important issue for Xi Jinping personally since he likely wants to stay in power forever.<sup>72</sup>

With this being said, nationalist pressure has been linked to increasing hostility by the PRC.<sup>73</sup> This is mostly just in the shape of harsh words and increased military drills around Taiwan. An example would be when American speaker of the house, Nancy Pelosi, visited Taiwan in 2021. This caused a big uproar from both nationalists and the CCP alike, and in response the Chinese government once again increased military drills.<sup>74</sup> It is important to note that military drills do not accomplish much, and is mostly just for show, specifically a show of strength for Chinese nationalists. If we compare this to the last time a high-standing American politician visited Taiwan in 1997, the response went from a murmur to a show of guns. Sure, part of Beijing’s increasing assertiveness can be linked to the fact that China has and continues to grow its economy and military and that China was more tacit before due to its lower relative power, but nevertheless studies do suggest that nationalism based on CCP propaganda causes China to respond more harshly, if only for show, to Taiwan provocations.<sup>75</sup>

The Taiwan issue definitely affects China’s overall foreign policy agenda. First of all, China’s strategy of delegitimizing Taiwan has shaped Chinese engagement with nations via its “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI). China prides itself on the notion that there are strings attached to the economic investments it makes via the BRI. Observers however have noted that many countries, especially in South America and Africa have changed their official stance on their recognition of Taiwan after receiving investments through the BRI. This has been dubbed as “dollar diplomacy” as it is a way to pay for diplomatic concessions. In Africa today, it is basically a must to support the one-China policy in recognition of the PRC.<sup>76</sup>

Another big consequence of China’s Taiwan policy comes from China’s insistence that no other nations legitimize Taiwan, since it causes China to have worse relations with many countries. The PRC likes to sanction and condemn countries that recognize Taiwan. The biggest example of this is definitely the US, who has been the main force to keep Taiwan

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<sup>72</sup> T. Y. Wang and Su-feng Cheng, “Threat Perception and Taiwan’s 2020 Presidential Election,” *Protests, Pandemic, and Security Predicaments*, 2023, 121–45, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-33776-5\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-33776-5_4), 252.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 252.

<sup>74</sup> David Rising, “China’s Response to Pelosi Visit a Sign of Future Intentions,” AP News, August 19, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-china-beijing-congress-8857910a1e44cefa70bc4dfd184ef880>.

<sup>75</sup> Ruihua Lin and Shu Keng, “China’s Policy toward Taiwan in the Xi Era,” *Protests, Pandemic, and Security Predicaments*, 2023, 251–76, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-33776-5\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-33776-5_8), 267.

<sup>76</sup> Maria Adele Carrai, “Promoting the One-China Policy: The PRC’s Economic Statecraft in Africa,” *China and Taiwan in Africa*, 2022, 201–22, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-95342-3\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-95342-3_12), 205.

independent and semi-recognized since the 50's. This has undoubtedly made US-Sino relations much more tense than they would otherwise have been.<sup>77</sup> We have spoken about China's goals of development and increased power in the international community. It is therefore interesting to note how, once again, China is going against its overall objectives of peaceful development, being a responsible great power and having a good standing in the international community, all in order to cling to the hope of "reunification" based on some Chinese national identity that was mostly invented during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There are of course also "realist" reasons as to why China covets Taiwan. These include Taiwan's strategic position in terms of Chinese security policy as well as the economic boom it would cause to integrate Taiwan.<sup>78</sup> My argument however is that we cannot rely on practical, realist arguments alone to explain China's complicated relationship with Taiwan. The concepts of CCP legitimacy and national identity are what help us understand why Taiwan is so important to the CCP and why hostilities have increased in recent years.

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<sup>77</sup> Zhouxiang Lu, *Chinese National Identity in the Age of Globalisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 166.

<sup>78</sup> Christopher R. Hughes, *Taiwan and Chinese Nationalism: National Identity and Status in International Society* (London: Routledge, 2014), 93.

## Conclusion

China's rise has had a great impact on the world in terms of economy, security, and international politics, and will probably increasingly continue to do so. It is for this reason that it is relevant to understand China. The purpose of this paper was to focus on national identity as a driver of Chinese foreign policy which could ideally help politicians in their dealings with China, both in terms of understanding China in order to facilitate successful diplomacy, but also in order to be able to predict Chinese responses to policy initiatives of other countries or international organizations.

National identity is basically what separates one country from another, and it is therefore helpful in interpreting Chinese motivations when other theories do not seem to capture the full picture, for example it was shown how realist motivations are identifiable in much if not all of the examples analyzed. However, if one only assumes realist motivations in for example China's stance on Taiwan, then one is bound to misunderstand the situation which could lead to unsuccessful diplomacy for a politician for example.

National identity is a very vast concept, and it was not possible to present and analyze every possible aspect of Chinese national identity. What was presented was a couple of very influential concepts, that focused on the political side of national identity, the purpose being that this aspect seemed both influential and easy to connect to foreign policy direction.

We were able to discover that China has a unique understanding of state sovereignty based on its, arguably unideal, translation long ago, along with the context in which the Qing empire was introduced to the concept. In the analysis it was shown how this unique understanding plays a big role in China's foreign policy, specifically in its participation in the UN, where China is dancing a tight rope between being an influential member of the international community with a good reputation and staying resolute on its opinion of sovereignty. As we discovered, failure to understand Chinese sentiments caused the breakdown of negotiations on climate control in 2009.

We also looked at how the CCP puts great effort into shaping national identity, originally just to facilitate legitimacy and popularity of the CCP, but with the explicit purpose of promoting nationalism in newer years, in order to gain legitimacy. What we then saw was the great success of CCP social control in fostering "patriotic" nationalism based on the national identity that the CCP has constructed. The result has been a reactive process where nationalism has become so strong and influential in China that the CCP is being swayed by the opinions espoused by nationalists in forums and protests. Basically, the CCP constructed a



certain national identity which was so successful/influential that it inspired nationalism which now affects CCP foreign policy.

Finally, we looked at the CCP's policy around Taiwan as an example due to its importance for the CCP, and the prevalence of national identity in the CCP's stance on the island. It was concluded that national identity plays a role in the CCP's "sensitivity" which in part explains Taiwan's importance. Furthermore, we concluded that nationalism plays a role in China's show of aggression towards the island, and if the CCP had not already placed such importance on unifying with Taiwan, there is reason to believe that nationalist pressure might have pushed them in that direction anyway. The foreign policy implications of China's Taiwan policy are great. On one hand China's BRI is in part controlled by the dollar diplomacy that they engage in in order to delegitimize Taiwan. Another thing is how China is constantly increasing tensions between themselves and other countries due to their insistence that no one legitimize Taiwan .

The great takeaways from this paper are: How national identity is constructed both by circumstance but to a high extent also by different actors, such as scholars, writers and particularly governments. How Chinese national identity of today is very much a construct of the West interacting with China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And finally, that national identity plays an indirect role in Chinese foreign policy in the areas of multilateralism and hawkish foreign policy.

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