China and the West

China and the West:
Encounters with the Other in Culture, Arts, Politics and Everyday Life

Edited by

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The other? Who is the other?
JSM!

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INTRODUCTION

CHINA AND THE WEST

LILI HERNÁNDEZ

Speaking of the roots of Orientalism, Said denounces "a restricted number of encapsulations: the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation" He goes on to suggest that "these are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception and form of the encounter between East and West[1]". Due to world interdependence, the line that was drawn between the two, however, turns out to be not so much the lenses through which the Orient is seen but the juncture from which the complexity of the relations between the two can be critically analysed. Contemporary society provides indeed the platform from which "the other" can be experienced on a deeper way so as to challenge, through multiple voices, traditional assumptions and encapsulations. That is the spirit that inspires this work. Not an analysis of the lenses through which both the West and China perceive each other but a genuine exploration of the intricacies involved. The tensions and complexities of such an encounter are the theme of the different essays in this collection.

Contemporary China speaks of a conjunction of elements of past and present, the traditional and the modern, immutability and on-going transformation, juxtaposed in a unique experience of contemporary society. This is what I call "neo-traditional China", a country where tradition is far from annihilated but renewed and re-enacted in manifold ways as part of modern forms of culture, architecture, market forces, world views and everyday practices. A defining element of neo-traditional China is the intersection of the local and the foreign, in particular the West, a component to which China replies in its own terms. Although foreign influence has been a part of China's history at different points in time, encounters between the two are still in their early stages both at micro and

[1] Said, E. (2003). *Orientalism.* London: Penguin Books, p.1.

macro levels. This explains why an anthology like this may be devoted to attend to such meeting point. The topics discussed in this book do not remain at the level of overarching meta-narratives but reflect a vivid intersection in aspects of culture, arts, politics and everyday life.

China's opening and reform has brought, in a relatively short period of time, a significant transformation within and without. The Asian country is increasingly the centre of attention of the rest of the world not only because of the economic position it has gained but also because of it has remained largely unique. To speak of China's uniqueness is far from any attempt at labelling the country as primitive and exotic. The distinctiveness to which I refer is a reflection of China's strong cultural roots which have allowed for the upholding of its own identity regardless of the foreign influence it may be willing to accept. China is, and is likely to remain an enigma for those who are outsiders to the conceptual, historical, cultural and political intricacies that make up for a country which, in as much as it is willing to continue to open up to the world, remains to a large extent sheltered. It could be presumed that to experience China from within would in all likelihood contribute to obliterate such ambiguities. Living in China, however, only adds to the conundrum. As stereotypes compensate for our lack of ability to understand, polarities and contradictions in neo-traditional China contribute ever more to its stereotyped image. The Western media has been an important factor in spreading labels that "seem" to fit the Asian country. The situation in Tibet and the condition of civil rights are frequently used to encapsulate China within authoritative views. The Tibet protests and the Olympic torch relay in 2008 were not to be missed in the reinforcement of such overarching assumptions. The alien in China was one of the main selling points during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. China's infrequent but still existing traditions of eating snakes, dogs, rats and insects were overemphasised, creating an image of this country as bizarre and alienating. The limited extent to which these habits are still in practice was largely ignored. Exotic foods eaten elsewhere such as puffin heart in Iceland, fermented Baltic herring in Sweden and fried tarantulas in Cambodia, among many others, were overlooked. It seems as if, as part of its opening up to the world, China has the task of dealing with these oversimplified conceptions.

The West, on the other hand, faces its own demons. Alongside natural catastrophes, environmental disasters and social disruption in different parts of the world, which have a worldwide effect, the West has to deal with the imperative of providing an account for its long standing confidence and pride. The 2008 global financial crisis, the recent Eurozone predicament and the slow-down in economic growth in such countries as

the US pose a question about the ability of the West to define and represent itself on the international stage. The West faces the need to turn eastwards. Just as the former is no longer powerful and articulate, the East, and in this particular case China, is not submissive and silent. The encounters between the two become closer to Taoism's concepts of Yin and Yang, the primordial pair of opposites, an interdependent and complementary built-in dualism which in as much as it challenges former antagonisms brings about new possibilities too.

The line of reasoning explored in this book deals with the manifold shapes and tonalities that the encounter between China and the West takes. The tendency to impose a "universal" authoritative world-view on the other is scrutinised through different frames of interpretation and analysis. Traditional responses and reactions are explored too. The other is at one and the same time threatening and most appealing. Both Chinese and Westerners find themselves at the crossroads between two seemingly opposite positions, a powerful aversion and a solid attraction towards the other. What could best define the encounter between China and the West is indeed the difficulty to delineate. No attempts seem to suffice for a thorough understanding of unparallel histories, ideologies, ways of thinking and everyday practices, all of which merge, nevertheless, within the stream of a globalised world.

The initial idea was to separate articles into specific sections as indicated in the title of this collection, "culture," "arts," "politics" and "everyday life." What appeared, however, was a constant element of interconnectivity across chapters and themes. The idea was then to allow for the intersection of topics to determine the stream of thought in this anthology. The first two chapters concentrate on media representations of the encounter between China and the West; each, though, using a different range of media frames and texts. Chapters three, four and five make use of film productions to address the manifold tensions that arise in the meeting point between China and the West. Lives, identities, perceptions and reflections give life to chapters six and seven. Finally, an unprecedented crossing of cultural boundaries between China and the West, both in the arts and in popular culture, brings together chapters eight, nine, ten and eleven.

Tao Zhang opens up, in chapter one, with an argument that contextualises the intricacies of traditional Chinese nationalism within a new global landscape. Zhang addresses a new form of anti-westernism called cyber-nationalism which despite its novelty speaks of the same old nationalistic sentiment in China. Zhang's essay *Anti-CNN.com and "April Youth": Anti-western Sentiment in Youth-oriented Chinese Online Media* demonstrates

how the young educated post 1980's generation are finding new ways of articulating their experiences recreating, nevertheless, the traditional identity of the "victim." This initial chapter is followed by Lut Lams' analysis of Sino-US tensions aroused by the 2001 Hainan island incident. In chapter two, Lam's contribution entitled *Communication and Difference: One Event – Different Media Frames. A Discursive Analysis of US and Chinese Media Narratives About the 2001 Hainan Incident* provides an analysis of media narratives from both China and the US with respect to a regrettable event that turned into an international dispute. Lam's study sheds light on how media texts are used to delineate boundaries of inclusion/exclusion as they cater for a domestic audience while setting up the other as a negative mirror of the self.

The next three chapters have in common the use of film representations for an analysis of the encounters between China and the West. In chapter three, Stephen Harper uses a British television documentary to elaborate on a Western irrational aversion towards this Eastern country. Harper's essay "*The Chinese are Coming!*": *Representations of China's Global Influence in a BBC Television Documentary* provides a thorough analysis of the BBC documentary, casting an eye on hegemonic views about China embedded at the core of this film production. Rachel Edwards' contribution, in chapter four, entitled *Jonathan Lewis's China: A Documentary Record of People, Policy and Place* maps out a depiction of China from within. Edwards demonstrates how the documentary challenges traditional assumptions, providing instead an outlet for Chinese voices. Based on Homi Bhabha's ideas on the tensions between the "pedagogical" and the "performative," Edwards argues that China and its people refuse to be encapsulated within stereotyped categories. The last in this trilogy is Anthony McKenna's *Screening the Others of Nanjing.* In chapter five, McKenna provides an international view on the Nanjing massacre, examining the portrayal of the event from three international film productions: "*Nanking"* (Bill Guttentag, Dan Sturman, 2007), "*City of War: The Story of John Rabe"* (Florian Gallenberger, 2009) and "*City of Life and Death"* (Lu Chuan, 2009). The three films support McKenna's review of a controversial event which has regained popular attention in recent decades both in China and in the West.

Ethnographic research is used by Phiona Stanley in chapter six and Lili Hernández in chapter seven to provide an account of the interface between expatriates and Chinese people as part of the ordinariness of everyday life in China. Phiona Stanley's essay *Multiculturalism with Chinese Characteristics: Western Middle Transnationals' Lives and Identities in Shanghai*, engages with the lived realities of foreign English teachers in

Shanghai. Such multiculturalism is one where China's unique features have left a clear imprint. Stanley scrutinises how the teacher's identities, perceptions and ways of life have been transformed by a process of acculturation in China. Located not far from Shanghai, in the city of Ningbo, Lili Hernández's *China and the West: Wedded in Otherness*, is a product of a direct immersion in China's everyday life. Hernández addresses difference and diversity as a mirror that reflects conditionings of self and society. Hernández' essay demonstrates that such conditionings far from having an absolute weight work instead as raw material for a new awareness that emerges at the crossroads of self and other. The arts and popular culture are the theme of the last four chapters of this compilation. In chapter eight, Christen Cornell takes us on a journey around the 798 Art Zone in Beijing. In his chapter entitled *Transnational Nation-building: 798 Art Zone*, Cornell engages with Chinese and cosmopolitan forms of art that are reshaping China's visual arts industry. The weight of Chinese roots and identity are apparent nevertheless in this emerging global landscape. A similar approach is taken by Paul Gladston's *Beyond Contemporaneity: towards a Discursive Polylogue of International Postmodernist and Chinese Contemporary Art Theory.* In chapter nine, Gladston explores the dynamics between two divergent discursive positions, on the one hand, an international art theory, while on the other, Chinese art theory. Gladston's discussion opens up space for the exploration of new paradigms in the interpretation of Chinese art theory woven into a discursive polylogue. In chapter ten, Carolyne Lee's and Jingyan Li's essay *China and Australia: Literature and Soft Diplomacy* offers a study which speaks, overall, about connectedness. Lee and Li provide a new approach to the analysis of Chinese perceptions of Australia through the reading of Australian literature. In their essay, the authors analyse "soft diplomacy" as a means to improve an understanding between cultures, transcending cultural boundaries. David Drissel's essay in chapter eleven, the last in this collection, addresses unconventional lifestyles that are a part of contemporary China. Drissel's work *Linglei, the Other Species: Hybridized Constructions of Alternative Youth Subcultures in China* scrutinises how the Chinese other is finding new forms of expression. Drissel's analysis is largely centred around music and literature, providing a view on how China is responding to emerging lifestyles and forms of expression. Drissel's contribution paves the way to what could be a suitable analogy for the overall theme of this volume, that is to say, young souls fighting old bodies. Not only are we addressing here a new and young China as it has emerged in the last thirty years but also new dynamics between this country and the West, unprecedented,

unknown, indefinable. Both China and the West are renewed by emerging interactions. Both are, at one and the same time, tainted by old paradigms. Overall, the chapters in this anthology pose a question to traditional forms of elaborating and representing the interface between China and the West. While the meeting point between the two is still in its infancy, tensions and contradictions arise. At some points we are ready to take a step forward and go beyond boundaries. At other times, we remain stagnated in the most traditional dichotomies of “us” and “the other”.

CHAPTER ONE

ANTI-CNN.COM AND 'APRIL YOUTH': ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENT IN YOUTH ORIENTED CHINESE ONLINE MEDIA

TAO ZHANG

A pattern of nationalistic sentiment rather complicatedly articulated with anti-westernism has been an enduring feature of China's political culture since its traumatic entry into industrial modernity during the 19th century. From various anti-Christian riots in the 19th century, the Boxer Movement of 1900, through the anti-imperialist propaganda of the communists in the 1930s and beyond, anti-western nationalistic sentiment was widely distributed amongst all levels of society. But as China, at the end of the 1970s, rushed to embrace market capitalism, it began a new phase in its complex encounter with the West. Caught within the contradictions of a globalized free market economy and continuing authoritarian political control, and exacerbated by the impact of the Internet in the 1990s, the cultural narrative linking national identity with a doctrinaire antipathy towards the West was put under increasing strain. This has not, however, resulted in the abandonment of anti-westernism as a cultural referent, but in the emergence of new, more complex forms.

This chapter explores one manifestation of this: the so-called "cyber-nationalism" (Wu, 2007) embraced since the 1990s by a relatively small but significant sector of educated Chinese young people both in China and overseas. We focus on the example of one prominent Chinese youth website, "anti-CNN.com", which was initially intended, 'to expose the lies and distortions in the western media' and its subsequent development into the far more comprehensive site, "M4.cn" styling itself, "the first ever Chinese youth portal". In the first section we offer a sketch of the historical formation of anti-western sentiment in the context of China's passage to modernity from the nineteenth century to the present. Section two analyses the emergence of 'anti-CNN.com' and its development into

"M4.cn/April Youth", focusing on its critique of alleged western bias in the reporting of China's affairs. But then in the final section we develop an argument that places this within the broader context of neo-nationalism amongst the globalized post-1980s generation – the generation that, in the light of some high profile nationalist demonstrations, has sometimes been dubbed China's "angry youth" ('fengqing').

Nationalism and anti-westernism in Chinese Cultural Modernity

To understand the fusion of nationalism and anti-western sentiment in contemporary Chinese online media, we need briefly to contextualise this in terms of its roots in a decisive period in modern Chinese history. The key trope here is the idea of "one hundred years of humiliation" of China at the hands of the West.

Discussions of nationalism commonly locate its historical origins in the nation-state as a phenomenon of modernity in the Western European context, along with such institutional features as capitalism, industrialism and mass communications. In such accounts, national identity is often treated as the outcome of certain modern developments. Benedict Anderson (1991) thus famously argued that what he calls "print capitalism" along with other modern institutions, played a decisive role in the production of a national consciousness.

However this European modernist interpretation has been found problematic in the Chinese context. As Gries (2005:7) puts it, ' "China" has four millennia of documented history, and two millennia of centralized rule. Did it only become a "nation" in the twentieth century?' There is, then, a broader problem in the application of western political and cultural theories to the Chinese case, as witnessed in claims about pre-modern China's status as a 'cultural nation-state'.[1]

One thing however remains clear. China resisted entry into the emerging modern nation-state system in the early nineteenth century, and

[1] Traditional Chinese national identity based on culture is recognized by many: According to Murphey (1974:31), 'in China a vigorously self-conscious cultural nationalism, national identity, and a tradition of an integrated national state and culture had existed for some two thousands years before the Westerners arrived'. Wang (1991:240) also argues that, 'as forms of group-identity consciousness, concepts of nationality and culture developed very early in Chinese thought'. Mungello (1999:23) claims that identity as a Chinese has traditionally been regarded as much more a matter of culture than race. For more historical discussion on pre-modern China as a nation, see Duara, 1988 and Szonyi, 1997.

this, according to Fairbank, was at the root of the foreign invasions and expansion of the "western menace" in China:

> The significance of the Opium War when it came would be that China's refusal to enter the family of nations on the basis of diplomatic equality and reciprocal trade had resulted in a British use of force. The British victory had turned the Chinese emperor's international status upside down. (Fairbank, 1987: 85)

What underpinned China's refusal was not just its long standing Sino-centric sense of cultural superiority but also, in part, its considerable economic success up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. As Paul Bairoch documents, in 1800 China led the world's overall manufacturing output with a proportion of 33.3% as against 28.1% for the whole of Europe, and even by 1860 still accounted for 19.7%. However the surge in industrial modernization in the West over the nineteenth century inevitably led to the decline of China from its position as the world's leading ''agrarian-bureaucratic' empire (Fairbank, 1995:9). By 1900, China's share of global manufacturing output diminished to 6.2%. In contrast, Europe's total share had risen in 1900 to 62%, with Germany achieving a rise from 2.9% to 13.2% and the United Kingdom from 4.3% to 18.5% of global output. The United States saw an even more staggering growth in manufacturing output from 0.8% to 23.6% of global output across the century. (Bairoch 1982: 296).

China's dramatic reversal in international status from its imagined place as the "middle kingdom" of the universe to, in Mao's words, a "semi-colonial" nation, combined with its shrinking national wealth, provided the grounds for the construction of a narrative in which China's ills could be laid at the door of the West. This narrative was not, of course, without substance when one considers the significance of the series of foreign invasions and imposed unequal treaties from mid-century. In terms of actual impact, as Fairbank argues, the domestic turbulence of events like the Taiping rebellion were probably more significant than these foreign invasions : 'Modern estimates are that China's population had been about 410 million in 1850 and, after the Taiping, Nien, Muslim, and other smaller rebellions, amounted to about 350 million in 1873.' (Fairbank,1987:81) The key point to emphasise, however, is how the exercise of foreign – that is to say western and Japanese – military and economic power became constellated into the enduring cultural narrative of the "one hundred years humiliation" of China. This "victimization narrative" was elaborated in the 1920s by the Kuomintang government and, particularly effectively, by the Communist Party.

In his 1939 article "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party", Mao referred to practically all forms of foreign contact in the 19th century as "cultural imperialism" and denounced imperialists as the chief target and enemy of Chinese revolution:

> The imperialist powers have waged many wars of aggression against China, for instance, the Opium War launched by Britain in 1840, the war launched by the Anglo-French allied forces in 1857, the Sino-French War of 1884, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, and the war launched by the allied forces of the eight powers in 1900. … in their aggression against China the imperialist powers have …. imposed their ruthless rule on China, reducing an independent country to a semi-colonial and colonial country. (Mao, 1965: 311)

Mao's black-and-white interpretation of western (including Japanese) imperialism was of course of great strategic value in mobilizing the nation in the formative years of the revolution, but through this it became a standard national historical stance towards China's 19th and early 20th century encounter with the West from 1949 onwards.

How this "mythologization" of China's past has been repeatedly used to serve political ends is illustrated in Paul Cohen's account of the cultural significance of the Boxer rebellion[2]. Cohen cites the example of the Chinese government's use of the 90th anniversary of the 1900 occupation of Beijing as an ideological counter-offensive to western reaction to the 1989 Tiananmen massacre:

> In a mid-August 1990 a flurry of articles appeared in the Chinese press which, in addition to emphasizing the standard post-Tianamen themes of renewed vigilance against imperialist aggression … made a point of reminding readers … of the brutal and savage acts committed by foreigners against the Chinese people in the summer of 1900. These atrocities sufficed, one article concluded, to lay bare the sham nature of "the so-called 'Western civilization' continually trumpeted by the allied forces and their home governments". (Cohen, 1997: 221)

And the appropriation of the "victimization narrative" is by no means restricted to state propaganda, as Xu Wu's discussion of the rather infamous 1996 best-seller, *China Can Say No* demonstrates. This wildly populist anti-western polemic, written by a group of young intellectuals

[2] On the wider issue of the re-interpretation of history in China, see Jonathan Unger, (ed.) (1993) *Using Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China* New York: M.E. Sharpe

styling themselves the "New Boxers", proved so inflammatory that eventually the government felt obliged to suppress it. (Wu, 2007: 27) Wu's quotation of the words of one of the books' authors, Zhang Xiaobo, demonstrates the enduring force of the victimization narrative:

> I have some questions to ask Westerners. British sold opium to China and waged the Opium Wars against China. That was a great infringement upon Chinese human rights. Yet I have never heard of any apologies being made by British government. …Without making sufficient apologies, they don't have the right to talk about human rights. (Wu, 2007: 27)

To summarise then, the contemporary articulation of Chinese nationalism with anti-western sentiment can be interpreted as part of the legacy of China's traumatic experience in the 19th Century of breaking from its agrarian-imperialist past and embracing the new industrial modernity. This legacy, vastly simplified and politicised as a "century of humiliation", continues to be central to the imagination of Chinese national culture. As Gries (2005:47) argues:

> The "Century of Humiliation" is neither an objective past that works insidiously in the present nor a mere "invention" of present-day nationalist entrepreneurs. Instead, the "Century" is a continuously reworked narrative about the national past central to the contested and evolving meaning of being "Chinese" today'.

And this narrative remains crucial to understanding the discourse of what Gries (2005:4) describes as the "fourth generation nationalists". This refers to the post-80s generation that had never experienced the deprivations that could, with a certain amount of justification, be referred to the trope of victimization, but were, ironically, the material beneficiaries of China's rapid economic growth and engagement with globalized capitalism. What Wang Linyan (2009) describes as the "vexed generation" – "20-somethings [who] often use the internet to publicly express their views on politics and society [voicing] hyper-nationalistic and slightly anti-US sentiments" – form the core of the "cyber-nationalist" netizens which we discuss in the following section.

Cyber Nationalism: Anti-CNN.com and M4.cn

Chinese cyber nationalism refers most generally to use of the Internet in the articulation and promotion of nationalist views by individuals and groups independently of the state (Wu, 2007: 2), a phenomenon which

emerged in the mid-1990s, grew rapidly and continues as a significant feature of on-line culture today. Typically this activity emerged as a response to international events infringing or threatening Chinese sovereignty: the US's bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia (1999), the "Hainan Island incident" in which an American signals intelligence aircraft collided with a Chinese interceptor fighter jet (2001), the detention by Japanese coastguards of seven Chinese activists on the disputed Diaoyu Islands (2004). Various websites emerged articulating hyper-nationalist sentiments, *inter alia*: "Patriot Alliance Net" (www.1931-9-18.org), "Chinese 9.18 Patriot Net" (www.china918.net), "The Forum on anti-Japanese Products" (www.CNNI.com.cn); "The Alliance for Not Forgetting National Humiliation" (www.wwgc.cc/longtan).

It was into this context that, on March 18th 2008, a 23-year-old Qinghua University engineering graduate, Rao Jin, registered the website "anti-CNN.com". According to Rao, what prompted this was the spontaneous anger that he and his friends – many of them abroad - felt on reading coverage in the western media of recent riots in Tibet: the "fake pictures" and "dishonest reports" not just of CNN but of the BBC, RTL, Fox News, La Republica, The Washington Post, and Der Spiegel among others. The website claims that

> the site is maintained by volunteers, who are not associated with any government officials. We are not against the western media, but against the lies and fabricated stories in the media. We are not against the western people, but against the prejudice from the western society.

On 28th March, anti-CNN.com/forum was launched to accommodate online discussion and dialogue. Within two months, its membership had reached 100,000.

The claims about media bias turn on a number of instances in which images of the riots were allegedly either cropped or misleadingly captioned so as to cast the Chinese police and military in a bad light and implicitly support the cause of Tibetan independence. The most frequently cited of these is an image on CCN's website, of 2 Tibetans running in the path of Chinese military trucks. Anti-CNN.com uploaded the original image in which 10 rioters could be seen throwing stones at the truck and argued that the cropping had been intentional. In another example, an image published on a number of Western media websites, including Bild, RTL and The Washington Post, showed Nepalese security forces wielding batons at Tibetan protesters in Kathmandu, but carried text mistakenly identifying them as Chinese police in clashes in Lhasa. In a third instance,

an image on the Berliner Morgenpost's website carried the caption, "Police are arresting Tibetans" when according to anti-CNN.com what it really showed were police rescuing injured people.

There can be little doubt that these and other cases involved clear examples of inaccurate reporting, though it is less clear that they can be collectively interpreted as evidence of systematic western bias in the way anti-CNN.com claimed. In a statement on its website, CNN (2008), "refutes all allegations by bloggers that it distorts its coverage of the events in Tibet to portray either side in a more favourable light". In response to the allegations over the truck incident, CNN claims that it, 'was used wholly appropriately in the specific editorial context and there could be no confusion regarding what it was showing, not least because it was captioned: "Tibetans throw stones at army vehicles on a street in the capital Lhasa"'.

However, significant misrepresentations did occur, and this is unsurprising, given the limitations on foreign reporting of the riots imposed by the Chinese government, which meant that most of the reports were compiled outside Tibet. The more interesting issue here, however, is the cultural context of Chinese public life that promotes the framing of complex issues like these in terms of a continuing victimization narrative[3].

What distinguishes anti-CNN.com from many other cyber-nationalist sites is the way in which its cause was, almost immediately, taken up by China's official broadcast media. Within two weeks of its launch, 1st April, 2008, CCTV's flagship news commentary programme, "Oriental Horizon" devoted a whole programme to anti-CNN.com: "Warning to CNN: why the Chinese netizens are angry?". The programme was much less an exploration of the issues than simply an endorsement of the position of the anti-CNN.com. – offering additional instances of alleged bias in the reporting of China. It contained interviews with Rao Jin and another activist living in the US, Wang Ping, along with commentary by two established media and journalism professors, Yu Guoming and Yin Yungong. It did not interview any western journalists or media critics or discuss the rebuttals by CNN. Rather, the programme consisted largely of

[3] See here Charlene Makley's account of her experiences of riots in the mainly Tibetan-populated town of Tongren in Qinghai province, a precursor to the wider Tibetan unrest. Reflecting on the coverage of the riots in the U.S. press, Makley notes, 'not only the complexity of motives and causes in the unrest but also the ways in which people caught up in crises come to 'frame' or reinterpret events after the fact in order to make sense of them. In this case, I found that similar framing processes were at work both locally in Tongren and in foreign media coverage.'(Makley, 2009:49)

a series of condemnations of western media and political bias. Yu Guoming claimed that the misreporting, "can only be regarded as purposeful deeds associated with certain political intentions", while Yin Yungong argued that the western world as a whole held, "bigoted opinions that are in favour of the Dalai Lama, turning a blind eye on the Chinese government and the Chinese people". Yu went on to criticise, "the unitary monopoly of the western media hegemony' and supported anti-CNN.com as a form of 'citizen diplomacy' making 'full use of modern digital technology … to publicize the truth".

An English translation of the script of the CCTV programme, renamed as, "CNN: What's wrong with you?" was published on the *China Daily* website (2 April 2008) and the *People's Daily* website (3 April 2008). This enthusiastic state-sponsored media support inevitably led to suspicion over the independence of anti-CNN.com. However the nature and extent of the state's support for Anti-CNN.com is difficult to assess. What remains clear is that the website represents and speaks to the cultural understandings of a certain, albeit limited, constituency of educated young people in China.

This is further revealed by considering some aspects of the re-launch of anti-CNN.com in April 2011 as M4.cn.[4] In comparison with anti-CNN.com, M4.cn – or "April Youth" as it is also called – is a much more elaborate affair. Styling itself, "the first ever Chinese youth portal", it provides a wide range of information from domestic and international current affairs to entertainment and celebrity gossip, and offers an impressive media platform including access to TV, radio, Micro-blogs (the Chinese version of Twitter), BBS and social networking sites, along with an English language website. Apart from this technological sophistication, there is a development in the site's sense of mission, as demonstrated in its manifesto:

> April Youth has inherited the spirit and missions of anti-CNN. com and is determined to enrich it. We have realised that protest alone is not enough to overcome western arrogance and prejudice. The key is to build a quality way of life suitable for the Chinese. After one hundred years' struggle of anti-imperialism, sixty year of PRC struggle, thirty years of open door and economic reform policy, China is on the path to growing prosperity… Following China's rise and shifts in international relations, particularly the rise of the non-western world, what we are experiencing has made the old

[4] 'M4' refers to the month of April and the immediate reference is to demonstrations in April 2008 by Chinese students in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Berlin, Paris, London, Manchester and elsewhere in response to the media coverage of protests during the Beijing Olympics torch relay.

> western-dominated world knowledge system seem out of date. Let's re-structure the world landscape and embrace a more open world (April manifesto, 2011).

The rather crude media bashing is here replaced by an assertion, albeit vaguely formulated, of China's destined role in the creation of a new world order. There is a curious mixture here of grandiosity and apprehension, of idealism and the struggle to articulate an authentic sense of Chineseness, which perhaps gives a clue to understanding what has formed the vision of these young neo-nationalists.

The Cultural Contradictions of April Youth

In his analysis of the outlook and attitudes of contemporary Chinese youth, Stanley Rosen points to the "competing and often contradictory influences" shaping the post -80s generation:

They have become very *internationalist* in their outlook, and they are strongly affected by global trends. Likewise, they are very *pragmatic* and *materialistic*, largely concerned with living the good life and making money. The third competing influence, most often called *nationalism* in its more extreme form, represents a broader impulse and encompasses not only the defence of China against perceived enemies from abroad, but also the kind of love of country and self sacrifice in support of those most in need that was evident in the volunteerism that followed the earthquake. (Rosen, 2009: 361)

A major source of these contradictions derives from the fact that this generation grew up within the perplexing cultural conditions of the, "market economy with Chinese characteristics": on the one hand, a free market and rampant commercialism and consumerism, on the other, a one-party state committed to the control of cultural and political attitudes and the rigorous regulation and censorship of the media.

In terms of the influence of the market economy, there is clearly a straightforward sense in which Chinese young people have become more susceptible to a culture of possessive individualism as compared with their predecessors – and this has, arguably, in turn led to a more pragmatic disposition towards the actions of the state. However there is a more complex implication of rising affluence to be considered. As Gries argues, the very fact that the fourth generation nationalists, to which the April Youth community belong, were the material beneficiaries rather than the victims of China's entry to the global market is significant:

> [They] fret over their generation's materialism: "cultural and spiritual fast food has taken over." They are envious of the third generation who, "proud of their hardships," can celebrate them at the Cultural Revolution restaurants like Heitudi … in Beijing, nostalgically eating fried corn bread, recalling the good old, bad old days. They then ask, "Are we an unimportant generation?" … Many of this generation, it seems, have a strong desire to make their mark. And they seem to do so through nationalism. (Gries, 2005: 4-5)

Whilst they struggled to find a distinctive sense of cultural identity, this generation also gained confidence from China's rapid growing economic and international-political strength. In 2010, China overtook Japan as the world's second largest economy and her increasing importance in world politics opened up a new environment in which they could form their own opinions and values in relation to the West. This process also contrasts sharply with the experiences of the previous generation. As Rosen points out, student attitudes in the 1980s, in the face of a growing recognition of the repressive nature of the Chinese state, tended towards the uncritical appropriation of western news reporting, along with a fascination with the ideas of western liberal intellectuals. As Rosen argues (following Zhou, 2006), this context of media reception became virtually reversed in the post-1980s generation, by, "a new interpretive framework that acknowledges the pursuit of national interest as the ultimate goal of international relations". The result has been that these educated Chinese youth began to treat all Western news sources as, "merely attempting to further a pro-Western agenda" (Rosen, 2009: 362).

An awareness of China's rapidly growing economic and international strength, then, plausibly contributed to constituting nationalism as a core identity position for this group; however it cannot alone account for the rather dramatic shift in attitudes towards the domestic complexion of the Chinese state and particularly its continuing repression of civil liberties. The other significant issue to be addressed here is the role of the Chinese state in the promotion of patriotism. The Chinese online cultural-political critic and blogger, Mo Zhixu, identifies this as a key factor in shaping the ideas of the post-1980s generation.[5] He points out that in 1994, the Chinese government launched a new programme of patriotic education that aimed to enhance the patriotism of all Chinese people from nursery to the university level. As part of this programme, in 1995, the government designated 100 locations as "patriotic sites" to be used both by the public and as part of educational programmes and went on to recommend 100

[5] On-line interview conducted with Mo Zhixu, June 2nd, 2011.

patriotic books, films and songs for young Chinese. In 1996, the Chinese president Jiang Zhemin made a speech that promoted the idea of national dignity and pride among the Chinese and urged all Chinese to devote themselves to building their motherland and to regard damaging the motherland's interest and dignity as the greatest disgrace. These campaigns continued over the following few years[6].

As Mo Xhixu (2011) suggests, these patriotic educational programmes coincided with the teenage years of April Youth, a crucial time in the formation of their ideas, values and worldview. Of course, this generation also had access, particularly via the Internet, to diverse sources of information and cultural influence. However, again in marked contrast with the previous generation, this external influence seems to have become subsumed into the turbulence of commercialism and consumerism of the 1990s, eclipsing the earlier manifestations of independent and critical opinion.

Taken together these various influences have issued in the contradictions in the wider cultural outlook and attitudes that Rosen identifies. But we can go somewhat further in exploring the peculiarly conservative nature of the April Youth neo-nationalists. Two interdependent factors are particularly relevant here: first, the sort of political pragmatism that Rosen and others (Zhao, 2005) identify and, second, the ability of the Chinese state to censor and manipulate historical-political understandings.

Rosen exemplifies the development of political pragmatism in relation to the motivation to join the Communist party. Citing evidence from a survey of students in Xi'an conducted in 2007, he writes:

> Party membership is widely desired and considered to be valuable for one's future success, most notably in finding a well-paying job and good housing in a major city, and many youth noted that they were under pressure from their parents to join…other surveys and interviews have revealed that most applicants have little knowledge or even interest in most party activities and goals. (Rosen 2009:365)

A slightly different form of pragmatism is displayed in the on-line conversation which the former CNN Beijing Bureau Chief, Rebecca MacKinnon conducted with the anti-CNN.com team in 2009. When asked about why the website did not subject the Chinese media to the same kind of critical treatment as the Western media, Rao Jin's response was:

[6] For more information on 'Patriotic Education' see XinHua Net http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/20/content_697898.htm

> our aim is not to challenge the government. We want to create a good space, a good platform where more people have a chance to participate in discussion. If the platform ceases to exist, then there are no voices at all, so first we have to guarantee its survival. (MacKinnon, 2009)

Rao Jin's apparent failure to see the contradictions in this position illustrates the easy slide from pragmatic acquiescence to tacit – and in some instances quite overt – support. Thus, though it cannot be entirely ruled out, there is no need to invoke hidden forms of state control in the activities of AntiCNN.com/M4.cn in order to explain the peculiar congruence between its position and that of the government. [7]

It would however be a mistake to attribute the neo-nationalism of April Youth entirely to a pragmatic stance in relation to the government, for this would be to ignore the genuine strain of idealism that we have identified in the mix. Of equal importance is the system of political education and media manipulation that results in an apparent failure to make appropriate distinctions between the concepts (and the related interests) of the state, the regime and the nation.

This is particularly evident in relation to the issue of the Tibetan riots, which was the original *casus belli* of anti.CNN.com. Kang Xiaoguang, a sociology professor at Beijing's Renmin University points out that, "Many foreigners understand this event in Tibet as an anti-Communist Party or anti-government event. But Chinese people don't think so. Chinese people regard this event as anti-China" (Drew 2008). Similarly, Rebecca MacKinnon concluded from her conversation with the anti-CNN.com community that

> it's clear that many community members don't think there is a problem in Tibet itself; they appear to believe that the whole problem is caused by the exile community and by Westerners who are enamoured of the Dalai Lama' (MacKinnon, 2009).

This accords with Geremie Barmé's broader assessment that the Chinese media are engaged in a concerted propaganda campaign to emphasise, "China's constant contributions to the Tibetans and their material

[7] On April 15th 2011 M4.cn carried a feature article on Ai Weiwei: 'Art or politics, creative art or plagiarism?' The article contained interviews with four Chinese academics and freelance critics who each condemned Ai Weiwei as being politically motivated and committing plagiarism. What is notable is that comments on Ai Wei-wei have been the subject of on-line censorship since his arrest in April. As an anonymous netizen from Shanghai put it: 'Only this website is allowed to talk about Ai Weiwei, this is the problem.'

prosperity", whilst ignoring, "the aggressive modernization foisted on the Tibetans" in the form of economic displacement, the "forced sedenterization of nomad communities" and so forth. (Barmé, 2009: 73-4).

This contrived limitation on political outlook extends to the broader grasp of China's recent history, most notably the student uprising of 1989. Evan Osnos's (2008) interview with an "angry youth" cyber-activist from Fudan university contained the comment that, "they felt no connection to Tiannanmen Square" - which might be rather startling until one considers how effectively this momentous event has been deliberately erased from the historical consciousness of young Chinese.[8]

Conclusion

We have argued that the unique culture intersection of rapid commercialisation and materialism alongside a continuing pattern of political authoritarianism that occurred from the 1980s in China can help to explain the phenomenon of neo-nationalism and anti-Westernism as exemplified in anti-CNN.com/ 'April Youth'. In coming to an assessment of the broader significance of this online community, it is interesting to note that the term 'April *Youth*' has limited applicability to a generation now entering or approaching their thirties. In the view of one observer (Mo, 2011), cyber-nationalism reached a peak in 2008 and began to decline as domestic issues like inflation, the struggle for employment and the cost of housing came to preoccupy the new generation of educated youth. The question that remains however is that of what cultural resources are available for Chinese young people to construct meaningful accounts of their everyday experience in relation to national identity, without recourse to the increasingly threadbare narrative of victimization. In the long run, the ideological vacuum left by the effective abandonment of communism as a narrative of collective purpose seems difficult to fill either by increased levels of material well-being or by attempts by the state to orchestrate patriotism. In this context, one of the greatest challenges for China is to develop satisfying narratives of national belonging that speak to the condition of its young people in the era of global modernity.

[8] Perhaps the most telling evidence of this is to be found in Antony Thomas's documentary film, *The Tank Man* (Frontline/Channel 4, 2006) in which a group of Beijing university students failed entirely to identify the iconic image of the protestor standing in front of the tanks in Tiannanmen Square. One bemused student ventured that it might be a picture of a military ceremony, whilst another asked if it was some kind of artwork.

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