

Chinese Nationalism, cyber-populism, and cross-strait relations

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Abstract: In November 2015, a Taiwanese singer named Chou Tzuyu appeared on a Korean TV show as a member of the pop group 'Twice'. During the show, she claimed that she was from Taiwan (without mentioning China), and waved the Republic of China flag. Chou was subsequently the recipient of vociferous condemnation from Chinese 'netizens', and eventually was compelled to make a public apology for her actions. This apology became the center of an Internet-based dispute between the netizens of mainland China and Taiwan, conducted mainly on the Facebook page of then Taiwanese Presidential candidate, Tsai Yingwen. Subsequently, the tone of this dispute had significant effects on the 2016 Taiwanese general election, with a decisive number of Taiwanese voters switching their support to Tsai. "Cyber-populism", and the online activities of nationalistic Chinese netizens, are not just limited to the Chou Tzuyu incident. Indeed, Chinese netizens have been vocal in the wake of other international incidents, such as the United Nations Convention ruling on the so-called "Nine-Dash Line" dispute. However, the Chou Tzuyu case was particularly notable for its clearly counterproductive outcome: an argument over the use of Taiwanese symbols of nationalist identity, driven by the identities and objectives of Chinese nationalists, contributed to the electoral success of a pro-Taiwanese independence political party. With this in mind, this paper examines the relationship between Chinese nationalism and cyber-populism, and discusses the effects of this phenomenon on the achievement of China's stated foreign policy goals. In addition, this paper proposes to examine the significance of symbols of Taiwanese and Chinese independence, and to examine what, if any, relationship exists between the interpretation of these symbols and events and the domestic and foreign approaches of the Chinese government

Introduction:

In November 2015, a Taiwanese singer named Chou Tzuyu, a member of the pop group 'Twice', appeared on a Korean TV show. During the show, she claimed to be Taiwanese, as opposed to Chinese, and was pictured waving the Taiwanese flag. Chou was subsequently the recipient of

vociferous condemnation from Chinese ‘netizens’, had endorsement deals cancelled, and eventually was compelled to make a tearful apology for her actions. This apology became the center of an Internet-based dispute between the netizens of mainland China and Taiwan, conducted mainly on the Facebook page of then Taiwanese Presidential candidate, Tsai Yingwen. Subsequently, the tone of this dispute is believed to have had significant effects on the 2016 Taiwanese general election. For instance, according to a survey conducted by a Taiwanese think-tank, 12.6% of Taiwanese voters decided to vote for the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party as a result of this incident (Taiwan Thinktank 2016). On the mainland, while many members of the public actively participated in the dispute, the official attitude of the Chinese government was somewhat equivocal: while the Chinese Communist Party didn’t openly criticize the behavior of mainland netizens, they did appeal to the public to stop fighting against the Taiwanese on social media platforms (Xinhuanet 2016).

“Cyber-populism”, and the online activities of nationalistic Chinese netizens are not just limited to the Chou Tzuyu incident. Indeed, Chinese netizens have been vocally critical of other governments in the wake of other international incidents, such as the United Nations Convention ruling on the so-called “Nine-Dash Line” dispute. However, the Chou Tzuyu case was particularly notable for its clearly counterproductive outcome: an argument over the use of Taiwanese symbols of nationalist identity, driven by the identities and objectives of Chinese nationalists, contributed to the electoral success of a pro-Taiwanese independence political party. With this in mind, this paper proposes to examine the relationship between traditional expressions of Chinese nationalism and cyber-populism, and the ways in which this affects and is affected by domestic and foreign politics in China. In specific, this paper begins by defining what we consider “populism” and “cyber-populism” in a Chinese context. It will then examine the ways in which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has used populist appeals to nationalism since the period of ‘Reform and Opening’ in the late 1970s and early 1980s to re-assert its control over Chinese society, whenever the legitimacy of individual leaders or of the party was potentially threatened, and the ways in which these nationalist messages were shaped and manipulated to suit the goals and preferences of the party. It will also discuss the subsequent reaction from Chinese society to this usage of nationalism, and how Chinese people responded to the messages provided to them by the leadership. Finally, this paper will examine the challenges presented to the current leadership by the advent of internet and social media, and how these new forms of technology can potentially allow nationalism to become a ‘Pandora’s Box’ that the Communist Party can no longer so easily control and manipulate as it had been able to in previous years.

Populism, nationalism, and cyber-populism in China:

Populism is a term used by scholars in an often loose and inconsistent way. It is sometimes hard to give a precise definition of populism, and it has been said that “the general understanding of the concept is so vague as to denote everything and nothing” (Piccone 1995: 45). Broadly speaking, definitions of populism and references to populism usually refer to a ‘thin’ ideology which creates a Manichaeian and antagonistic dichotomy between a pure, uncorrupted ‘common

people' and a corrupted 'elite' group that works to undermine and circumvent the interests and will of the people (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: 5-6). In addition, populism is distinct from two other thin ideologies: elitism (an inversion of populism, which casts the 'elite' as being the pure and moral segment of society, with the 'people' being the vulgar and dangerous other) and pluralism (which rejects the concept of a Manichaeian dichotomy within society wholesale) (Ibid: 7-8). The nature of how 'populism' and 'populist' discourses and ideologies are constructed is often contextual to a particular environment: for instance, within a European context, 'populism' is often used to refer to xenophobic and anti-immigration political figures, whereas in South America, this term is connoted to refer more to the economy and economic stances (Ibid: 2). However, the nature of populist discourse is usually aimed at a combination of tangible and amorphous, intangible groups: European populists, for instance, will often rail against specific, albeit stereotyped, groups such as Roma, Muslims and Jews, while also targeting an unspecified group of 'elitist' political, cultural and economic individuals within the state (Mudde 2007). In addition to this, according to populist ideologies, there are often several distinct groups (which may or may not be connected to one another) which are characterized as being the enemies of the people and/or of the nation: those who are from the state and within the nation; those who are from outside the state but within the nation; those who are from outside the nation but within the state; and those who are from outside the state and from outside the nation (Ibid: 64-65).

Chinese populism:

Within Chinese society, populist narratives and the creation of Manichaeian dichotomies are inherent to the discourses of the CCP ever since its inauguration, although the nature of these narrative change and develop over time. For instance, during the early days of the CCP, populist narratives descended from the arguments of Mao Zedong and came principally in the form of the "Mass Line" [群众路线], which advocated that the CCP should work for and rely on the 'masses', and that it should be the instrument and tool of the proletariat (News of the Communist Party of China 1981). In this regard, then, the CCP is constructed as the embodiment of the 'people', in opposition to 'capitalist roaders' and others who would circumvent the interests of the proletariat for the benefit of an amorphous elite. The concept of the "mass line" remains an important doctrine of the CCP to this day, although it itself is often subject to alteration and change: for instance, under Deng Xiaoping, it became less focused on populist mobilization of the 'people', and more focused on the concept of building effective national institutions and delivering public goods (Chen 2011: 91-92). Indeed, under Deng, populism was less pronounced and somewhat sidelined (in as much as it is possible for a communist movement to sideline populism).¹ Under the premiership of Xi Jinping, on the other hand, populism is again a central part of the CCP's narrative. While 'capitalists' and wealthy people are no longer tarnished to the same extent as being inherent members of the 'corrupted elite', per se, the emphasis of modern Chinese populism is now placed more on the activities and behaviors of those who engage in conspicuous consumption and who publicly display their wealth (Taplin 2017). In this regard, those who are

¹ To a certain extent, it is possible to even characterize Deng as an 'elitist', the opposite of a populist. It is to him that the quote "wealth is glorious" ("致富光荣") is often misattributed, although it does somewhat capture Deng's understanding of the benefits of developing a wealthy, market-based economy in China, with all the positive and negative effects associated with this (Iritani 2004).

seen to (or believed to) engage in political corruption, particularly those members of the party who are seen (rightly or wrongly) to be using their positions to enrich themselves in an ostentatious manner and to the detriment of the regular people, are the modern constituents of the 'elite'. As such, when considered in terms of those opponents of the 'people' originating from within the state, Chinese populism often has a normative element to it, being targeted against people who openly misbehave or fail to behave in a manner in accordance with the Communist and Confucian norms of the state. This is distinct from populism aimed at groups with certain inherent and/or demographic characteristics, as is often the case in other parts of the world.

Populism and nationalism in China:

However, an equally important part of Chinese populism is based on the construction of external enemies of the nation, and on an interplay between populism and nationalism. This interplay is centered on the idea of the restoration of Chinese prestige after the "century of humiliation".² Indeed, references to the century of humiliation are a common refrain in Chinese governmental and social discussions about the nature of the international system, and how China should engage with it (Adcock Kaufman 2010: 4). According to Callahan, discourses and narratives surrounding the humiliation China suffered in this time is central to constructing the central narrative of the CCP: that through this humiliation, the country has been rejuvenated (under Communist leadership, of course), and will thus be able to achieve the economic, social, political and cultural development denied to it by the Japanese and Western invaders (Callahan 2004: 204-205). Additionally, these discussions serve to actively construct China's image of itself as a modern nation-state by 'othering' its own history: the century of humiliation is not just a result of the depredations of foreign enemies, but also because of the corruption of the Chinese people and the Chinese government itself that facilitated this: in such a manner, then, "...Chinese critics vent their anger not just at foreigners but at Chinese leaders for being weak in the face of foreign provocation." (Ibid: 207). In this regard, then, Chinese populist nationalism denigrates and rails against any actor that is considered to be an obstacle to this national rejuvenation, whether it is an incompetent or corrupt bureaucrat or political leader, or a hostile foreign power.

Within the context of this construction of populist nationalism, then, two issues are of particular concern: that Chinese leaders present a strong and unyielding face in relations with external powers, and that they actively work to the resolution and restoration of the Chinese nation following the century of humiliation. The former point focuses more closely on the political behavior of Chinese governmental officials and leaders. This is rooted in the narratives of the century of humiliation, as it is meant to contrast with the supposed approach of the late Qing dynasty authorities, who were castigated for their seeming willingness to appease and seek conciliation with the Western powers, whilst crushing any domestic dissent (Yang 2016). This sort of behavior is captured in the terms "reactionary" ("反动") and "reactionary government" ("反动政府"), and in common pejorative phrases such as "对内镇压 · 对外妥协", which broadly translates to "internal repression, external compromise"³; variations on this phrase have appeared in

² The "century of humiliation" was a period between 1839 and 1949 when China was the subject of intervention from Imperial Japan and the Western Empires, suffering several military defeats and seeing a severe and precipitous decline in the country's power and prestige.

³ While this is the literal translation of "对内镇压 · 对外妥协", it could more accurately be described as meaning

several magazines, newspapers, school textbooks and academic journals throughout the years.⁴ With regards to the latter point, that the government work towards the restoration of the glories of the Chinese nation, the issue of reunification with Taiwan becomes particularly important: Taiwan, as the last territory of China that was ceded to its enemies following the Opium Wars to remain outside the formal control of Beijing, symbolizes the last ‘disgrace’ and ‘humiliation’ of the country. Thus, the unification of the mainland and Taiwan is one of the most ‘sacred’ issues for the Chinese government and citizenry alike, and is considered an extremely sensitive issue (Adcock Kaufman 2011; Wang 2008: 802). Through this lens, it is not difficult to see how symbols and arguments which assert and reinforce the division between the two regions can provoke vigorous and sometimes aggressive responses from citizens of the mainland, as it represents a visible and forceful repudiation of the myth of ‘humiliation and renewal’ upon which the narrative of the modern Chinese state is built.

Populism and cyber-populism:

Based on this, it is possible to understand the various narratives upon which Chinese populism is based, and from that, to understand who (or what) is constructed within Chinese society as being the ‘enemy of the people’. While these ‘enemies’ may not fit so neatly into Mudde’s “typology of enemies” (outlined above) as in other countries, it is still possible to conceive of two distinct groups, with one other floating somewhere in between. A somewhat vague and amorphous group of “corrupt” politicians, officials, doctors, bureaucrats and businessmen (amongst others) who display their wealth and privilege in an ostentatious manner constitute enemies of the people from within the state; ‘hostile’ countries and actors which seek to prevent the rejuvenation of China following the century of humiliation and the recovery of Taiwan make up the enemies of the people from without the state. Between these two groups, and arguably worst of all, are those leaders who, through either sheer treachery or incompetence, are perceived as being conciliatory and weak towards foreign powers, while seeking to shore up their political power through the violent repression of their domestic enemies. As such, leaders in China who for political necessity must crack down on domestic opposition, are also put in a position where they must show a similar level of toughness with ‘external’ enemies, whether this is necessarily in the best interests of the state or not; otherwise, they face the prospect of being tarred with the brush of “对内镇压·对外妥协”.

Populism is most commonly understood in terms of the behaviors of leaders, although there may not be a particular “prototype” for a populist leader and how they present themselves to public (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017: 62-63). Indeed, when one considers populism, it is common to automatically associate it with its use by political figures as a strategy for obtaining, retaining, and harnessing power. However, it is important to remember that in the age of the internet and social media, politicians or other elites are no longer so in control of the societal discourse, as any person with a Twitter, Facebook, or in the context of China, Weibo or Wechat account, can publish and disseminate their own ideas on politics to a wider audience than was previously possible (Gerbaudo 2015: 67-68; Bennett 2012: 22). In this environment, then, political leaders may no longer be the sole arbiters of populist discourse, and may indeed find

“suppressing domestic opponents while bending over for foreign powers”

⁴ For examples of the usage of this discourse, see Gu 2007; Li 1958; Pu, 1992; Yang, 2016.

themselves constrained to a greater or lesser extent by the new avenues of approach for online activists. Thus for the purposes of this paper, we define the term 'cyber-populist' as being an actor (whether individual or group) who expresses populist sentiment through social media and other cyber channels, and who may or may not be, or be connected or associated with, a public political figure.

Populism, nationalism, and Xi Jinping's consolidation of political power in China:

As introduced above, the use of populism has a long history in China, and has been repeatedly used by Communist party leaders to shore up their domestic support. As was related earlier, populist appeals have been inherent to the discourse of the CCP ever since its foundation, as both Mao and (to a lesser extent) Deng used these narratives to bolster their credentials as the leaders of the country. However, the purpose and usage of these populist appeals has changed somewhat since that time. During their tenures as leaders of China, both Mao and Deng enjoyed relatively unchallenged supremacy within the party, and had no major rivals. This was largely due to the charismatic authority they were both capable of wielding: Mao was regarded as the savior of Chinese nation while Deng was the chief architect of reform and opening up. In contrast to these two, their successors Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping do not or did not enjoy the same level of uncontested authority over the party, and thus, faced a greater level of restraint over their abilities to implement their preferred policies. In the cases of Jiang and Hu, this is partially due to the fact that they were both heavily overshadowed by Deng. Jiang and Hu were both designated by Deng as his future successors: therefore, their power was largely derived from Deng himself. One example during Jiang's tenure is Deng's famous February 1992 Southern Sojourn, when Deng was able to extract promises from all the upper-level members of the CCP to implement policies preferable to him, by appealing directly to the regular Chinese citizenry (Shambaugh 1993). In one particular instance, Deng was able to use his connections to the municipal party secretary of Shanghai, Zhu Rongji, to have favorable news stories published in the party newspaper in Shanghai (*Liberation Daily*), thus raising the pressure on his CCP leadership successors (Ling, 2012). Those articles sparked vigorous debates around the country, and Zhu was assigned as the Vice Premier during the publication of those articles. For Hu, it was even more obvious that he was being constrained by his predecessor. He did not receive the title of the chairman of the Military Commission, the supreme military policy-making body in the country, until two years after his presidential inauguration; during this time, it was Jiang who retained this position.

For both Jiang and Hu, the key to overcoming these power struggles was building their own factional alignments within the CCP: "Shanghai Gang" (上海帮, *shanghai bang*) and the "Youth League Faction" (团派, *tuanpai*), respectively (Li 2002; Kou 2001). Through getting support from other important members of the party-state, Jiang and Hu could concentrate power in their own hands. However, Hu was less capable than Jiang in this regard. Members from the Youth League Faction only tied together because they once served as members of the Communist Youth League, and did not have many other common, binding interests. Thus, Hu did not actually garner much power from his factional alignment. For instance, during his first five-year term as President, Hu proposed his "harmonious society" strategy; in his second term, no such strategy on this scale

was proclaimed (Miller, 2013).

Xi's domestic populism:

Despite his reputation as a strongman, Xi Jinping is also arguably faced with a similar situation. While Jiang and Hu were designated by Deng, Xi was selected through a collective political process within the party, which put him in a more difficult situation. Xi's factional alignment, in contrast to Jiang's regional faction or Hu's faction of former Youth League colleagues, is the so called "the Princeling faction" (太子党 *taizi dang*), a group of offspring of revolutionary pioneers. Besides having to build his own alignment, Xi also has to eradicate the influence of Jiang's Shanghai Gang. Even though these figures are aging and declining in influence, the potential for them to prop up young political forces in order to maintain their influence is an unbearable possibility for Xi. In order to prevent this eventuality from occurring, Xi has displayed a willingness to break with one of the unwritten rules of the CCP (dating from the time of Deng), that "the past and present members of the Politburo Standing Committee not prosecute each other" (Broadhurst & Wang, 2014). This was evident in the cases of Bo Xilai and (particularly) Zhou Yongkang, two high-ranking members of the CCP who were eventually sentenced to life imprisonment for corruption and abuse of power. Indeed, it is quite likely that Xi's much-vaunted anti-corruption serves to allow him to consolidate his own grip over the party. In particular, Xi's use of 'double designations' ('双规')⁵ has surpassed that of any of his predecessors, even being extended into the realms of investigations of non-party members, indicating that his "...anti-corruption drive resembles a party-building campaign for amassing political power amidst China's fragmented power structure, rather than a systemic remedy to cure endemic corruption" (Yuen, 2014).

In concert with this, it is commonly argued that the anti-corruption campaign serves Xi Jinping's by allowing him to appeal to Chinese populist understandings of the 'internal enemy', and thus bolster his credentials with the populace as the voice of the common man (Perry 2015; Fewsmith 2013; Gonzalez-Vicente & Carroll 2017; Lampton 2016). Although Xi's predominant reliance on using his intra-party agenda to deal with corrupt officials is detrimental to the rule of law, his campaign still met with large support from the general public. One reason is that for the Chinese people, the officialdom standard is still a dominant thought among the society; ordinary Chinese people revere officials even though they may be corrupted; at the same time, Chinese people also hope that there is a 'good emperor' to solve the corruption problem (Zhu 2005). Thus, in this sense, Xi is capable of fulfilling the role of the 'good emperor'. More tangibly, the anti-corruption campaign appeals to the sensibilities of ordinary Chinese by restricting governmental expenditure on the 'three public consumptions': business travel expenses, state-financed vehicles, and banquets. In 2015, the total official business disbursement was less than was budgeted for; traditionally, Chinese officials would try to spend the entire budget (Bai, 2016). In addition, according to the Xinhua Agency, this campaign has managed to save 53 billion Yuan, enough to build an aircraft carrier (Xinhuanet 2015). And finally, Xi has effectively downgraded the prestige of civil service jobs, which were once viewed as being an ideal job for many, by lowering the wages

⁵ 'Double designations' are a method of investigating rule-breaking within the CCP which is overseen by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CDI). According to this approach, the CDI is permitted to investigate any alleged rule-breaker at any time, and was created in order to prevent corrupt party members from destroying or tampering with evidence of their wrong-doing (Fan and Gu 2013).

and welfare of civil servants (Sohu 2016). Xi's anti-corruption campaign thus delineates the ordinary people from the corrupted officials, and serves to construct an image of himself as being on the side of the 'people' and against the corrupted 'elites'. Even for some Chinese intellectuals, Xi's campaign receives support: the 'elite' side represents the corrupted bureaucracy that is hindering the deepening of reform, while Xi is the one who is trying to sweep away the obstacles to reform. In this sense, then, Bo Xilai's Chongqing model represents the planned economy and the worship to the revolutionary period of the communist party (Miller 2012; Broadhurst and Wang 2014); Xi, as the one who cracked down on Bo, is then perceived as the opposite, as a pragmatist who is seeking to reform the market economy.

Xi's foreign policy populism and the cyber-populist response:

In this regard, then it is possible to see how Xi Jinping's centralization of power is predicated upon his ability to effectively appeal to populist discourses in China. While Xi does not so heavily use vocal populism himself in connection with his campaigns to root out 'corruption', the policy itself is a discursive act which plays to the sentiments of the Chinese people. For Xi, however, such a strategy is potentially a double-edged sword, as it places him at risk of being perceived to engage in “对内镇压·对外妥协”. Given the historically dangerous and loaded nature of this term, it is incumbent upon Xi to balance his domestic crackdown with a strong stance when dealing with foreign policy issues, in particular those related to Taiwan. Xi has consistently pursued strategies that would seek to assert China's claims and interests in its neighborhood, ranging from using China's maritime fleet (including civilian fishing vessels) to signify China's claims over its territorial waters, to issuing passports which contain maps recognizing extensive versions of China's claims (Economy 2014, 89). This is also exemplified in his attitude towards the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling on the 'nine-dash line', when Xi effectively ignored the findings of the court. However, of particular concern remains the issue of cross-strait relations: indeed, Xi himself has been quoted as saying “...from the position of Chinese people's nationalism, 1.3 billion people on the mainland would not agree to Taiwan's formal independence...the Communist Party would be overthrown by the people if the pro-independence issue was not dealt with” (Zhuang 2016). In this sense, then, re-unification with Taiwan becomes less of a concern for the government, in and of itself, than the management of the irredentist nationalist sentiment of the Chinese citizenry related to the Taiwan issue. As such, Xi has adopted a strident approach to cross-strait issues, particularly as they relate to the potentiality of Taiwanese independence.

In the past, Xi has indicated a willingness to co-operate with re-unification-minded Taiwanese leaders such as Ma Ying-Jeou; this was most apparent in the historic meeting between Xi and Ma in late 2015, the first ever meeting between the sitting presidents of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China, which sought to develop cross-strait relations and to “...preserve [the] status quo in the Taiwan Strait” (Tiezzi 2015). However, since the election of the independence-oriented Tsai Ing-Wen, Xi has moved more towards a strategy of 'squeeze and freeze' towards the Taiwanese, involving restrictions over the numbers of mainland tourists allowed to visit Taiwan each year, conducting large-scale military exercises not far from the Taiwanese coastline, and restricting Taiwan's diplomatic room for manoeuvre by offering formal diplomatic relations with past or present allies of Taiwan (Li and Zhang 2016; Glaser and Vitello 2015; Freeman 2017). In addition to this, Xi's administration has made numerous pronouncements warning against any steps being taken by Tsai towards Taiwanese independence,

and responded to Donald Trump's provocative phone call to Tsai in late 2016 by insisting that the new presidential administration recognize the 'one China' policy, thus forcing a climb-down from Trump in early 2017 (Campbell 2017). In each of these instances, Xi plays closely to the demands of his 'base', and adopts rhetorical and policy stances which feed into populist narratives in the country. In this manner, Xi is a populist largely through deeds rather than words.

Controlling the discourse: traditional propaganda and the problem of social media

In order to effectively able to translate these policies into domestic successes, the CCP seeks to carefully manage and control the nature of political discourse in China. This is done in order to bolster the party's (and by extension, Xi's) control over Chinese society, but also to ensure that the reaction from Chinese society can itself be harnessed in such a way as to maximize the effectiveness of China's foreign strategies. The traditional internal propaganda strategies applied by the party-state could be divided into two sub-types: the passive censorship approach and the proactive patriotic education. The notorious censorship system, the Golden Shield Project, was originally developed by the CCP to monitor the information passing through Chinese cyber-space, and to censor sensitive information if necessary (Dodson 2010). While the firewall successfully censors a large number of foreign websites and filters sensitive information, this system is no longer as effective as it used to be because of globalization and marketization. The party-state views the internet as a key engine for economic growth and an important platform for social and public services (Opennet Initiative 2012); meanwhile, all the media organizations run by the party-state are forced to compete on the open market, and receive only minimal or even no subsidies (Li 2000). Therefore, the public has greater access to the space online to express their opinion, which would inevitably lead to the emergence of discourses that could potentially criticize the party-state. Through the process of globalization, netizens in China have started to learn how to use Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), which allows them to obtain information from outside China, or even to spread information from China to foreign countries.

Patriotic education, or state-led nationalism, differs from the passive censorship approach in that it is a proactive form of traditional propaganda. After the reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping and the Tiananmen Square Incident, the socialist ideology of the CCP collapsed. The party-state then transformed the source of its legitimacy to nationalism (Downs and Saunders, 1998-1999). A top-down patriotic campaign was subsequently launched by the party-state. On August 23, 1994, the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee released the 'Outline of the Implementation of the Patriotic Education', which emphasized that the major target population is the youth. The campaign successfully created antagonism between China and "imperialist countries". However, the major problem of the patriotic education is that it has a "problem of lack of content" (Zhao, 1998). In accordance with Johan Galtung's theories, this master narrative of Chinese nationalism is built on three facets: chosenness, myths and traumas (Wang 2014). Chosenness refers to the predictions of Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong, that China would eventually rejuvenate; myths refers to the glorious history of ancient China; and traumas refers to the national humiliations China suffered in the modern times. The patriotism then becomes merely a tool to justify the party-state's policy preference rather than giving the population a real sense of commonality. The "lack of content" could eventually lead the public towards holding sceptical

and distrustful attitudes towards the party-state.

Thus, the censorship and patriotic education strategies face greater challenges in the new era. The party-state then has to seek new approaches to recapture the lost ground in cyber space. On February 27, 2014, the 'Central Cyber Security and Informatization Leading Group' was founded, with Xi himself holding the post of leader. With this in mind, the group began its work by seeking to regain control over the cyber-political discourse. New forms of patriotism education that tried to adapt to the subculture of cyberspace were unveiled: a case in point is the cartoon *What Rabbits Have Done in Those Years* (那年那兔那些事儿, *nianian natu naxie shier*). China was once dubbed as a 'rabbit' by netizens, because it was perceived as being very weak on the international stage. However, in this cartoon, the 'rabbit' is described as a character that is gentle but not afraid to fight back. The superficial self-deprecation of this cartoon thus attracts youth audience much more effectively than the traditional patriotism strategies.

Another remarkable achievement is the stigmatization of public intellectuals. Opinion leaders (意见领袖, *yijian lingxiu*), sometimes also known as public intellectuals (公共知识分子, *gonggong zhishi fenzi*), have noticeably declined in influence throughout China. According to the 'Report and Analysis of the Internet Public Opinion of 2015', the number of the articles published by public intellectuals and the influence of these are far behind those published by mainstream media or personal media (Pan, Zhu, and Chen 2015). For the Chinese public, the concept of public intellectuals is a kind of 'imported goods', who were once perceived as avant-gardes and reformers who criticized the party and the government, and demanded democratic reform (Yu 2016). Many public intellectuals enjoyed great popularity. However, now, the term 'public intellectual' has a somewhat negative connotation. People have started to use this term to refer to national nihilists and rumormongers (Jiang 2017). The retaking of the control of public discourse could be regarded as one of the most remarkable victory of Chinese internal propaganda system.

On the contrary to the downfall of public intellectuals is the rise of other patriotic groups such as "little pink" (小粉红, *xiao fenhong*). This term originated from Jinjiang Literary City, a female-oriented website in which people share original literature works (Ruan 2016). The transformation from literature amateurs to patriots is largely because many of the members have been able to study or work abroad. After having lived abroad, they believe that their motherland is the best place to live. Official discourse now regards 'little pink' as being 'true patriots', referring to them as a new generation with cultural self-confidence (Zhu, Pan, and Chen 2016).

While successfully retaking the control of discourse online through a new type of patriotism education campaign, the party-state still faces new problems. In the past, when the old type of patriotic education campaign did not work well and people felt negatively towards the government, the party-state could still hold its legitimacy because of its great performance on economy: the overall living standard of people was rising with a rapid speed, and as such, they could tolerate a weak government. However, due in part to the successes of the new type of patriotism, the nationalist sentiment of people tends to go beyond the control of the party-state. In 2012, after the Japan government exercised their sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands, protests against the Japan government were organized in China. During the protests, sentiments arguing for a boycott of Japanese goods (which, it was believed, would swiftly bankrupt the Japanese economy) began to emerge; the "boycott of Japanese goods" soon transformed into a quest to

“destroy Japanese goods” (People’s Daily, 2012).

People, after solving their basic needs of food and clothing, have the demand of expressing their opinion. By comparing the report of Chinese online public opinion from 2014 to 2016, we can conclude that the attention of Chinese people has been transferred from domestic social conflicts to others (Xie 2015; Pan, Zhu, and Chen 2015; Zhu, Pan, and Chen 2016). With the successful patriotism education campaign, the attention would be led to foreign issues. When the party-state faces another challenge on international stage, it will be face great pressure as well. As discussed above, though the internal propaganda system faces challenges, it is still successful retaking the control of online discourse. The external propaganda system, on the other hand, does not work as well as the internal. This evident in the case of Chou Tzu-yu.

After Chou Tzu-yu was accused by Huang An, and then attacked by Chinese netizens, the voices from the official media of the mainland China were not coherent. People’s Daily criticized Chou Tzu-yu and praised the patriotism of the netizens, saying that “the Taiwan pop singer who is suspected to be a separatist has made her apology to the mainland Chinese”(Zuo, 2016). The Global Times described the mainland netizens as having won a perfect victory in the incident, defeating the Taiwan separatists completely (China Daily 2016). At the same time, there are also different voices from the official media. The overseas version of People’s Daily published an article described the behavior of the mainland netizens during the incident as a ‘carnival of populism’, and criticized the netizens for damaging cross-strait relations (Xiakedao 2016). Finally, the ‘most official’ expression, from the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, was rather vague, stating that “we must be careful if some political forces played the mainland Chinese off against Taiwanese” (Xinhuanet 2016). These incoherent responses from the official media indicate that the party-state struggles to control the nationalistic sentiment. Nationalism has the stabilizing function for the party-state, by transferring public attention from domestic conflicts to foreign affairs; at the same time, the party-state is also afraid of the nationalist sentiment turning into criticism of the government (Zhao 2005).

In the Chou Tzu-yu Incident, the official media have to praise the behavior of the mainland netizens and lecture Chou to conform to Chinese public sentiment; simultaneously, the party-state also has to throw cold water over the demands of the enthusiastic patriots in case they demand more assertive policies toward Taiwan. This is the cost of the patriotism which “lacks content”: the patriots need external enemies to express their patriotism. In the case of Taiwan, it is even more complicated. It combines the three facets of the CMT complex. The classic discourse of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that ‘XXX has been part of the territory of China since ancient times’ builds the reunification sentiment based on the concept of chosenness; keeping the territorial integrity is one major part of “the great rejuvenation of Chinese nation”, which builds the sentiment based on myths facet; Taiwan is regarded as the last vestige of national humiliation, and it builds the sentiment based on trauma facet. When Taiwanese are referred to as a group by mainland Chinese, they sometimes can be considered compatriots and sometimes enemies. Therefore, it is extremely hard for the party-state to find the balance between encouraging reunification sentiment and calming the enthusiastic patriots.

The incident becomes more complicated because of the different understanding of the 1992 Consensus between the two sides. The term 1992 Consensus was first created by non-official organizations of two sides, and finally adopted by the party-state and the KMT government. This is an “agree to disagree” understanding: both sides agree that there is only one China, although

there could be respective interpretations of this. However, although the party-state never challenged the respective interpretations part, it only emphasizes on the one China part; the KMT also never challenged the mainland's altitude and therefore the public in Taiwan believed that the mainland has already accepted the space for the ROC. However, in Chou Tzu-yu Incident, Chou was accused of being a separatist because of her flag-waving behavior, leading Taiwanese people to discover that there are two different versions of the 1992 Consensus. The new president of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen has claimed that "the possibility of her accepting the 1992 Consensus during her tenure is minimal" (Zaobao 2016).

Another factor is that as Wang explains, people are more prepared to accept the "information consistent with their existing perceptions" (Wang H. , 2003). Taiwanese are more prepared to accept the information that the mainland Chinese are distorting facts in order to bully an innocent young girl, than to accept that there is a misunderstanding between the two sides.

As discussed above, the party-state's external propaganda is less capable than its internal propaganda. Issues like reunification of Taiwan are more complicated than the domestic conflicts. While the party-state cannot do too much to control the public opinion in Taiwan, it also struggles to manage the public opinion in the mainland.

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