

UDC:323.1

*Ren Wanyu.*

*Master of MSU*

**EXPLORING THE CAUSES OF EXTREME NATIONALISM IN  
CONTEMPORARY CHINA  
--A CHINESE PERSPECTIVE**

**Abstract**

*For a long time, the Chinese people have been more rational in thinking that Chinese nationalism is a double-edged sword,[1] and that it can be made a more desirable tool for politicization, provided that a certain degree of control is exercised. Some foreign scholars have even referred to this nationalism as "popular nationalism," a spontaneous, top-down, powerful weapon to strengthen the "legitimacy" of the ruling authorities.[2] In recent years, however, with the increasing complexity of the international environment and the booming development of Internet technology, the irrational thinking of Chinese nationalism has gradually returned, and the tendency of "face-based" thinking has become obvious, and the "The difference between Chinese and foreigners, Extreme"[3] thinking has been externalized. Nationalism has entered into a limitation, affecting the direction and path of China's political development. Given this, this article will analyze the causes of extreme nationalism and its harmful effects in contemporary China from a new perspective (with a Chinese perspective as the starting point), providing a new way of thinking for the study of Chinese*

*nationalism and providing theoretical supplements and support.*

*Keywords: nationalism    extremism    political system    conflict transfer  
patriotism*

## **I. Practical cause for the emergence of extreme nationalism in contemporary China**

1、 The inability to balance and match the pace of development of China's political system with the pace of development of democratic and egalitarian thinking

Historically, China was a privileged multi-ethnic country,[4] but the ruling authorities have always been able to control the thinking and activities of "Chinese" (here "Chinese" can be understood as China's earliest "nationalists") within a certain range, because in ancient China, the concepts of a sovereign state, nation-state, and nationalism were still vague compared with modern times, and it was not the national boundaries that maintained political power, but the recognition of the power of the ruling class (emperor). The ruling class (the emperor) attached political words such as "patriotism" to this vague concept and made it reasonably transformed into a tool of political rule. "The world is great, it is not the royal land, the shore of the land, it is not the royal courtier" aptly proves this view. Just like Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson noted in *The Imagined Communities*: "It is paradoxical that pre-modern empires and kingdoms could easily sustain their long-term rule over vassals who were extremely diverse and heterogeneous, often inhabited in disconnected territories." [5]

At the end of the nineteenth century, with the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese

naval war (known in Japan as the Japanese-Qing War), the concept of nominalism was first clearly introduced to "China" ( the Qing dynasty) by the students who had stayed in Japan. However, it is worth noting that Chinese nationalism is very different from European and American nationalism, the nationalism of Britain, France, and the United States is in the context of the domestic bourgeois revolution, through the resistance to feudal autocracy to obtain individual life, freedom, property, and civil rights, to complete the identification of their nation and country and gradually develop, while Chinese nationalism is produced in the context of Western aggression,[6] so the Chinese ruling authorities once took a more tolerant attitude towards Chinese nationalism. And as much as possible, guide the development of its super-favorable countries. For example, the anti-American demonstrations following the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999 and the anti-Japanese demonstrations in several major Chinese cities in April 2005,[7] were movements that enabled Chinese nationalism to show great cohesion while the ruling authorities were able to contain its influence within certain limits.

In recent years, however, Chinese nationalism has become more and more extreme. In its external manifestations, some Chinese nationalists have frequently combined and processed the "super-national treatment" granted to foreigners by certain universities and institutions, targeting foreigners in China, resulting in an increase in xenophobic sentiment. On the surface, the grievances of Chinese nationalists towards foreigners may be due to the inherent xenophobic ideology

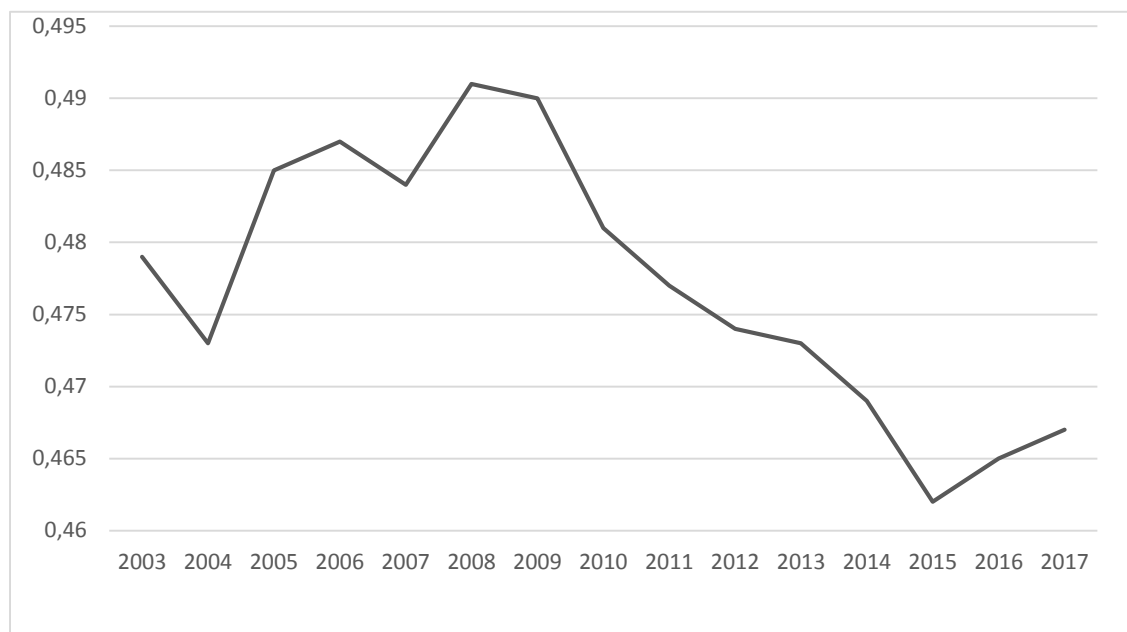
of the "Han system", the lack of a commoner's spirit in China, the global awakening of ethnic and regional consciousness, the anxiety of national identity and the search for a cultural home, the threat to China's national interests brought about by globalization, the actions of right-wing forces in Japan and the hegemonic policies of the United States, etc. [8] But in the author's view, this is more of a shift in social contradictions. The real cause of this nationalism with great prejudice is the contradiction of the inability to balance and match the speed of development of the political system of contemporary China with the speed of development of democratic and egalitarian thinking.

We all know that the nation is an imaginary community, and in China, due to the special political system, individualism (consciousness) lacks legitimacy and individual independence, and individuals need to gain a sense of security, strength, and honor through their dependence on the nation; also express their egoism through the national collectivism, i.e. national egoism, in a twisted way. [9] In recent decades, Chinese society has changed dramatically, with rapid social and economic development, urbanization, universal education, literacy, industrialization, and the flattening of the mass media——expanding political consciousness, increasing political demands, and widening political participation —— and nationalists have been rapidly mobilized into political life, but unfortunately, The development of China's political system is lagging behind the development of democratic and egalitarian thinking. In other words, the rapid development of the Chinese economy has raised the nationalists' sense of equality,

but certain shortcomings of the political system (informal rules, officialism, multiple constraints, cut-off policies, the gap between rich and poor (for example, the Gini coefficient in China in Figure 1)) have not been completely resolved for the time being, and these shortcomings have resulted in the nationalists not being able to enjoy the social dividend equitably, and they feel a real crisis (this crisis refers specifically to the intensification of competition for "jobs", "education", etc). Based on this oppressive and contradictory situation, the "super-national treatment" granted to foreigners by certain Chinese universities and institutions has served as a reasonable diversion from the contradictions of Chinese nationalism. But beyond these superficial phenomena, it becomes clear that Chinese nationalists reject "them" (foreigners) because they do not belong to the same ethnic group as "us" (the Chinese). The answer is no. In the Chinese mind, the distinction between different races, religions, and beliefs is not very important, and the Chinese do not have as strong a sense of nationality as the Europeans or the Americans. During China's thousands of years of feudal and authoritarian history, although the 'Han system' had a certain influence on the construction of Chinese nationalists' thinking, they were all able to deal peacefully with foreigners without creating hostility or hatred because of their status. The reality behind this highly prejudiced nationalism is therefore a contradiction between the speed of development of the political system in modern China and the speed of development of democratic and egalitarian thinking. It can be said that the new wave of extreme nationalism taking place in China is brought about more by a

sense of crisis than by a sense of superiority.

**Figure 1: Gini coefficient of disposable income per capita for Chinese residents nationwide (2003-2017)**



Source: China Household Survey Statistical Yearbook published by China Statistics Press (2018 edition)

The Gini coefficient is generally considered to be less than 0.2, indicating that the distribution of residents' income is too even, between 0.2 and 0.3 it is more even, between 0.3 and 0.4 it is more reasonable, between 0.4 and 0.5 the gap is too wide, and above 0.5 the gap is very wide

## **II. Direct causes of extreme nationalism in contemporary China**

### **1、 Slightly deviant patriotic national education**

The direct cause of the emergence of contemporary extreme nationalism is perhaps related to China's patriotic national education. Understanding China's patriotic national education helps us to gain a deeper understanding of the paths

by which the values and thought structures of Chinese nationalists are formed, and to understand where their anger and hatred towards foreigners and foreigners come from.

Patriotic education has always been an important part of the Chinese schooling system, and Chinese people are constantly subjected to such lessons from their junior student days to their doctoral graduation. Without any prejudice, it is reasonable for a country to educate its young people about patriotism, but the problem is that patriotic education in China is slightly biased,[10] and patriotic education in China has evolved in line with the changing relations between China and the outside world. Objective and authentic historical sources are the best way and mean of patriotic education, especially for China, where a century of humiliation from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries of modern history has produced enough sentiment to achieve patriotic education for young people. But for special cause (on the one hand, the detente in relations China with Japan and the United States from 1979-1989, when the dominant governmental voice was reformist and liberal, until the 1989 Tiananmen counter-revolutionary movement—the "1989 school wave" erupted, Although in the end, the Party relied on the people to successfully suppress the event, this huge lesson made the Party fully aware that the cause of patriotic education in China was in urgent need of strengthening and political guidance, and that, unlike the regimes in Europe and the United States, China's regime had been baptized by the old and new democratic revolutions and was very hard-won, and therefore needed more

care;<sup>[11]</sup> on the other hand, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union put enormous pressure on China and the legitimacy of the Chinese government was weakened, the government wanted an idea or theory that can gather national spirit and national strength, so patriotic education under political guidance was the best option), and the Chinese political authorities taught patriotic education to young students under political guidance.

In the absence of religious unity and a fully developed value system, this politically guided knowledge of history determines young students' perceptions and judgments of reality. Young students are unable to gain an objective and comprehensive understanding of the history of interactions between Chinese and foreign peoples, and this, coupled with their one-sided sources of information, leads them to develop deep-rooted prejudices about the outside world and Sino-foreign relations. This education system has produced a strange and contradictory mindset——in their fantasies, they and their forefathers feel the disasters and humiliations brought to China by foreign countries, while in reality, they are the new generation that has "risen ". This contradictory and sensitive mentality prevented them from understanding rationally the relationship between China and the West and put them in the dilemma of rebelling against the West and learning from it. Under the influence of this kind of thinking, Some of the young students have gradually become an important reserve force for contemporary Chinese ultra-nationalists. Ordinary foreign trade disputes, and cultural conflicts, will rise



to the perspective of nationalism to understand, and even often go online to denounce others for 'traitor', they through the reconstruction of memory, the Western economic and cultural input into capitalist conspiracy theories. When given the opportunity, they may even perform dangerous scenes of hitting, smashing, and burning. Therefore, it can be said that this slightly deviant Chinese patriotic education is the direct cause of contemporary extreme nationalism.

### **III. The harms and improvements of contemporary extreme nationalism**

#### **1、Harms**

For China, this extreme nationalism appears to have a democratic personality, and on the surface, it seems to be spontaneous and self-sustaining. But the reality is that these extreme nationalists are often irrational, highly emotional, over-emphasize cultural and ethnic identity, they are extremely prejudiced against other nationalities, and this is a perverse form of nationalism. They are blindly xenophobic, elevating ordinary Sino-foreign friction into the political sphere and the national sphere. They apply the attitudes and habits of behavior developed in international relations situations to domestic politics, and they blindly emphasize the nation as a subject of undivided interest, while leaving the individual, the most basic unit that constitutes the nation, out of the picture. This has dictated that nationalism only presents a mood, a posture, and a strategy in terms of nation-state relations, but does not offer any practical solutions in terms of how to develop (economically, politically, and culturally) within the state. [12] This extreme nationalism has become a cover for the refusal to deepen and

reform the Chinese political system.

For the international community, China's extreme nationalism continues to affect and undermine Sino-foreign relations, stimulating conflicts and even evolving into armed conflict. China's extreme nationalism has over-criticized Western liberal regimes (the author does not intentionally compare the merits of communist and Western liberal regimes here, as both can be classified as effective states and not as declining political systems. The United States, and China each have different forms of government, but all two systems of government have been able to secure their states) and interpret some of the international community's demands for codes of conduct as an infringement of national dignity. From the overly aggressive internet vocabulary that has emerged in recent years - "Love China means you can't learn English", "We can't use anything that is American", "Boycott Japanese goods " —it is clear that this kind of bigoted nationalism is becoming increasingly distorted, and it has become a major obstacle to China's progress towards international development under globalization.

## 2、Improvement

At present, although the shortcomings of China's political system have stimulated the development of ultra-nationalism in China, it is worth noting that the Chinese political authorities have now embarked on a reform of the political mechanism with the goal of "ruling by a large country, ruling by one party, ruling for a long time, and ruling in the era of globalization",[13] to implement China's basic political and economic system and guarantee the rights of citizens. As for

the slightly deviant patriotic education, another factor contributing to extreme nationalism in China, China is also trying to practice and improve it to transform it into a more objective, rational, and globalized direction. In particular, some of China's best scholars are now clearly aware that the real aim of patriotic education is to strengthen young students' patriotic spirit and sense of responsibility and to give them an in-depth understanding of national development. These scholars pay more attention to the objectivity and authenticity of the educational methods and contents, and they enable young students to feel how to love the country comprehensively and deeply, and how to view the relations between China and the outside world correctly so that young students can become rational nationalists in the new era. Therefore, the author has reason to believe that extreme nationalism in China will remain within a reasonable range in the future, and even get back on track.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In this article, the author attempts to examine the causes of Chinese nationalism from a new perspective. Most of the previous articles on the causes of Chinese nationalism have considered the external environment as the cause of extreme nationalism in contemporary China, especially agree the "actions of the right-wing forces in Japan and the hegemonic policies of the United States" as the root cause of extreme nationalism in contemporary China. However, taking China's internal environment as the starting point, the author of this article attempts to summarize and analyze the causes of extreme nationalism in

contemporary China and provide a new way of thinking for the study. The article describes the practical and direct causes of contemporary extreme nationalism. Finally, the article also summarizes the harms and improvements of contemporary extreme nationalism. The article attempts to provide theoretical supplements and support for the study of nationalism in China.

### References

- [1] Ren Juanling, Wang Zhiquan. The relationship between patriotism and nationalism in a dialectical view of modernization history [J]. People's Forum, 2013(23):230-231.
- [2] Ding Wei. How Chinese nationalism unites ethnic minorities [C]//Secretariat of the Advanced Forum of Anthropology, Guizhou Institute of Nationalities. Chinese national identity and identification with the Chinese nation - volume 2008 of the Advanced Forum of Anthropology. Heilongjiang People's Publishing House, 2008:125-130.
- [3] A brief discussion of Zhang Taiyan's nationalism\_ Guangming Daily, a Beijing newsarticle \_ Guangming.com [EB/OL]. [2023-06-08]. [https://www.gmw.cn/01gmr/2006-04/04/content\\_398483.htm](https://www.gmw.cn/01gmr/2006-04/04/content_398483.htm).
- [4] Yu Chongsheng. The nature of Chinese populism as a companion to governmentalism[J]. Exploration and Controversy,2016(04):26-27.
- [5] [E] Benedict Anderson, translated by Wu Ruiren. Imagined Communities: The Origin and Dispersal of Nationalism [M]. Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2011, p. 18.

- [6] Ren Bingqiang. The re-emergence of nationalism in China: causes characteristics and its impact [J]. Xuehai, 2004(01):78-82.
- [7] Pang Q, Thomas N. Chinese Nationalism and Trust in East Asia [J/OL]. Journal of Contemporary Asia, 2017, 47(5): 815-838.
- [8] Shi Jing. Right-wing political thought and its hazards in post-World War II Japan [J]. Journal of Southeast University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), 2008(S1):97-100.
- [9] Daokeba. Cause for the rise of extreme nationalism in contemporary China [EB/OL]. [2023-06-12]. <https://www.doc88.com/p-9089679291131.html>.
- [10] Shan Xiaoqi, Guo Zhanxin. The new century "cynics" and youth patriotism[J].
- [11] Modongal S. Development of nationalism in China [J/OL]. Cogent Social Sciences, 2016, 2(1): 1235749.
- [12] Ren Bingqiang. The re-emergence of nationalism in China: causes characteristics and implications [J]. Xuehai, 2004(01):78-82.
- [13] Liu Zhifeng. Problems to be solved in China's political system reform and ideas to cope with them [J]. Journal of Beijing Administrative College, 2011(01):43-47.