

Behind Global Spectacle and National Image Making

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The Tide of Nationalism

In the spring and summer of 1996, the “popular political” best-seller *China Can Say No: A Choice of Politics and Attitude in the Post–Cold War Era* suddenly sparked what appeared to be a return of nationalistic fervor in urban China.¹ With fifty thousand copies in circulation, this book remained on the best-seller lists at bookstores and street stalls nationwide for several months. Backed by effective marketing strategies, books that “say no” flooded the entire book market in an instant. The documentary *Measure of Strength*, a montage of war footage from the Korean War, also swept urban China without warning.

Around the same time, advertisements, which had been displaying the landscape of globalization and the template of the modern (Western) ideal

life, also appeared to suddenly change their message and image. For example, Ao'ni shampoo had made its sales pitch by using nostalgic packaging and the images of returning to nature and environmentalism: an urban girl, emerging from a despoiled nature, is shown joyfully participating in the Dai nationality's Water Splashing Festival. Then the shampoo's advertisement suddenly began to foreground its domestic label and production. In the new advertisement, a queue of Chinese ("black hair, Chinese products") is seen ascending the Great Wall hand in hand. The words accompanying the image are "The Great Wall will never topple, Chinese products must be strong."

The domestic film brand Lekai, which had been suffering from dismal sales amid the stiff competition of the foreign brands Kodak and Fuji, also gained attention at this time. In the numerous discussions about the future of Lekai covered in the media, the long-forgotten "militaristic rhetoric" reappeared, as in "*Lekai* advances while risking the enemies' fire." The advertisements on the doors of the numerous Chinese-style fast-food restaurants dismally lining up behind McDonald's even changed their wording to "Chinese people eat with chopsticks." Overnight, the resurfacing of the image of the "Chinese people's volunteer army" in front of movie theaters, the widespread propagation of advertisements for the "say no" books throughout urban bookstores and bookstalls, and the commercial advertisements' "use domestic product campaign" seemed to project an image of Chinese resistance and opposition to the United States and the West. Its rhetorical tone was quite strident: "We have the right to curb rumors and slandering to safeguard our country's reputation and welfare. We have the right to expose conspiracies and schemes and understand our real peril and our true opponent."² Other examples of this rhetorical tone include "The twenty-first century is the century of the dragon"³ and "China can say no; China must say no."

By examining the book market, it is easy to make a list of best-selling titles that corroborate the surge of nationalism: *Megatrends Asia*; *China Can Say No: A Choice of Politics and Attitude in the Post-Cold War Era*; *China Can Say No: The Sudden Awakening of a Sleeping Lion*; *Why China Says No: America's Mistaken Policies toward China during the Post-Cold War Era*; *True Account of the Chinese-American Struggle*; *Taiwan Straits Monsoon: A Penetrating Look through a Prism at the Taiwan Straits Relations*; *Pacific Monsoon*; *The Revival of*

China and the Future of the World; *Containing China: Myth and Reality*; *Selling Out China: The Secret History of Unequal Treaties*; *China's Strategic Plans for the Twenty-first Century*; *Megatrends China*, and so on.⁴ Not surprisingly, columns in the most influential U.S. newspapers, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, hastily carried reviews of these shocking books. Some of the authors were also invited to visit the United States. It appeared as if the entire Western world was nervously focusing on this sudden surge of Chinese nationalism.

Interestingly, the reaction of the Chinese intellectual community to this rather sensational popular trend was similar to that of the West. Namely, most intellectuals were angered and worried by the trend, or at least regarded it with scorn and apathy. In view of Chinese intellectuals' habitual dismissal of popular culture, they had not intended to pay any attention to this type of popular sensationalism. Their reaction in the end was in reality only a response to Western society's reaction. In part, this can be explained by the fact that Chinese liberals have always remained wary of how nationalism can lead to the "closing of the country." Also, these intellectuals vividly recalled the experiences of radical nationalism and authoritarianism—of, for example, Nazi Germany and the Japanese militarist empire. However, what bears an even closer tie is a type of nationalism or anti-American sentiment, especially evident in the fervent style of expression in *China Can Say No*, which recalls the Mao Zedong era. Therefore, it was very "natural" for intellectuals to reject this trendy popular expression of nationalism. The few scholars who followed this cultural phenomenon concluded that the burgeoning of an intense sentiment of national resistance and strong native consciousness emerged to resist the course of globalization. Furthermore, they asserted that this phenomenon could be explained by the injurious effect the series of conflicts over international affairs between China and the United States had inflicted on the Chinese public in recent years.⁵

Typography of the Popular

The rise and fall of this tide of nationalism is not as simple and transparent as it may first appear. We need to juxtapose this trend with other similar eye-catching trends to grasp its true significance. We cannot ignore those

other translated publications that introduce various facets of U.S. culture, society, and history, with which the Chinese have been enamored for more than a decade. Those titles continued to be published and placed on the best-seller racks adjacent to the aforementioned books. Briefly glancing at the array of books, we discover Richard Nixon's *Beyond Peace*; the three-volume series *Three Pioneers of America*;⁶ *West Point*; *West Point's Honour*; *Forty-one American Presidents*; *Secret Files of the CIA*; and *The Art of Living of the American Presidents*. Not only did the "suspect Harvard books" emerge anew in force, but books published by Harvard, Stanford, and Berkeley continued to lure readers to the United States and the American dream.⁷ At this time, both *Manhattan's Chinese Girl* and *Being a Mother in America* were deemed worth reading. Furthermore, *The Horse Whisperer*, following the earlier popular success of *Bridges of Madison County*; the series of Stephen King novels; Jostein Gaarden's *Sophie's World: A Novel about the History of Philosophy*; and John Gray's *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* and *Mars and Venus Together Forever* all topped the best-selling fiction and non-fiction charts. Translated series about economics, such as Series of Overseas Entrepreneurs and Biographies of World Entrepreneurs also deserve special attention. Although these series contain *foreign* and *world* in their titles, all the figures and enterprises selected in the books are from the United States. Examples of these books, thousands of which were printed, include *Control Your Destiny or Someone Else Will: Lessons in Mastering Change, from the Principles Jack Welch Is Using to Revolutionize GE*; *It Ain't As Easy As It Looks: Ted Turner's Amazing Story*; and *Father, Son & Co.: My Life at IBM and Beyond*. In addition, the more serious *The American Reader: Words That Moved a Nation* and a limited edition of *Collection of Translations on American Literary History* (eight volumes), which had been deeply influential in the 1980s, were reprinted.

The appearance of books containing strong national sentiments may have formed the core of the market; however, the large array of "American books," in contrast, still afforded a magnificent spectacle. An interesting point is that the pioneer of the popular political best-seller, *Megatrends Asia*, was written by U.S. scholar John Naisbitt rather than "an angry Chinese." This book not only paved the way, but it was also reprinted numerous times with high revenues. Because the premonition of "China's resurgence"

originated from the mouth of a U.S. scholar, it exerted a greater influence. The Chinese-penned *Megatrends China* not only completely mimicked the title and cover design of its predecessor but also chose a transliterated name (*shibike* for *speaker*) as the pen name for its collective author. As a result, debates raged between the cultural and publishing communities over ethics—in particular, the issue of falsifying a sequel. Also evident in this incident over the Chinese sequel is the pursuit to share in and rely on Naisbitt's success and discursive authority.⁸

Another similar and rather absurd example is that many of the early popular political books featured group photos of the authors posing with important U.S. politicians. Although the documentary *Measure of Strength* surpassed its predicted box office revenues, it is impossible to overlook the much higher earnings of the fanatically received Hollywood blockbusters. Although *Independence Day* was not officially stamped as one of the “imported blockbusters,” it had already been circulated and “released in tandem with global distribution” as an illegally copied video CD (VCD). As with many computer games, Chinese consumers have no qualms about sharing the American illusion of rescuing humanity through this film.

The integration of a “Chinese” identity with “domestic products,” as a fresh voice projected by the new advertising images, can only be considered a single hue among an array of vivid colors. As domestic products began to foreground their Chineseness, U.S. or Western transnational companies were still, nonetheless, viewed as representing the world. In 1997–1998, a billboard for IBM appeared at the corner of People's University. Within the deep blue of outer space appears the image of an astronaut, wearing a silver suit and walking in space. On the billboard was the impressive phrase “Even just a small step can move the world.” A similarity can be drawn between this billboard and Central China Television's repeated primetime broadcasting of citizen's commercial. In the earth's wasteland of the distant future, an extraterrestrial explorer's probe excavates a lavalike surface material. Surprisingly, what is discovered is the illustrious citizen “forever resilient” watch. Actually, following the lead of the Coca-Cola ads that featured a global family of pretty youths with black, yellow, and white skin, the “human race” space narrative became one of the common rhetorical strategies in the transnational corporations' advertisements.

While the double-decker buses covered entirely by Kodak's yellow, luminescent ads and Fuji's deep green ads fearlessly traversed the streets of Beijing, the ads for Lekai ("risking the enemy's fire") were comparatively subdued and resounded with irony. Likewise, the mechanical advertisements produced by state-owned enterprises primarily relied on scenes from old documentaries of oil field workers toiling shoulder to shoulder in a frozen, snow-covered landscape. These advertisements seemed to clearly rearticulate the Mao Zedong era's spirit of self-reliance and arduous struggle. However, in 1997 a series of peculiar but striking lighted billboards were set up in Beijing's eastern district in a new commercial area outside the luxurious shopping mall adjacent to China's State Department—Full Link Plaza—and a large-scale household shopping center promoting a "lifestyle of high quality." Pictures of socialist model heroes from the 1950s through the 1990s were displayed on one side of the lighted billboards, while the other side featured colorful advertisements for Coca-Cola and Golden Lion products. The first picture placed at the intersection was that of the "iron man" Wang Jinxi, representative of the oil field workers. The squeezing out and concealment of Wang Jinxi's black-and-white photo by the Golden Lion and Coca-Cola advertisements was an important scene in China's cultural landscape of the 1990s. It indeed seems to admit or reveal the mutually conflicting ideologies of the cold war era—between the deep infiltration of the transnational corporations and the image of the high-spirited national industry and consciousness. At this time in the 1990s, however, these became harmoniously shared by China's cultural and official strategies. These ideologies even appear as the front and back of the billboards that "light up Beijing." However, as is the case with *China Can Say No*, concealment and exhibition are two sides of the same coin. While the advertisements display a type of national sentiment, they also conceal a more truthful political-cultural conflict within the domain of economics, the oppositional (or even life-and-death) struggle between the transnational corporations and national industries and the welfare of laborers.

Actually, even during 1996–1997, the years of "China saying no," the cultural performance uniquely displayed within advertisements was extremely complex. For example, in Beijing there appeared an ad for Five Star Beer on a public bus, less flashy than the ads on the double-decker buses. Despite Five

Star being a traditional domestic brand, the advertisement's designer paired the product's original five-star logo with the colors red and blue and an African American basketball player leaping to dunk the ball. Clearly, people were led to associate the U.S. flag with the image of the National Basketball Association. A famous film dubber recognized by all Chinese as the voice of Donald Duck, says in a commercial for televisions, "Chinese people prefer to use Chinese colored televisions" and "Chinese color television, Chinese excellent products." In 1995 the formation of soccer leagues once again ignited the entire society's surging fervor ("Burst out of Asia and head for the world") for Chinese soccer. And sports, a national institution whose ideological efficacy was corroborated in the hosting of the 1990 Asian Olympics and bidding for the 2000 Olympics, more or less became a "naturalized" medium for expressing national sentiments. In relation to the trading of athletes, the hiring of foreign coaches, and the gradual increase in players from outside China, the sport's financial spectacle has obscured the issues of national identity and national image.⁹ Besides, the 1997 playoffs of China's A league, viewed by the entire country, received most of their financial support from the Marlboro company. Therefore, the photos of the "postmodern national" soccer heroes triumphantly dribbling and shooting became the mesmerizing images of the ubiquitous advertisements for Marlboro cigarettes.

At the same time, the Chinese products, while entering the course of globalization, began to exhibit their "domesticity" or conceal their connection to transnational capitalism. Refrigerator brands provide evidence of how foreign obsolete technology was blindly introduced into China.¹⁰ Certain brands, such as Meiling-Alliston or Haier, began to depart from the practice of copying Western names, as in the case of "the Chinese people's Meiling." The advertisements for the U.S. company Procter and Gamble (*Baojie* in Chinese), which essentially took over the cosmetics market and nearly wiped out traditional Chinese brands, illustrate the following intriguing transformation: from America's Baojie Company to Baojie Company (Chinese-American Joint Venture) to Baojie Company (Shanghai) and then to China's Baojie Company. The brand name Procter and Gamble, as an enlarged close-up read by a low, powerful male voice, gradually became a soundless image flashing by during this process of the company's transformation.

Even more interesting is the large advertisement for U.S. computer manufacturer Intel printed in the weekly edition of the *Beijing Evening Post*, one of the four major evening papers in China. This advertisement featured an astronaut holding an Intel motherboard as the icon for its globalized product. To make it more visually stimulating, the ad was sometimes accompanied by the lithe figure of a ballerina. However, in 1997 traditional Beijing Opera characters replaced the ballerina to surround the astronaut. At the same time, Compaq's advertising rhetoric became "On the never-ending road, I will look up and down." This can more or less lead us to conclude that the high tide of nationalistic feelings compelled transnational corporations to adopt a low profile, conceal their identity, or even "perform" Chinese nationalism.

However, we can certainly cite many counterexamples to this phenomenon as well. In October 1996 a peculiar large-scale advertisement emerged on Beijing University's campus. The famous Lee jeans set up a bright red booth on the campus's famous triangle with a large photo of blue jeans covered with the signatures of celebrities. The jeans were sold at a fifth of the market price, and even lower, to Beijing University students with a student ID. (A few years earlier, Coca-Cola had handed out complimentary Cokes in Beijing University's cafeteria.) Naturally, crowds of students surrounded the booth. With little inspection it was not difficult to discover that the patiently lined-up students were holding TOEFL or GRE preparatory books. According to one report, this one-time advertising campaign sold more than twenty thousand pairs of jeans. If the buyers were indeed Beijing University students, then "Beijing University will become the ocean of Lee Cooper's blue jeans."¹¹ In 1987 Italian film director Bernardo Bertolucci noted that he selected China as the place to film *The Last Emperor* because "China is a country that has not yet been invaded by Coca-Cola and McDonald's." However, in just a short few years, McDonald's in Beijing, which started as a single franchise in 1990 at the corner of Wangfujing, multiplied into more than forty restaurants, and more places were still being solicited by attractive offers to open new chain restaurants. Therefore, in large cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, the golden arches of McDonald's became the most conspicuous street landmark, with the effect of satirizing Bertolucci's statement.

As just a detail within Beijing's citywide project Beautifying Bus Stations in 1997, the "American-style bus stops" featured covered waiting areas and large lighted advertisement frames. The first advertisement displayed was a solicitation for advertisements by the advertising company. This advertisement, with a rather simple and crude red and yellow image, carried the words "Let your advertisement splendidly illuminate China's vast land" across the top. In English, "China can say: Yes" was printed symmetrically across the bottom. It is obvious that this advertisement implicitly targets transnational corporations and foreign capital, and Western name-brand products occupied this advertising space in Beijing's congested eastern district. We can perhaps conclude that the so-called surge of nationalistic sentiments was linked to China's ongoing complex with the "world/West/America."

A Recollection

Perhaps if one wants to explore the rise of nationalistic culture in the 1990s, at least its manifestation in popular culture, then one must glance back at history.

First, we should recall the Mao Zedong era's self-reliance slogans that imagined China as the center of the revolution and internationalism ("Chinese people possess the will and the ability to quickly catch up and surpass the world"; "China is the heart of the world's revolution"; "Plant the red flag in all five continents"; "Imperialists and reactionary cliques are all paper tigers"). But this imaginary landscape faded during the post-Cultural Revolution period. The discussion of the "three worlds" theory and the reestablishment of sino-American relations, while bolstering the image of China as a world power and leader, also inadvertently rewrote the ideological implications of the former landscape. The opposition between socialism and capitalism, in terms of their different social systems and ideological camps, was replaced within China by divisions between the rich and the poor, the large and the small, and the powerful and the weak.

In addition, an episode of greater importance occurred during the profound social transformation at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. At this time, after living through the ecstasy of being rescued from the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people experienced a cultural course

that I refer to as “encountering the world.” The Chinese, whose concept of the world had been informed by official political rhetoric and nineteenth-century Western literature, suddenly discovered that their country was not the center of the world’s revolution. Moreover, China no longer held the mission of “honorably liberating all those who live in dire circumstances—two-thirds of the world’s population.” Their history of closure and self-detachment, to the contrary, deeply exiled China from the world’s path of “civilization” and “advancement.” This historical experience of encountering the world constructed for the Chinese the painful retreat from a position in which China was seen at the center to one of marginality. The rhetoric of China belonging to the third world now degraded their idea of a glorious, self-congratulatory sense of mission to a stark material reality. It was confirmed that China was no longer a world (at that time, referring to the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America) leader. Since the 1980s, China has looked upon the West, or more precisely, the hegemonic United States, as the center. With the U.S. model in mind, China has been attempting to complete the historical course of a march back to the center—a one-time retaking of the center. As a result, summonses to “head towards the world,” “get on track with the world,” and “join the global village” have resounded as loudly as they have been, without being subject to critical questionings.

One of the most important cultural strategies adopted by Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s was to articulate and conceal at the same time their antiofficial stance through the seemingly nonideological means of cultural expression. But in reality it became the most powerful practice that legitimized ideology during the Deng Xiaoping era. The naming of China/world and national ethnicity was an attempt within the scope of discursive practice to dissociate the concepts of nation (*guojia*) and homeland (*zuguo*). *Nation* came to signify the former socialist system during the Mao Zedong era, indicating the “inhuman” or “antihuman” authoritarian political dictatorship. *Homeland* came to refer to the hometown—native land, language, culture, kinship, and traditional customs. This practice shows the refusal to have the tyrannical nation represent China and the resistance and deconstruction of the national myth of “bearing the historical mission of world revolution.” This is symptomatic of the intellectuals’ negative

reaction against the patriotic ideology promoted by the regime since 1949 to conflate the notions of nation and race into a single entity of national identity.

According to E. J. Hobsbawm, China's feudal history was replete with "proto-nationalism," and China possessed a "natural" "supply" of nationalism. The Han nationality composed an absolute majority of the population (more than 94 percent).¹² Modern China was more or less built within its historical frontiers. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially around the eruption of the Sino-Japanese War, "proto-nationalism" had already successfully been transformed into and become an integral component of the discursive constructs of China's modernity (*xiandai xing*). This nationalistic discourse was indeed abundant.¹³ Therefore, its course of naturalization and legitimization was profound and successful. At the same time, the imperialists' annihilation of China's naval defense catalyzed the institutionalization of a modern China and coerced China into entering the course of globalization. The experience of victimization in historical and practical terms was another origin for the strengthening of nationalistic identification. Precisely because of this memory of China's semicolonial experience, it has been difficult for Chinese intellectuals to think reflexively about nationalism and confront it objectively. The Chinese dwelling on cosmopolitanism, Eurocentrism, the complex cultural psychology of idolizing the West while searching for indigenous identity, and the display of conscious national resistance and extreme nationalistic fanaticism have always been inextricably entangled. They appear indistinctly within China's cultural and ideological expression from the last century until today. Furthermore, the unadulterated image of homeland/motherland, once disassociated from the image of the nation, has again become a successful reincarnation of protonationalism.

From one perspective, an essentially bidirectional reciprocal process cross-cut the 1980s. On one side was the movement of historical cultural reflection, the constant criticism and negation of Chinese traditional culture. This movement included Taiwanese essayist Bo Yang's *Ugly Chinaman*, his famous lampooning of Chinese "soy sauce vat culture," and Long Yingtai's heated response, "Chinaman, why don't you get angry?" On the other hand, we also saw Hong Kong pop singer Zhang Mingmin's "China Heart," Taiwan "re-patriot" Hou Dejian's "Keeper of the Dragon," and "Cloud of My

Homeland” by Feixiang, who resided in the United States. These singers were all made popular throughout the country, especially among young students, by the mega-medium of Central Television’s “New Year’s Evening Party.”¹⁴ In this form of popular culture, ostensibly devoid of any ideological content, the returned “overseas patriots” confirmed the integration and interpolation of the motherland by singing these pop songs.

Optical Illusion

The foreign policy of staving off the enemy behind closed doors informed the Chinese perception of the world. Slogans from this period include “the proletariat of the world unite” and “liberate those in dire straits—two-thirds of the world’s population.” Then, during the social transformation from the 1970s to the 1980s, in the process of first encountering and painfully realizing the boundary of China’s “self,” there was also a concealing or a turning of a blind eye to China’s history during the preceding several centuries. A new narrative about the process of modernization and China marching toward the world became rewritten into the myth of the spectacular creation of a new century. It is clear that the denouement of the 1980s brought to a premature end the Chinese dreams about reforming their political system and their quick entry into global membership. Later, in the 1990s, amid despair over political reform and the rising social craze of money worship, the ideology of the nation-state became one of the only possibilities into which the entire society could be integrated as a unified whole. Again a contradiction appeared between the campaign of paying ritualistic homage to emperors and Confucius and the movement of promoting patriotic films and books. Because both movements were identified as national and official, they were predictably ineffective. Yet it is undeniable that amid the great social angst and identity crisis of the transition period, “Chinese nation” and “Chinese people” resonated with double clarity and remained the only stable index and signifier with which the entire society can be identified. Since 1992 the intensifying process of globalization further accentuated the ongoing construction of the subjective/objective consciousness of “Chinese nation” and “Chinese people.”

Since the new era, a strange and marvelous phenomenon is Chinese society and culture's disjunction from the debt and legacy of the Mao Zedong era, despite the fact that on the surface the Chinese seemed to have resorted to the complete negation or unconditional refusal of such a legacy. On this account, when we painfully realize our true marginal position within the world, a dash toward the center to eventually arrive at the central position is also initiated. This is precisely the popular version of the "three worlds theory" of the United States, China, and the Soviet Union. We naturally select the United States as our model, goal, and ideal ally. On account of China's history, social reality, and recent farewell to fanatic idolatry of communism, we cannot possibly select the Soviet Union. We will not stoop to and are not willing to be wrongfully classified as just a developing country of the second world, either. Consequently, during the 1980s "America" became an important myth and a great idol of contemporary culture. This is not simply the reappearance of the American dream in the period of social liberalization and transition. Rather, it is a unique Chinese version. The myth and romanticization of the United States is not, or is not only, the unlimited imagination of the American dream. Rather, the American dream is a comprehensive model and the object of emulation. At the same time, it is that which is desired to be replaced and, in the very least, contested with. As the center of the world in the historical past and the imaginary leader of the third world under Mao's leadership, China felt justified in dreaming this wondrous vision.

Not until the tragic denouement at the end of the 1980s did the Chinese version of the American dream begin to include the characteristics common to the third world fantasy about the first world. Within this vision, U.S. politics and military force were identified as the manifestations of global righteousness and democratic strength, and its internalization was seen as a healthy disciplinary force of domestic politics.

Because of the conscious banishment of the Mao Zedong era from popular memory, and because the increasingly significant value of the motherland was meant to be foregrounded in the national narrative to transcend the former Marxist ideology, Chinese people have intentionally or unintentionally neglected the fact that the conflict between the United States and China historically originated in the cold war era. The cold war era was

not an absurd comedy. Rather, it was a battle to the death of capitalism and socialism, the ruthless confrontation of two major international ideological fronts. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe, the hands-down victory of capitalism, and the termination of the cold war, Chinese society, and especially the Chinese intellectual community, willingly participated in this worldwide “festival of humanity.” Therefore, without hesitation the Chinese abandoned Marxism, believing they were transcending the socialist system.

On account of this, they were unwilling to view themselves objectively as the last surviving country of socialism, or more accurately, as the government ruled under the dictatorship of the Communist Party. It seemed that if they had been brought to such an awareness, they would not have been permitted to share in the relaxation and harmony of the post-cold war era. Therefore, rather than mistaking *China Can Say No* and the other popular political books for expressions of anger and resistance, these books should more aptly be seen as vocalizing disappointment—the disillusionment of the Chinese people over their fantasies about the United States. Rather than viewing the book as a profound contemplation on the fate of China in the post-cold war era, it is better to consider it an emotional expression replete with disenchanting resentment. Similarly, because the Chinese people have left behind their idolatry of Marxism, Chinese society and the intellectual community failed to recognize that underlying the movement of globalization is the logic of capitalism. This failure resulted in our inability to confront and examine the inevitable conflict between transnational capitalism and the national welfare and interests of the third world within the sphere of globalism. It could be suggested that in the 1980s and 1990s, faith in human progress was the largest myth and utopian vision. The so-called Chinese version of the American dream is an important tile of this multicolored mosaic.

The best-seller *China Can Say No*, the pioneer of this so-called tide of nationalism, emotionally beckons to those of the same generation to trace how the American dream, even during the latter part of the Mao Zedong era, penetrated the Chinese imagination, only to become an even greater lie over time. The authors’ use of recollections, carefully selected historical references, and emotional rhetoric are undoubtedly the major elements that evoke the readers’ identification (according to my investigation, the book’s

most avid readers are middle-aged urbanites and intellectuals in the field of technology). Interestingly, despite being a “political book,” it seems more akin to a soliloquy on lost love. Because of China’s enthusiasm for and aspirations (or, better yet, imagination) in regard to America, America must offer to reciprocate. They have never put forth the effort to carry out their obligations. We have time and time again been injured, continually encountering betrayal. Therefore, a choice is made, in a tone filled with injury, based on resentment to abandon the abandoner: China can say no.

“I have called out to you for thousands of miles but you pay no heed. You are not like in my dreams. In my dreams, you are the only one. Once, once again, I ask me [*sic*] whether or not you love me. I ask myself whether or not I can bear to part with you.” In the once hip television series *Beijinger in New York*, this deeply sentimental and lamenting title song accompanies the bird’s-eye shot of the dazzling, glamorous nightscape of Manhattan. It changes to instrumental music, the majestic American anthem, while the roving camera closes in and shoots the Brooklyn Bridge from below. Here the remorseful soliloquy, while issuing a sharp farewell, is also a deep emotional plea: “China is saying no not in pursuit of opposition but to seek a more equal dialogue.”¹⁵

The many popular political books do not share exactly the same direction, position, and narrative style. However, in the very least they share a common selling point: an ambiguous subject-position of China. This is a feeling of resentment, an attitude of self-consolation and self-love and yet an earnest appeal: if you join hands with China, you will benefit. Interestingly, the words printed on the cover of *China Can Say No* more or less appear to exhibit a resolute attitude: “China can say no. This is the voice of the Chinese people.” However, inside the cover, the table of contents is equally revealing: “China delivers opportunities to the world: take the ‘Chinese express.’” These popular political books even resort to a classical mechanism of psychological compensation, namely, to project one’s own desire through a reversal of subject-position: “Will America lose China for a second time?”¹⁶ Another interesting clue appears on the book’s cover: warm and light colors set off the fluttering star-spangled flag and the image of the Statue of Liberty. Prominently displayed above is the blue earth photographed from outer space with a relief of a large dragon wrapped around

the top of the globe. In addition to the U.S. symbols dominating the cover, it is well known that the blue color of the globe in the 1980s was imbued with a unique and obvious connotation: the aquatic West/modern civilization. The large dragon, referring to China, is shown engulfing the world. However, the blue of the background (America) is still unquestionably presupposed.

Within these books, the so-called national sentiment, native mentality and the movement of China marching toward the world, and globalization—global village—on track are mutually informing and reinforcing. Moreover, as a continuation of the overseas students' literature of the 1990s, we can view the books from a different perspective. Namely, these political books assume that the political perspective informs one of the true America. However, that half of the American dream that remained unfulfilled is China's fantasy of America—eventually, China itself—while the other half of the dream is located in an America that still glitters like gold. Rather than viewing these books as a disclosure of anti-American sentiment, we may be better off viewing them as an account of China's disappointment with its own expectations about the United States.

These political books still give themselves and America enough room for comfort. This story of China and America starts with ardent love and ends with lost love. However, China is not ready to reach a position of animosity toward the United States. On the contrary, China's prospect is still one of "holding hands [with America] into the twenty-first century"¹⁷ and "constructing a new world order together."

A Corner of a Topographic Map

With little doubt the surge of Chinese nationalism in the 1990s was one of the most intricate components of this period's cultural topographic map. For China, the international and domestic economic state and prospect were hinged on opening the country's door and attracting outside capital. That is to say, the economy depended on having transnational capital increasingly infiltrate China. Transnational capital not only confronts an ideological obstacle but also manifests a deep conflict with the national industry. Perhaps it can be said that the conflict between transnational

capital and national industry was the real issue behind Chinese nationalism in the 1990s. But this is the invisible component of the popular books such as *China Can Say No*. Presuming that events such as the bid for the 2000 Olympics, the Diaoyu Island incident, and the Taiwan and Tibet issues severely injured the Chinese people's feelings, then in comparison to these, more sincerely constitutive of the conflict and dispute are the problems surrounding the World Trade Organization, economic sanction, and most favored nation status. Thus, although the authors of *China Can Say No* promoted national interest, their ultranationalist and xenophobic sentiment was at the same time a barrier to the state's pursuit of an open-door policy aimed at drawing in overseas capital. The authors of *China Can Say No* can effectively construct a banner of unifying national identification. But they also contradicted current governmental policy.

In the context of the 1990s, this sudden surge in the tide of nationalism displaced to a certain degree the widespread identity crisis and latent class conflict. However, a critique such as *China Can Say No* and its acknowledgment of the predicaments of globalization could possibly form the focal point of domestic political debates and conflicts. From these different levels and perspectives, nationalism is a double-edged sword of contradiction and risk. Specifically, in the unique circumstances of the 1990s, the complexity of Chinese nationalism resided in its subtle links with larger social critiques targeted at globalization, transnational capital, and the economic, cultural, and political imperialism of the West.

Family and Nation

Nationalism in the 1990s displayed not merely a complex of conflict and collusion of different interest groups within the various political, economic, and cultural positions. It also became a juncture of mutual convergence for the discourses of ethnicity, class, and sex. I said earlier that one of the most important developments in the cultural politics of the 1980s was the disassociation of the notion of the nation-state from the motherland, or more precisely in English, the fatherland. We may think that subversion of an autocratic system is at the same time an act of toppling the patriarchy. But

interestingly, in China such a subversion marked the beginning of the reconstruction of the patriarchal order. We may presume that in the traditional Chinese lexicon and epistemology, the concept of *guojia* was made up of the two characters *guo* (nation) and *jia* (family). However, within socialist China, the work unit system, the revolutionary family, and the spirit of communism, while subverting traditional China's institutions of family ties and kinship, also inherited and magnified this structure. In the 1990s, advertisements and popular culture were replacing mainstream (official) culture as the window that exhibits the ideal lifestyle and ideal values. Perhaps not so accidentally, the visual image of the ideal nuclear family replaced and dissolved the narrative of communism and the values of the traditional kinship family.

The transition from the 1980s to the 1990s witnessed a proliferation of costly and extravagant advertisements for transnational corporations, soap operas from Western countries, and Hollywood blockbusters, which circulated quickly as pirated VCDs. These cultural artifacts inadvertently summoned individuals to construct a fantasy about the wonderful life of the petite bourgeoisie. The nuclear family, as a globalized standard image, became a perfect ideological means to convey the ideal of everyday life that is understood to be nonideological. Therefore, every brand of beer, famous Western alcohol, perfume, tie, and leather shoe became the emblem of success. The measure of this type of success, without a doubt, was money, which is advertised to be where a man's attractiveness lies. In the same manner, many of the cosmetics, foods, and beverages of the transnational corporations became natural daily choices for the ideal wife and necessities for the happy nuclear family. Because we all tacitly know that Western modern life is the model of this lifestyle, the blond Western boy and Western nuclear family became the most effective image for advertisements. In a joint-venture company's advertisement for cereal, a pleasant housewife in an apron opens the kitchen's sparkling blinds and gleefully peers out at her husband and son flying a kite in the golden yellow wheat fields. The golden wheat obviously links the advertisement to the product it is promoting. The advertisement also summons the typical modern petit bourgeois lifestyle through the image of the happy housewife living in a house in the suburbs.

It may not be accidental that at the time of this advertisement, the department of urban planning had just initiated a debate on whether to develop the suburbs and build highways or to rebuild the old city and improve the system of public transportation. As a displacement of the reality of contemporary urban life, the happy wife of these advertisements is always the full-time housewife. We never see a household of working parents in these advertisements. In a motorcycle ad, a male voice cuts in: "My mother is always so busy. . . ." Then we see his bustling mother on a motorcycle rushing to shop, cook, and drive her child from place to place. Of course a more frequent sight is the housewife deriving pleasure from using name-brand international household products. Many of these young wives, lonely during the day, receive gifts of household electrical appliances from their husbands. In comparison with the old message of women returning to the hearth, the patriarchal connotation here may be less blatant, but this image is no less effective in reinforcing the same message via the depiction of modern life, which is now seen as the only model of an ideal life.

In the beginning of the 1990s, domestic and semidomestic advertising companies with a large capital base began to adopt the advertising images used for imported and joint-venture products. Therefore, the individual and the ideal nuclear household, which gracefully and elegantly traverse urban space, became the omnipresent conventional images in television advertising. Representations of modernizing China's cultural imagination and values, in one sweep, seemed to transcend identification with the nation, perfecting the globalized cultural landscape.

However, like an echo, around the time *China Can Say No* provoked the surge of nationalism, China's advertising industry seemed to change its strategy. Advertisements that had exhibited glamorous photos of the world became infused with a proletariat ambience. The advertising images began to pursue a course of ethnification. Interestingly, this ideology of ethnification diverges from Zhang Yimou's spring festival TV commercial made for Marlboro, a typical "scene of ethnic worship" also seen in films such as *Yellow Earth* and *Red Sorghum*. Rather, it adopts a Chinese style of warmhearted and intimate kinship relations to distinguish it from the picture-perfect Western nuclear family. Alluding to *Beijinger in New York*, Kongfu household wine adopted "Even a million miles won't keep me

away from home” as its slogan. In the commercial, Wang Ji, who plays the “overseas woman” in the television series, returns to her native country—China—emotionally reuniting with her friends, relatives, and aging parents. In other commercials the nostalgic images of grandmothers or mothers-in-law appear in warm, glowing light. In the commercial for Fulinmen cooking oil, a girl’s “great-grandfather, time to eat” summons the gathering of a joyful four-generation household. The public welfare advertisements, which suddenly appeared scattered throughout the city, were also connected to “the traditional aesthetic values of the Chinese people.”

The success of these advertisements may seem at first glance to imperil the image of the imported and joint-venture products. However, as a cosmetic measure, the transnational companies, as mentioned earlier, began to discard their natural alliance with the nuclear family and the image of the individual or modern lifestyle. They no longer refused to adopt or refer to the image of the Chinese-style kinship family. Even the advertisements for McDonald’s and Pizza Hut, which had always focused on efficiency, standardization, youth, and office workers, began to change their strategy. For example, Pizza Hut’s advertisement became “Heaps of fresh ingredients make grandfather feel great; it’s so delicious that grandmother feels exhilarated; mother-in-law just can’t wait to taste it, and daughter-in-law can’t stop eating; and you?” Likewise, *Our Father, Our Mother* and *Growing Up Tale* replaced *Addicted to Play* and *Love You No Matter What* as popular television series. During this period, holding the banner of shared suffering, realist literature emerged and rapidly became enmeshed with the production of popular culture. The popular television series *Garage Owner* and *Our Father, Our Mother*, while illustrating the hardships of the lower levels of society, once again displayed the socialist work unit system of state enterprises—a magnification of the hard-up but warm and comforting kinship family. Here, the family/work unit/nation obtained a new degree of integration.

This development of popular culture may more profoundly reveal the truth about Chinese society and the surge of nationalism in the latter part of the 1990s than the popularity of *China Can Say No*. Of course, it must first be stated that China’s media has always been the “official” media. It has a certain degree of control and regulation over the advertisements of transnational corporations. Due to this, the reality displayed by these ads is

not the same as the reality of economic life. For example, since the 1990s the new rich, an unavoidable spectacle ubiquitous throughout Chinese society, and urban youths have become the main consumers responding to commercials. However, these consumers were hardly featured in the ads broadcast by the national and regional stations. To look into this pattern of consumption, we must investigate a different space of the urban landscape. We must look at the fashions and lifestyles of urban middle-school students and white-collar workers in the old city's and the commercial districts' row upon row of boutiques, bars, cafes, karaoke clubs, and pirated CD and VCD underground shops and the meandering villas in the suburbs. However, (TV) commercials, without a doubt, are still an important window revealing certain information about politics, culture, and the economy.

Interestingly, the reception of Chinese television commercials in the 1990s changed its focus from appreciation to utility. In other words, in the latter part of the 1980s the majority of commercials for transnational companies were received as exotic "visual ice cream" and stereotypical model of Western life. In the 1990s the production and reception of commercials became one of the basic facts of everyday life. Therefore, the advertisements of transnational (at this time primarily joint-venture) and domestic companies began to reveal a truth, namely, their competition for the Chinese market and Chinese consumers. On closer inspection, it is apparent that the fluctuations of the transnational company (primarily joint-venture) and domestic product commercials do not just parallel the rise and fall of the sentiments of nationalism. Rather, they reveal a real social and economic change. The drastic stratification of classes now became manifested as the stratification of consumers. The proletarian ambience and the enveloping warmth of the kinship family, which suddenly appeared in advertisements, are less indicative of a turning point in cultural identity than of the limits of consumer spending ability. Few doubt the efficacy of Crest toothpaste, but at one-sixth the price, Blue Sky ("good teeth equal good appetite; eating well makes the body swell") is certainly a more realistic consumer choice. Aoni's products ("black hair, Chinese product"), marketed at a price not much cheaper than Procter and Gamble's, cannot attract consumers even with its patriotic appeal.

The intent of the advertisements was certainly not to carry or promote a classical ideology. However, selection of the products' images and maximization of profits cannot but take as reference points specific sociocultural psychological needs. Therefore, the classical ideology became endowed with a deeper meaning when McDonald's and Pizza Hut changed their advertising strategy by consciously assimilating the image of Chinese kinship family so as to distinguish themselves from the globally best-selling image of the nuclear family. We may conclude that simultaneously with the "say no" voice there existed a natural alliance between the identification of the family (the extended kinship family and not the modern nuclear family) with the nation.

However, as a signifier of a modern nation, the word *China* cannot be completely identified with the traditional Chinese family. On the contrary, the image of the extended family in May Fourth literature such as Ba Jin's work was always cast in symbolic terms of imprisonment and bloodless abuse. In the post-1949 era, in the name of class and communal spirit, sociocultural and political structure further dissolved the familial pattern based on blood relations. There emerged a double-directional process of cultural construction. On one hand, we witnessed individuals' absolute loyalty to family transformed into the modern-day patriotic tradition and merged into the metaphoric expressions of the nation; on the other hand, Mao's literature and the arts of the workers, peasants, and soldiers successfully turned class conflicts into family feuds. Two discourses are interweaving: as a symbol of Chinese feudal culture, family signifies repressed desire, enemy of the individual, but as the fountainhead of the Chinese race, family is the anchor for human feelings and national identity.

The reappearance of representation of the kinship family is perhaps the missing link in the riddle behind the tide of nationalism of the 1990s. During the period of transition, the surge in fervent nationalism was not informed by the reemergence of an international political stand, or the Chinese people's awakening and resistance, toward American imperialism. Rather, it was constructed by the real and widespread social crisis and self-identity angst. The tide of nationalism itself is filled with crosscutting currents. However, at least in terms of the production and reception of popular culture, nationalism is more a phenomenon governed by domestic logic than something

that grew out of the anti-imperialist pattern of provocation/reaction or oppression/resistance. The most important or significant optical illusion is the concealment of the new and extreme class stratification and the reconstruction of a system of gender and class. These were effectively obscured by the ideological discourse of an ancestral land, which emerged in the attempt to transcend class, sex, and ethnicity. In the 1990s the resurgence of nationalism sought to displace the surfeit of China's social crisis and self-identity angst. Once again, this displacement enabled the arrogant and nay-saying Chinese to configure an imaginary community and communal entity sharing the same fears and joys.

This time, the restaging of the alliance between family and nation was not a brilliant political/cultural strategy. Rather, it was a culturally shared space, coincidentally created as a result of the conflict and collusion of diverse political/social interest groups. Assuming that in the 1980s revalorizing the family was itself a refutation of class analysis and communism, then readopting the representation of the kinship family in the 1990s, to a large degree, stemmed from the loss and disorientation that resulted from the critical social stratification and restructuring.¹⁸ Moreover, this pursuit was filled with a nostalgic reminiscence that accompanied the entrance of China's first generation of only-children and the historical submergence of the complex web of kinship. Of greater importance was the dissolution of the system of social welfare (for the newly born, elderly, sick, and deceased) prior to the establishment of a new welfare insurance system. The lower classes, the sacrificial lambs of reform, still hoped for and depended on a large family and network of close friends. According to an investigation, over 20 percent of six thousand unemployed workers in Henan province's Association of Laborers were financially dependent on their family and relatives.

In real life the reemergence of the family might correspond to the weakening of the nurturing capacity of the nation. However, in the latter part of the 1990s, China's new social groups emerged in response to the sudden eruption of desires and major restructuring and dissolution of the former social structure. Therefore, society once again needed a common enemy—an image of the other—to bear China's agony during its historic transformation and to bail the regime out of the deep crisis that arose in this

dangerous time. Nationalism, without a doubt, became one of the only legitimate banners that could be summoned to remobilize the Chinese people. There had to be enemies from outside rather than from inside. However, this mandatory enemy, or enemy of the Chinese people, could only implicate an imaginary America. This is because the image of the United States in the 1980s was constructed by and drowning in adoration for America, which was necessarily accompanied by a fear of America. Therefore, the construction of this enemy is really just the filling in of an empty space with a name. It is an object used to displace the nameless social restlessness and crises.

The representation of kinship family and the social discourse of sharing suffering once again used the name of the nation to seek the devoted sacrifice and fervent patriotism of the lower levels of society. These ostensibly disparate representations and discourses coexist in a sometimes conflicting and sometimes complicitous manner. In short, this is a cultural reality played out in the domestic domain rather than in the international arena. Of course, within the mirrored reflections of China and the world in the post-cold war era, it became a sometimes real and sometimes illusory reality, continually undergoing repeated refraction, magnification, and constant contortion.

Translated by Jonathan Noble

Notes

- 1 Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang, and Qiao Bian, *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu: Hou lengzhan shidai de zhengzhi yu qinggan jueze* [China can say no: A choice of politics and attitude in the post-cold war era] (Beijing: Zhongguo gongshang lianhe chubanshe, 1996).
- 2 Written on the cover of Qian Li, Sun Keqin, and Cui Jianhong, *Ezhi Zhongguo: Shenhua yu xianshi* [Containing China: Myth and reality] (Beijing: Zhongguo Yanshi chubanshe, 1996).
- 3 From the advertisement for *Yazhou da qushi* [Megatrends Asia].
- 4 Zhang Xueli, *Zhongguo keyi shuobu: Mengxing de shuishi* [Why did China say no: The sudden awakening of a sleeping lion?] (Beijing: Hualing chubanshe, 1996); Peng Qian, Yang Mingjie, and Xu Deren, *Zhongguo weishenme shuo bu* [Why China says no: America's mistaken policies toward China during the post-cold war era] (Xin shijie chubanshe, 1996). Refer to "News

Topic: The Extent of the Mass Political Books Fad,” *Zhonghua dushu bao* [China readers magazine], January 1996.

- 5 In Zhang Kuan, “Guanyu houzhimin zhuyi piping de zai sikao” [Reevaluation of the critique of postcolonialism], in *Yuandao* [The source], ed. Chen Ming, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi, chubanshe, 1996), 406–424.
- 6 Includes *George Washington: The Revolution’s Sword* [Geming zhi jian Hua Shengdun], *Benjamin Franklin: Father of a Nation* [Minzu zhi fu Fulankelin], and *Thomas Jefferson: Spirit of Democracy* [Minzhu de hun Jiefeisun].
- 7 See the special report “The Suspect ‘Harvard’ Books” in the series Tracking the Bestsellers, *Zhonghua dushu bao* [China readers’ magazine] 14 August 1999, 1. Pioneered by the best-seller *Learning from Harvard*, an entire series of best-selling books with *Harvard* in their names appeared, such as *Harvard Management* and *Harvard Debating*. In 1995, based on my calculations arrived at by visiting some of Beijing’s bookstores, I saw more than forty-eight books with *Harvard* in their titles. In 1996 *Learning from Stanford* and *Learning from Berkeley* also appeared.
- 8 See “‘Zhongguo daqushi’ shifou fangzao?” [Is “Megatrends China” a forgery?], *Zhonghua dushu bao*, 11 September 1996.
- 9 Of course, the fact of Chinese soccer teams taking in foreign players is not as clear as it may seem on the surface. The woman writer Xu Kun published a novel titled *Shui wei ni chuanqiu* [Who is passing the ball for you?] that with great insight and wit illustrates the subtlety of the nationalistic sentiments.
- 10 In the early 1990s the enterprises that were originally state owned began to change their production over to household electronics, blindly and repeatedly introducing “advanced” technology from abroad. Four or five domestic manufacturers were vying over Alliston’s refrigerators. However, it was quickly discovered that the refrigerators, in terms of international standards, had become obsolete because they employed freon refrigeration technology, which caused serious pollution. To put it more precisely, the transnational companies repeatedly sold at high prices to different companies obsolete and environmentally harmful refrigeration technology.
- 11 See Liu Junmei, “Lee Cooper qiangtan Beida” [Lee Cooper rushing to dock at Beijing University], in *Sanlian shenghuo zhouban* [Sanlian life weekly], 1996, 40–42.
- 12 Hobsbawm points out, “Such negative ethnicity is virtually always irrelevant to proto-nationalism, unless it can be or has been fused with something like a state tradition, as perhaps in China, Korea and Japan, which are indeed among the extremely rare examples of historic states composed of a population that is ethnically almost or entirely homogeneous. In such cases it is quite possible that ethnicity and political loyalty are linked.” See E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1990), 66. Chinese translation: *Minzu yu minzuzhuyi*, trans. Li Jinmei (Taipei: Maitian chubanshe, 1997), 86.

- 13 Around the time of the Sino-Japanese War, a narrative about a patriotic tradition, or “series of great patriots” came into existence, from Chu Yuan’s loyalty to the King of Chu (“I would have no regret even if I were to die a hundred deaths for the King”) in his *Li Sao* to the “Story of Hua Mulan” from the Han dynasty. Then, from the Song dynasty, there is the story of Yue Fei’s and his mother’s utmost loyalty to the nation, Liang Hongyu’s *Taking Jinshan Mountain*, and the chronicles of the Yang Family Generals. During the Ming dynasty, there is Wen Tianxiang and “Song of Righteousness”; during the Qing dynasty there are many stories about opposing the Qing and restoring the Ming dynasty and of Zheng Chenggong reclaiming Taiwan. Then there is Lin Zexu as the destroyer of opium and Deng Shichang during the Sino-Japanese War. These all link a narrative of modern nationalism that is centered on the Han people. Of course, this narrative contains the conflict between the Han nationality itself and the ethnically diverse “Chinese great family” and must eliminate contradictions inherent in the Yuan dynasty’s Genghis Khan functioning both as the national pride and as the Han invaders and alien others.
- 14 Here we will for the time being not discuss the central role of popular culture from Taiwan and Hong Kong upon the course of the production of popular culture in China during the 1980s. In reality this is an important and intriguing issue. In 1997 Zhang Mingmin once again performed “China Heart” at Qinghua University’s celebration of the “return of Hong Kong.” Although the reaction to this song was great, most of the songs were “old songs” carrying a flavor of “cultural nostalgia.”
- 15 These words are printed on the cover of *China Can Say No*.
- 16 See Peng, Yang, and Xu, *Why China Says No*.
- 17 The title of the ninth chapter of Zhang Xueli, *Why Did China Say No*.
- 18 This type of transitional loss is made apparent by the confusion over titles. When such titles as *airen* (husband/wife—a gender neutral term) and *tongzhi* (commonly translated as comrade) rapidly disappeared from the social context, substitutes had to be chosen. However, the only titles that were not altered were those for the various positions within the kinship family.

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