

## **CHINA'S PATRIOTIC EDUCATION: THE BEGINNING OF THE IDEOLOGICAL TURN**

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Edward Friedman (1996) argues that patriotic Nationalism constitutes a hoax; Friedman asserts that since the death of Mao 'Chinese people' somehow have found anti-imperialist patriotism as a problem that blocks them from achieving social development! Therefore for him Chinese patriotic education does not constitute an issue. He interprets Deng's 1992 southern tour as an expression of Deng's commitment to 'reform and openness'. Admittedly the tour was characterized by Deng's support to Confucian values, hierarchy and an authoritarian model of government. Nevertheless Friedman (1996) argues that "Confucian authoritarianism has not progressed in China despite its propagation by a regime that supposedly dominates the media." and then he moves on to make yet another a-historical assertion that "this failure [of Confucian authoritarianism in China] suggests that the democratic national identity in China has grown quite resistant to Party propaganda." (Friedman, 1996: 179) In a couple of places the writer had to write statements such as "...which is not to deny that Chinese authoritarians have a real base of support" which were intended to complement his deeply controversial statements about how the Chinese people were ready for democracy in a decade (90s) that admittedly saw the most pervasive patriotic education campaign in Chinese post-Mao history (He, 2003; Yoshida, 2006; Zhao, 2004).

Such emotional expositions lose the mark as is explored in this paper; Chinese patriotic nationalism does indeed constitute a trend in China today as it did in the 90s and in the 80s. Not only does it constitutes a dominant feature of Chinese post-Mao national construction from the level of state power down (Fritzgerald, 1996) but some scholars have even argued convincingly that it might be also forming at the grassroots level of Chinese society (He, 2003; Le, 2011). In this paper it is investigated whether China's patriotic education started in the 90s or earlier on. This is an attempt to clear some misconceptions that might arise from reading Suiseng Zhao's (2004) book 'A Nation-State by Construction.' It is found here that although the 80s saw liberal nationalist popular expressions which sought to advance a more 'western' future for China this should not automatically lead historians to assume that patriotism and patriotic education started in the 90s. This essay is organized in three parts: it starts with a brief examination of Balibar's theoretical concept of nationalism and introduces some terminology to be used in the paper. Afterwards it analyses in two

parts what is covered by Zhao's (2004) narrative, and what is not considered effectively in that narrative. The first part provides evidence from the 90s intense patriotic education campaign in the People's Republic of China and it also goes through Zhao's view of the 80s as providing space for expression of liberal opinions. The second analysis part outlines evidence of patriotism during the 80s; this is done by studying the textbook incident (1982), the 12<sup>th</sup> party congress and their aftermath.

### **Nation and Nationalism.**

Nation is a shared identification of members of a society; it stems from common language, culture, and behavioral traits as well as physical characteristics of the members (Balibar, 2000). According to Balibar (2000) national identities should not be considered fixed or natural but rather constructed and fluid, "there is no given identity; there is *only identification*. That is to say, there is only ever an uneven process and precarious *constructions, requiring symbolic guarantees* of varying degrees of intensity" (Balibar, 2000: 67). By 'symbolic' guarantees Balibar refer to a synchronized and continuous effort by state power to construct dominant conceptions of nation and identity in order to boost public harmony and regime legitimacy, or serve state interests in foreign policy; a key form of national state construction is the interpretation of national history which connotes the 'good' or 'bad', 'criminal' or 'human' actors of the past (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988). Those actors can be competing or allied states in a nation's international relations, or they may be sub-state groups or rebel organizations; whatever they may be, they do not possess any objective or significant moral character until the moment they become part of a certain version of a national history (White, 1980). National history consists of the specific choice and presentation of 'stories' and 'narratives' that produces certain consensual forms of national identification (He, 2003). Nation-building Institutions in our case can include education, media, museums and memorials, as well as events and traditions which are employed together in order to "dominate national collective memory and shape the core ideas of national identity," amongst the populace (ibid: 5). The term 'patriotic education' is derivative of this discourse: 'patriotic education' does not refer to the work of education institutions per se, but to the collective work of all state institutions to supply ready definitions of patriotism to the people.

This theoretical framework of historical and political analysis is very effective in the case of China which is famous for its long state history; as professor of Asian Studies in La Trobe University in Melbourne John Fitzgerald (1996: 57) characteristically wrote, "the state that is China has, ... , no given nation." The only reality in China is that it is 'always' a state, which in order to preserve its rule and legitimacy in different historical contexts has constructed a variety of historical narratives and therefore different forms of national identification. The 'nation' then differed for Mao's time in which it was characterized by a 'socialist internationalism' and a 'communist identification', and consecutively in Deng's time up to now, in which it is characterized by 'patriotic nationalism' and a 'patriotic nationalist identification' (Le, 2011).

The terms 'Patriotic nationalism' and 'liberal nationalism' which are used in this essay are not supposed to be fixed, as the notion of nation is 'fluid' and changes with the interests of political leadership (Bauman, 2016). The term liberal nationalism refer to a "doctrine of social solidarity based on symbols of nationhood," it includes civil, social and political rights and it is defined over a given territory (Zhao, 2004:

20). With the term ‘patriotic nationalism’ what is referred is a nationalism as defined by Whiting (1983): the nationalism that includes strong antagonisms and emotions: the love for one’s country and the hate for one’s enemies; in the case of China this could be also termed as anti-Japanese or anti-western nationalism. A key difference between those two forms of nationalism is that the second does not make demands for political freedoms and liberties.

### **Patriotic Education in the 90s and Liberal Dissent in the 80s.**

In his book, Suiseng Zhao (2004) argues that China’s patriotic education started officially in the 90s. His reading of Chinese ‘liberal nationalist’ intellectuals of the late 70s and early 80s in combination to expressions of liberalism in the Democracy wall movement in 1979 and the pro-democracy student demonstrations in 1986 and 1987 and the Tiananmen incident in 1989 lead him to conclude that CCP has lost ‘mass support’ for its legitimacy during the 80s (See also Hooper, 1985). He also argues that the regime’s legitimacy problems of the time were mapped into the rivalry between top leaders Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping who represented two opposing forces within the CCP during the 80s; one critical to modernizations and one in support respectively (Zhao, 2004). The rivalry between Deng Xiaoping and the People’s liberation army has also been cited for the first years of the 80s, with the PLA questioning the anti-Marxist character of Deng’s modernizations (Rose, 1998). Zhao finds hence that Patriotic Nationalism was re-invented by the CCP in the years *only after 1989* when the internal contestations have culminated; the years after the 1989 incident were admittedly the most repressive in China’s modern history<sup>1</sup>. Zhao’s (2004: 217) analysis hence points to Deng Xiaoping’s tour to the south of China as the official initiation of the Chinese patriotic education campaign; in his own words “Deng left Beijing for the south on January 17, 1992, arrived at Shenzhen on January 19, continued on to Zhuhai in the Pearl River Delta on January 23, and later visited the municipalities of Zhongshan and Shunde before leaving for Shanghai, then returning to Beijing by plane on February 20. The purpose of Deng’s southern tour, as later suggested by Beijing’s official publications, was *to end the ideological debate about whether reform should be “surnamed socialism or capitalism.”* The tour was used by Deng to show his strong support to Confucian values, hierarchy and an authoritarian model of government that assumes its strength from an enlightened leadership; The Singaporean authoritarian model and its success were also used as an example of what China should be striving for in Deng’s speeches (Friedman, 1996). Later Zhao (2004: 218) argues that in 1991 “the first official document on patriotic education, a Circular on Fully Using Cultural Relics to Conduct Education in Patriotism and Revolutionary traditions, was issued” by the CCP propaganda dept. He added that “the (patriotic) campaign was not carried out at full scale until Deng Xiaoping’s successful tour of southern China.”

It is true that in the 90s expressions of anti-foreign patriotism became dominant in popular culture; or as Barne (1996: 185) has also argued for the 90s “...nationalism [in China] is functioning as a form of consensus [even] beyond the bounds of official culture.” The 90s patriotic campaign involved erection of war

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<sup>1</sup>Indeed there is a consensus that after 1989 the CCP became far more assertive regarding its new patriotic ideology (see for instance Barne, 1996; He, 2003; He, 2013; Yoshida, 2006; Zhao, 2004); this was also the result of changing international climate with sanctions being imposed on China by the west including Japan, giving the CCP leadership the perception of being ‘under siege’ (He, 2013).

memorials that focused on Japanese atrocities during the Sino-Japanese war, it involved the making of patriotic films such as ‘Don’t Cry, Nanking’ (1996), and popular literature such as the ultranationalist anti-western and anti-Japanese bestseller ‘A China that can say no’ (1996) (中国可以说不); the book focused on all the ways that western and Japanese ‘devils’ have tried to disgrace China and stop her from becoming a strong nation in the international system (Zhang et al. 1996). The patriotic education of the 90s also involved primary, secondary and university education institutions especially after the January 1993 State Education Commission paper which outlined “A Program for China’s Education Reform and Development. (Zhao, 2004: 218)”. For instance as Zhao (2004) points out, in 1994 television stations copied tapes of history films to be sent and screened to all secondary schools even in remote areas. In those films Chinese patriots fought for China in the Japanese war of aggression; student essays were also written in Beijing schools where students commented on the aspects they liked about those films. In Chinese universities, and especially in the sociology departments books like 1946 ‘Xiangtu Zhongguo’ (乡土中国) written by Fei Xiaotong were reprinted in the 90s and became popular amongst students (Fei, 1946). ‘Xiangtu Zhongguo’ is fully in the spirit of China’s patriotic education. It shows that China is founded on traditional Confucian values which include filial piety explained as “fraternal submission,” as well as submission to elders; it also argues that because China is a *patrilineal society* in which men have more power than women, it is therefore a stable society in contrast to the west. The book also works to demonstrate effectively how Chinese society is not ruled by laws but by ritual. There Fei (1946: 98) also connects rituals with ancestor worship; because as he argues tradition and rituals are respected by the Chinese because they constitute “accumulated social experience.” All this evidence presented here is of course in full contrast to Friedman’s (1996) narrative that China was ready for democracy by the mid-90s.

Zhao’s (2004) research apart from providing ample evidence of expressions of patriotism in the 90s has also dedicated a lot of attention on the ‘liberal nationalist’ popular views of the 80s. Those opinions reflected what Sinologist Barne (1996: 197) called a ‘wounded national pride’ and posited as a solution to China’s problem at times its assimilation to the democracies of the west. Liberal nationalist opinions received considerable political tolerance from the CCP leadership at the time (Hoston, 2004). For instance in 1988, a six-part documentary titled ‘River Elegy’ was screened in Chinese television and later received approval from Zhao Ziyang (ibid). In this documentary symbols of Chinese patriotism such as the great wall were presented as indicating an ‘Asiatic mode of production’ which reserved China from reaching the achievements of western powers; the documentary clearly supported the need for the construction of a new China which would be more open to incorporating western elements to its culture (ibid). It was also in the 80s when liberal books such as Hayek’s ‘the constitution of liberty’ and Popper’s ‘Open Society and Its Enemies’ were translated in Chinese (Zhao, 2004). It was in that spirit that the pro-democracy student demonstrations which culminated in the 1989 Tiananmen incident took place.

After 1989 a large number of prodemocracy activists where either imprisoned or fled China while the rest hid from the authorities; amongst those who were blamed for inciting the late 80s democratic protests were intellectuals such as writer Liu Binyan and astrophysicist from Anhui province Fang Lizhi (Zhao, 2004) as well as student leaders of the 1989 movement including Wang Dan and Chai Ling (Benson, 2002). Fang Lizhi and his family found refuge in the US embassy after

1989, they had to stay there for over one year until they would be allowed to fly to the United States to seek asylum; Chai Ling also found refuge in the United States. The writers of the series ‘river elegy’ Xiaokang Su and Guantao Jin were also persecuted by the CCP, as a result they left China in 1989. The CCTV director of the series Xia Jun had to change his course to survive in the new patriotic nationalist environment of the 90s making documentaries such as ‘the peasants’ and ‘the east’, where the west was no more a solution to China’s national problem; in these series aired in 1992 and 1993 the ‘traditional Confucian values’ of a ‘xiangtu zhongguo’ were brought forth to criticize the modern decadent urban culture (Barme, 1996).

### **Chinese Patriotism: Evidence from the 80s.**

Zhao’s (2004) argument stems from a comparison of the popular culture, official decrees and demonstrations during the 80s and the 90s; the 90s proved to reproduce dominantly patriotic nationalist values while in the 80s there seemed to be more space for expression of liberal critical opinions. Nonetheless would it be correct to use this line of argument to assert that Chinese patriotic education was initiated in the 90s? Firstly Zhao’s (2004) assertion that the first official document on patriotic education appeared in 1991 is incorrect. Official statements on strengthening patriotic education were issued as early as the beginning of the 80s as a response to the so-called ‘textbook incident’, which as will be explored here constituted an important moment in the history of Chinese nationalism.

In the level of international relations the 80s marked the end Mao’s ‘socialist internationalism’ (Le, 2011); ‘Socialist internationalism’ here refers to the core China’s foreign policy during the 50s and 60s which demanded Chinese ideological expansion to US allies such as Japan by giving them concessions: such concessions given were for instance the good treatment of Japanese war criminals by the July 1956 Chinese war tribunals, or the fact that China never asked for reparations for the Sino-Japanese war during that period (He, 2002). Furthermore the 80s signified the culmination of radical Marxist ideology and the birth of Chinese pragmatism; as Hooper (1985: 204) argued in his early study the CCP leaders at the time were revising their use of the term ‘Marxism-Leninism’ or ‘socialism’ with progressives arguing that they were following “the correct socialist road” which included Deng’s modernization and ‘open door’ policies, in contrast to Mao’s previous ‘closed’ ultra-left policies. This official ‘revision-ism’ affected also the belief in Maoist notions of socialism at the base of the Chinese people including the Chinese youth (ibid). Indicatively in a survey conducted by the renmin ribao in the early 80s where Chinese people were asked: “Do you believe in Marxism?” some of them replied “no” (ibid: 203). This was a clear sign for the conservative circles of the Chinese deep-state including the people’s liberation army of ‘spiritual pollution’ which meant *lack of patriotism* and *lack of socialism* (Rose, 1998); the same argument was by 1982 also endorsed to a large extent by communist party leaders Hu Yaobang, Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang. The context of ideology in decay was very important for the return of Chinese nationalist patriotism<sup>2</sup> (aiguo zhuyi); the change was evident in the dominant revised version of socialism of the 80s which has now lost its purely internationalist Marxist coat and has become ‘socialism with *Chinese characteristics*’ (Gittings, 1989). The era of Chinese patriotism was inaugurated by the Chinese

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<sup>2</sup>See Gittings, 1989; Suzuki, 2009; Whiting, 1983 and Yoshida, 2006

response to the ‘text-book incident’ in 1982<sup>3</sup>; patriotic rhetoric was clearly present in the statements of the Chinese leaders in the 12<sup>th</sup> congress of the CCP which took place only months after the incident (He, 2013; Whiting, 1983). 1982 also constitutes the first incident of a clear break of the prior tranquility of Sino-Japanese relations.

In June 1982 the Japanese popular press published some articles that argued that the new history textbooks to be used by Japanese schools spent less attention on Japan’s modern war history and its relation to China; newspapers such as Asahi Shinbun argued that Japan’s aggression including the ‘Three Alls’ ordered in wartime by the imperial army (burn all, loot all, kill all) were being removed from Japanese school curriculum (Yoshida, 2006). As a response the CCP staged a planned two month intense patriotic campaign with articles in the mainstream Chinese press (renmin ribao, Youth Daily). The patriotic campaign was triggered by the textbook incident but it has been convincingly argued by Rose that it was instrumentally used by the CCP to achieve wider motives. Many articles expressed regrets over the incident but also fears over a revived Japanese militarism (Rose, 1998). In the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1982 which marked the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japan’s surrender in the Second World War renmin ribao even went as far as to publish an article with title: ‘Past Experience, if Not forgotten, *is a Guide to the Future.*’ The press abstained from blaming the Japanese people and usually dropped the blame to ‘narrow government elites’ for the text-book incident and ‘Japanese Militarists’ for past war-crimes (ibid). Nevertheless the intensity of the campaign and its strong focus on history and Japanese atrocities functioned as a memorial of the war and as a public lecture on the importance of state unity and patriotic values (ibid).

The patriotic attitude of the CCP was also reflected in the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the CCP in September 1982; this congress being so temporally close the text-book incident provided an excellent opportunity for Deng to unite Chinese leadership, including the anti-imperialist party hardliners as well as the PLA, to accept his modernization agenda in the context of a declining communist ideology (He, 2013). In his opening speech Deng argued for the reinvention of patriotism: “No foreign country can expect China to be its vassal, nor can it expect China to accept anything harmful to China’s interests.” (Rose, 1998: 124) Characteristic is also the following segment from a speech given by Chairman Hu Yaobang:

“Being patriots, we do not tolerate any encroachment on China's national dignity or interests.... In the thirty-three years since the founding of our People's Republic, we have shown the world by deeds that China never attaches itself to any big power or group of powers, and never yields to pressure from any big power.... Having suffered aggression and oppression for over a century, the Chinese people will never again allow themselves to be humiliated as they were before, nor will they subject other nations to such humiliation.” (Section from Whiting, 1983: 913)

Whiting (1983) was one of the first observers to argue that there was a clear change of language in 1983 amongst CCP officials. According to the new narrative China was placed historically in opposition to foreign powers which tried to challenge its national sovereignty in the past. This is explained by the special emphasis on ‘sufferings’ of the Chinese people stemming from ‘aggression’ and ‘oppression’ of foreign powers as a core source of Chinese patriotism used in the speech (ibid).

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<sup>3</sup>See Whiting, 1983 and Yoshida, 2006

Although not all officials were specific in targeting other countries Hu even went on to say that “some *forces in Japan* are whitewashing the past *Japanese aggression* against China ... and are carrying out activities for the revival of *Japanese militarism*” (Rose, 1998: 124); this verifies clearly the anti-Japanese character of Chinese patriotism. The same tone pursued on October 12 and 13<sup>th</sup> 1983, on the second plenary session of the twelfth congress where Hu Yaobang, Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang found it necessary to initiate a struggle to put an end on ‘spiritual pollution’ which received popular media coverage; for instance according to Xinhua news on October 25<sup>th</sup> 1983 on a symposium on chairman Mao in Shandong it was reported that one of the main topics of discussion was the issue of illegitimate thoughts that harm national interests and social harmony and the necessity of popular resistance to them (Yoshida, 2006).

One year later the textbook incident on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1983 the propaganda department of the CCP in cooperation with the Secretariat of the CCP issued a statement to start boosting patriotic education (Yoshida, 2006). This did not have immediate results but did show the commitment CCP elites to the new rhetoric. Patriotism was more widely exhibited from 1985-6 on, when there was a boost in the construction of war museums and memorials, changes in Chinese education textbooks and student patriotic demonstrations.

The construction of war museums and memorials from 1985 onward was intended to boost memory of the Chinese sufferings from the Japanese war of aggression (Mitter, 2000). Indicatively, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1985 the Chinese People’s Revolutionary Military Museum in Tiananmen Square opened and at the same time multiple exhibitions took place in Harbin, Heilongjiang on sites operated in the Sino-Japanese war by the Japanese ‘Unit 731’ which was responsible for conducting medical experiments on human subjects; after two years, ‘the Memorial Museum of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan’ was also opened for the public in Beijing (Yoshida, 2006). Museums built over that period were exemplary of a revived Chinese patriotism; what impressed Mitter (2000) was the use of 3D dioramas representing Japanese atrocities: in her research on the ‘Memorial Museum of Chinese People’s War of Resistance’ she recalls a dramatic wax diorama where a Japanese scientist conducts a biological operation on a live Chinese resistance fighter using a scalpel.

The manner history was presented in Chinese schools also altered between the 70s and the 80s (He, 2003). According to He’s analysis during Chairman Mao’s decades of office the Chinese education aimed strategically to cover-up conflicts with Japan over war history; the textbooks used to focus on blaming mainly the ‘Chinese Nationalist army’ (Guomindang), ‘American imperialists’ and a very small number of ‘Japanese militarists’ (ibid). During that time “textbooks rarely mentioned Japanese atrocities” (He, 2003: 16). On the contrary from the mid-80s on and since the 1986 Teaching Guideline, attention has substantially shifted towards the Sino-Japanese war, and descriptions became lengthier than before (ibid). Battles fought by the Guomindang that were previously suppressed from detailed examination were now studied more often, and the nationalist army was no longer discredited in the struggle against Japanese imperialism but seen as a contributor and ally (ibid).

Indicative of CCP’s adherence to patriotic principles has been the Chinese response to the official visit of Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone to the Yasukuni Shrine in 1985 which marked also the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary for the end of Sino-Japanese war (Suzuki, 2009). This event has sparked official government criticism and patriotic

demonstrations by Chinese students in the PRC (ibid). The reason for China's protests were historical; since Yasukuni Shrine enshrines the Japanese who were killed during the Sino-Japanese war as well as thirteen Class-A war criminals who were executed at the Tokyo trials and were moved there in 1978 (ibid). The demonstrations started by Beijing University students who marched in hundreds to Tiananmen Square holding up signs posing "Down with Japanese militarism!" or "Down with Nakasone!" (Le, 2011: 45) Although the CCP was critical to Nakasone's visit it did try to stop the students' protest in the interest of public security by revoking their permission to demonstrate. Nevertheless weeks after the Beijing demonstrations, students in Wuhan, Chengdu and Xian also went to the streets to voice their antipathy to Japan (ibid).

## **Conclusion.**

What can be argued hence is that during the 1980s there was tolerance towards liberal voices. Tolerance is what makes the 80s and the 90s different in the sense that during the 80s some dissenting voices were allowed to be heard while in the 90s they were imprisoned or hid or fled abroad. The internal media contestation which was also connected to a confrontation between higher echelons of the CCP in the 80s was culminated in 1989 after the Tiananmen incident; after that the CCP leadership realized the dangers of allowing Chinese liberals to become vocal and responded with a strong full-encompassing implementation of its patriotic education campaign. In the 90s Chinese patriotic nationalism became dominant and its expressions were found in all levels of cultural expression.

It is definitely not argued hence that Zhao's (2004) narrative is wrong, although there are some inaccuracies in his account. What should be argued is that Zhao's historical narrative overemphasizes the 'liberal nationalist' movements of the 80s that might lead readership to the simplistic assumption that Chinese patriotic education started as late as in the mid-90s. What should be acknowledged is that patriotic education has been organized and debated amongst CCP leaders from the early 80s and indications of its implementation have already appeared from the mid-80s. The reinvention of Chinese patriotism was the result of a decline in the credibility of the communist ideology to legitimize Deng Xiaoping's modernizing leadership and the resulting pressure from conservative Chinese politicians. Events that triggered the ideological swift were the textbook incident (1982) and Nakasone's visit to Yasukuni Shrine (1985). The later 'provocation' has also resulted to student demonstrations, which shows vividly the patriotic fervor amongst the Chinese youth from the mid-80s on.

Although it is fair to fully endorse the scholarly consensus that exhibitions of patriotism in China in the 90s were more far-reaching than the 80s, the 80s should not be neglected from research in Chinese patriotism. It was well before the Tiananmen incident that 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' was first debated amongst top CCP officials. Also before 1989 were the constructions of the first patriotic Museums; changes in presentation of history in education textbooks and anti-Japanese student demonstrations.

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