H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Zheng Wang. *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. xiii + 293 pp. $32.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-14890-0.

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Published on H-Diplo (December, 2012)
Commissioned by Seth Offenbach

Chinese Exceptionalism

As the title for his new book on historical memory and Chinese nationalism, Zheng Wang has chosen a phrase that first became popularized in China around 1915: "never forget national humiliation" (*Wuwang guochi*). This phrase aptly captures Wang's thesis: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has bolstered its legitimacy in the post-Tiananmen era by using historical memory to cultivate a nationalistic and anti-Western victim mentality that provides young Chinese with an understanding of who they are and how to comprehend the rest of the world. Historical memory, Wang argues "is the prime raw material for constructing China's national identity" and it constitutes a powerful force in the way the Chinese understand and carry out foreign relations (p. 223).

Wang brings impressive credentials and an insider's perspective in his attempt to understand how historical memory informs Chinese foreign policy and why Chinese youth are so patriotic and nationalistic. A native of Kunming, capital of China's southwestern Yunnan province, he holds a Ph in conflict analysis and resolution from George Mason University and now teaches at Seton Hall's Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations. Before taking up his professorship, he spent nearly a decade as a researcher at the Chinese People's Association for Peace and Disarmament in Beijing.

A timely and well-researched book, *Never Forget National Humiliation* qualifies as a landmark in the study of Chinese nationalism. Despite the minor reservations detailed below, it offers a comprehensive exploration of Chinese identity and the politics of history education in the People's Republic of China. Anyone interested in modern China or U.S.-China relations should read this book.

"To understand a country," Wang writes, "one should visit the country's primary and high schools and read their history textbooks" (p. 7). Through his study of Chinese textbooks and education policy, Wang reveals how the CCP has used history education to glorify the party, consolidate national identity, and justify one-party rule in the post-Tiananmen era. After the 1989 Tiananmen protests and the Soviet bloc collapse, China's leaders concluded that the CCP's greatest failure in the 1980s was not focusing enough attention on ideological education. Shortly afterward, the party launched its patriotic education campaign. By selecting which parts of Chinese history to remember and which parts to forget, the CCP has used historical memory to cultivate a national consciousness and what Wang calls a "Chosenness-Myth-Trauma (CMT) complex." Wang argues that this CMT complex and historical consciousness "are the dominant ideas in China's public rhetoric and bureaucratic procedures" (p. 240).

Inspired by a letter CCP leader Jiang Zemin wrote to the Education Ministry, the party officially launched the patriotic education campaign in August 1991 with two documents: "Notice about Conducting Education of Patriotism and Revolutionary Tradition by Exploiting Extensively Cultural Relics," and "General Outline on Strengthening Education on Chinese Modern and Contemporary History and National Conditions." The patriotic education campaign jettisoned the Mao-era class struggle narrative in favor of a framework for teaching history that focused on China's struggle with outside forces. A 1994 CCP directive stated that the party initiated the campaign in order to "boost the nation's spirit, enhance cohesion, foster national self-esteem and pride, consolidate and develop a patriotic united front to the broadest extent possible, and direct and rally the masses' patriotic passions to the great cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics" (p. 99). The patriotic education campaign–the driving force behind contemporary Chinese nationalism–is thus "an elite-led, top-down po-

litical movement" (p. 140).

Central to the patriotic education campaign are the CCP's chosen glories and traumas–Wang's CMT complex. Wang shows that when looking to the glories of China's past, party-approved textbooks engage in selective remembering and forgetting. For example, China's standard history textbooks praise Ming Dynasty admiral Zheng He's naval expeditions as "voyages of peace and friendship," yet recent scholarship has shown that Zheng's voyages were often accompanied by violence against local populations (p. 46). These textbooks emphasize that China has always been a "peace-loving country" while overlooking military campaigns various dynasties have undertaken against China's neighbors. History education in China also glorifies the CCP's achievements while downplaying or ignoring the suffering that many ordinary Chinese have experienced at the party's hands. In China's textbooks, most suffering comes at the hands of foreigners and brings national humiliation.

Under Mao, history education emphasized national glory. The government suppressed writing about the Nanjing Massacre and used class struggle theory to explain the Chinese Revolution and foreign imperialism. Above all, history education during the Mao years emphasized that the CCP and Mao's brilliant leadership deserved all credit for victory over the Japanese and the Guomindang (GMD). Under Mao the party had redeemed the country after a century of national humiliation stretching from the First Opium War to the Communists' victory in the Chinese Civil War.

China's patriotic education campaign revised these Mao-era narratives. The new narrative blamed the West rather than class enemies for China's suffering. In teaching students about the War of Resistance against Japan, for example, the revised curriculum focused on ethnic conflict between Japan and China rather than class conflict between the CCP and the GMD. More than anything else it emphasized the foreign powers' brutality against the Chinese, forcing the younger generation to confront the atrocities of the century of humiliation. According to Wang, "this transition from China as victor to China as victim reveals a great deal about changes to Chinese national identity" (p. 103).

In order to cultivate the new China-as-victim identity, the patriotic education campaign reached beyond the classroom. Wang finds no parallel anywhere in the world for "the special effort made by the Chinese government since 1991 to construct memory sites and use them for ideological reeducation" (p. 104). In 1995 the party selected one hundred national-level demonstration sites for patriotic education. Nearly two-thirds were devoted to past wars and conflicts. The remainder featured ancient Chinese civilization and national heroes like Mao and Zhou Enlai. Taking their cues from the center, provincial and county authorities created patriotic education bases of their own. Wang counts more than 2,300 provincial- and county-level sites in Beijing, Hebei, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Anhui alone (p. 109). Visiting these sites, he notes, has become a regular part of the school curriculum.

Entertainment, too, has become a patriotic education tool. To encourage visits to patriotic education bases, the CCP launched a "Red Tourism" program in the early 2000s. Red tourism skillfully exploits China's domestic tourism boom by replacing the term "education" with "tourism." The results, as Wang shows, have been impressive: between 2004 and 2007 more than 400 million Chinese traveled to red tourism sites (p. 109). While at home, Chinese can watch movies and TV series about the War of Resistance and humiliation at the hands of foreigners. Nothing, of course, illustrated Chinese national greatness and rejuvenation like the opening ceremony at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Wang's excellent chapter on the Beijing Olympics reveals that the anxieties underpinning China's patriotic education campaign also inform its attitudes toward international athletic competition. In preparation for the games, the CCP's General Sports Administration drew up a strategy called "The General Outline for Winning Honor at the Olympics, 2001-2010." The document urged government ministries and provinces to win honor at the 2004 and 2008 Olympic Games by winning as many gold medals as possible–silver and bronze would not suffice. They targeted medal-rich disciplines that rely on athletes' long-term training and individual skillfulness–diving, weightlifting, shooting–rather than more popular sports emphasizing teamwork and contact, such as soccer or basketball. The strategy paid off handsomely in 2008 when Chinese athletes took home fifty-one gold medals.

But Wang argues that China's emphasis on gold medals "masks a lingering inferiority complex" (p. 153). In 2004 Chinese hurdler Liu Xiang won China's first track and field gold and became the country's most popular athlete. By winning gold in a sport traditionally dominated by Westerners, Liu, according to Wang, "became an instant symbol for China's ability to conquer the world in any new field that China wants to take on" (p. 153). Because of the lingering memory of national humiliation, the Chinese government can legitimize its rule through

sports. To win more gold medals than the United States symbolized China's passage into the top tier of world powers. Yet Wang remains wary about such logic and urges Chinese elites to heed the words of historian Xu Guoqi: "A nation that obsesses over gold medals to bolster nationalist sentiment and its domestic legitimacy is not a confident government" (p. 162).

Wang's next chapter shows how this "culture of insecurity" influenced China's response to three crises in U.S.-China relations. The majority of China's top leaders interpreted the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade as an open provocation and insult to the Chinese people. The government organized anti-American demonstrations outside U.S. diplomatic missions and demanded an official apology. Beijing had also demanded an apology after the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis. In 2001, Beijing blamed the United States for the collision between a Chinese F-8 fighter jet and a U.S. EP-3 spy plane and expected Washington to apologize and take full responsibility. According to Wang, each incident touched on the feelings of national humiliation cultivated by the patriotic education program. As a result, the Chinese government escalated each crisis through military maneuvers, rejecting American apologies, or sending students to pelt U.S. diplomatic facilities with rocks and debris. Because the CCP has built its legitimacy on righting the humiliations of the past, it cannot allow the country to be humiliated again. Each crisis thus becomes a test of the CCP's political credibility, and presses the government toward a more uncompromising stance.

Wang concludes that Beijing must move beyond its victim mentality and allow discussion of the failures and catastrophes caused by the party. He sees the 2005 publication of the first joint history textbook in East Asia–written by Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean scholars–as a step in the right direction. But he also concedes that China has a long way to go: in 2006 the CCP shut down *Bingdian* (Freezing point), the weekly supplement to the national *China Youth Daily* newspaper, after *Bingdian* published an article criticizing a Chinese history textbook for fostering blind nationalism and providing one-sided historical accounts. Party officials also sacked the *China Youth Daily's* editors and barred all Chinese media from reporting on the suspension. Though China today is far more open than it was during the Mao years, the party retains its monopoly on interpreting controversial history.

Wang wrote *Never Forget National Humiliation* because he wanted to help Westerners better understand the Chinese people, their motivations, and their intentions. Here he succeeds admirably, and his task is no doubt an important one. Failing to understand Chinese nationalism in the past has caused and exacerbated problems in U.S-.China relations. Taiwanese scholar Ch'i Hsi-sheng, for example, shows that during World War II General Joseph Stilwell, commander of U.S. forces in China, needlessly angered the Chinese by treating them with disrespect and contempt. Stilwell assumed this was the best way to accomplish his goals, but Chinese president Chiang Kai-shek interpreted Stilwell's manner as evidence of the general's ignorance and racism. Ch'i concludes that Stilwell treated Chiang harshly and demanded control over Chinese military forces because he failed to understand the depth of Chinese nationalism.[1] Books like *Never Forget National Humiliation* go a long way toward giving non-Chinese a clearer understanding of how many Chinese see the world.

Although a first-rate study, *Never Forget National Humiliation* is not without its flaws. Wang's first chapter contains a literature review and theoretical framework that may put some readers off. That would be a mistake–the book is well worth reading. And though Wang argues that China's CMT complex and historical memory are the dominant ideas in the PRC's bureaucratic procedures, he proves his case only when discussing the Belgrade embassy bombing and EP-3 spy plane incident. But these minor shortcomings do not detract from this masterful book. One hopes it not only leaves non-Chinese with a clearer understanding of the PRC and its people but also encourages the Chinese to look more honestly at their country's recent past and see China as it truly is.

Note

[1]. Ch'i Hsi-sheng, *Jianbanuzhang de mengyou: Taiping yang zhanzheng qijian de ZhongMei junshi hezuo guanxi, 1941-1945* [Allies at daggers drawn: China-U.S. military affairs cooperation during the Pacific War, 1941-1945] (Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lianjing chuban gongsi, 2011), esp. 503-555, 634-643.

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Citation: Zachary Fredman. Review of Wang, Zheng, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations.* H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. December, 2012.

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