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The Origins of National Humiliation Narratives and When They Succeed: the Case of China

The narratives of national humiliation disseminated by the Chinese Communist Party, Hindu nationalists in India, and Russian leaders all share the trope of a once-great nation humiliated and taken advantage of by outsiders as well as the idea that the nation should be restored to its former glory. Given the evidence from Chapters 3 and 4 that national humiliation increases preferences for conflict, understanding how the idea of national humiliation originates and how it becomes politically prominent matters. Understanding the source of these narratives would also help explain when humiliation influences foreign policy preferences.

The next two chapters examine the hypotheses from Chapter 2 about when political groups disseminate narratives of national humiliation. I argue that narratives of national humiliation are socially constructed based on the national identities of political groups and the strategic incentives of key political actors. First, in order to construct a national humiliation narrative, an actor must be a member of the national identity claimed to be humiliated. Second, political groups strategically choose to propagate narratives of national humiliation when they can avoid responsibility for the event they are framing as humiliating and instead pin the blame on their political opponents (H3a). Third, political groups will use national humiliation narratives to promote policies that pose short-term costs to the public but can

be framed as necessary to defend the nation (H3b).

I probe these hypotheses with long-term historical case studies of political groups in China and India over the 20th century. These cases offer substantial variation in the use of national humiliation narratives and the strategic contexts facing the key actors. These case studies should be evaluated more as analytic narratives that seek to probe the extent to which the evidence is consistent with my theory in comparison with alternative explanations than as rigorous hypothesis tests (Bates et al. 1998). This is because it is impossible to find political group-periods that are identical across all confounds but differ on an independent variable.¹ However, the importance of the topic necessitates attempting to understand when political groups use narratives of national humiliation, and the diversity of conditions in China and India where the theory finds support lends some weight to the finding that strategic blame accounts for national humiliation narrative propagation.

I also use these cases to make inductions about the conditions under which the propagation of these narratives pays off. I find three conditions are associated with the political success of national humiliation narratives. First, national humiliation narratives will not lead groups to political success if the government severely represses these narratives and bans parties disseminating them. Second, the success of these narratives requires dense networks connecting the group propagating the narratives to their audience. These networks take two forms. First, media networks allow the narrative to spread and reach a wider audience. Second, institutional networks sustain the narrative over time, build trust, and provide resources for narrative propagation. The third determinate of narrative success is whether the audience is at a sufficient level of economic welfare to provide relief from the immediate concerns of survival, allowing citizens room for concern about more abstract issues like national humiliation. As the cases play a theory generating role for my explanation of humiliation narrative success, I do not attempt to use them to evaluate the evidence for my theory as opposed to competing theories and instead focus on illustrating the aspects of

¹This along with the reasons in section 2 of Chapter 4 are why I do not attempt to use the cases to test the hypotheses about the influence of humiliation on foreign policy preferences.

the cases that lead to my conclusions.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I discuss case and period selection. Second, I evaluate my theory against alternative accounts of when national humiliation narratives are disseminated with the case of political groups in China 20th century. Third, I discuss what the Chinese case suggests about the conditions under which national humiliation narratives resonate with their domestic audience. The final section offers concluding comments.

1 Case Selection

In the next two chapters, I conduct case studies of political groups in China and India from the turn of the 20th century to 1999. My unit of analysis is major domestic political groups that either currently control a country or have the prospect of taking control of a national government. I make political groups the unit of analysis because it is political groups that decide whether or not to promote narratives of national humiliation and that either succeed or fail in taking control of a country.

China and India are particularly suited to evaluating my theory. First, they both have variation over time in the promotion of national humiliation narratives, which is important because my theory predicts within-country variation in whether political groups use national humiliation narratives. In both China and India, political factions that did not promote narratives of national humiliation exist during times other political groups do promote such narratives. China and India also both experience periods where national humiliation narratives led to political success as well as when they did not.

Second this variation extends over a long period of time. Being able to follow particular cases over a long period of time is necessary to rule out event-based explanations by showing that humiliation narratives are not always immediately preceded by the potentially humiliating event as well as to include events that could have been constructed as humiliating but were not. The length of time over which these narratives are deployed also helps rule

out international bargaining explanations. If humiliation narratives persist over long periods of time, the politicians initially deploying these narratives could not have anticipated the foreign policy effects this strategy would have many years down the line. This would make it unlikely that those narratives are solely a product of international bargaining.

I search these cases for evidence that would either support or contradict my theory. Specifically, only groups that share a national identity with their audience and can blame their political opponent for the event should propagate narratives of national humiliation. These groups should also promote policies that require short-term sacrifice from citizens, which the groups justify in the name of national defense. Evidence that would falsify my theory includes finding that political groups propagate national humiliation narratives when they could be criticized for the event they construct as humiliating or if none of their political opponents can be associated with this event.

1.1 China Period Selection

I divide my discussion of the Chinese case into three time periods based on changes in the independent variables (Lind 2010, 21). The first period begins when national identity starts forming and ends at independence.² I start a new period after independence because the strategic incentives to deploy national humiliation narratives change once a state is formed and colonial powers are ejected. Now domestic politics groups compete primarily against each other instead of the colonizer for political power.

I end the second period with the Tiananmen massacre of 1989, which is commonly described as a turning point (Fewsmith 2001).³ Importantly for my theory, this marks the beginning of the time period when Communist leaders began to perceive a challenge to their rule from democratic reformers. Whether China ever faced a realistic prospect of democ-

²If instead this period were started earlier, the findings should not change because the use of national humiliation narratives cannot arise prior to national identity formation.

³A reasonable alternative cut-point is 1976 (Mao's death and the beginning of Reform and Opening Up). However, 1989 marked a shift in the political strategic situation in China. The Communists' primary perceived opponent changed from reactionaries to liberals.

ratization during this period is less important than Communist leaders' perceptions of this possibility. This is because my theory is about the strategic incentives of political parties to propagate narratives of national humiliation given their beliefs about their primary competitors and their office-seeking imperative. I conclude the case study in 1999 for tractability, but because the Communist Party is still in power today, faces similar incentives about the need to motivate sacrifice to foster national defense, and continues to deploy national humiliation narratives, the findings would hold if this final time period were extended to the present.

Table 1 shows the political groups in China in each time period, whether they promoted narratives of national humiliation, whether they had the opportunity to blame their political opponent for an event constructed as humiliating while themselves escaping blame, who the humiliator was according to this narrative, and what political opponent they sought to blame with it (Target). In contrast, Table 2 shows the variation in the dependent variable alongside variation in independent variables highlighted by alternative explanations.

Wars are important both for events-based explanations that attribute national humiliation narratives to trauma and suffering inflicted by national others during conflict and for bargaining explanations that see narratives of national humiliation as bargaining tactics that seek to convey resolve to opponents in international disputes. One issue with using wars to explain national humiliation narratives is that wars vary at the country-period level and not the political-group-period level. Explanations that rely on wars cannot account for different political group strategies within the same country-period as observed in China from 1885–1949. Legitimacy crisis explanations do a bit better because a group's perceived right to rule does vary among groups. While the tables provide surface level evidence that strategic blame covaries most closely with humiliation narrative use, the analysis of each period below will examine further empirical implications of each explanation to assess their fit.

Of course, there were significant divides within each of these groups, and the time span analyzed is vast. I cannot give a complete account of Chinese politics in the 20th century. Nevertheless, I capture the key points of continuity and change in groups' use of national

Table 1: China Case Summary

Group	Period	Narrative?	Strategic Blame?	Humiliator	Target
Guomindang	1885–1949	Yes	Yes	Imperialists	Warlords
Communists	1885–1949	Yes	Yes	Imperialists	Warlords and Guomindang
Qing Empire	1885–1949	No	No	NA	NA
Communists	1950–1988	No	No	NA	NA
Communists	1989–1999	Yes	Yes	Imperialists	Democrats

Table 2: Alternative Explanations Summary

Group	Period	Narrative?	War?	Legitimacy Crisis?
Guomindang	1885–1949	Yes	Yes	Yes
Communists	1885–1949	Yes	Yes	No
Qing Empire	1885–1949	No	Yes	Yes
Communists	1950–1988	No	Yes	No
Communists	1989–1999	Yes	No	Yes

humiliation narratives as well as in the independent variables.

2 National Humiliation Narratives in China

2.1 Forging National Identity (China 1885–1949)

The events in China from 1885–1949 illustrate the importance of the formation of national identity to allow construction of national humiliation narratives as well as the importance of strategic incentives in their construction. The Qing Empire could not use national humiliation narratives because it would be held responsible for China’s defeats. In contrast, its opponents could and did use national humiliation narratives. Strategic incentives can be seen in the timing of narrative construction as well as what they constructed as humiliating. For example, neither the Communists nor the Guomindang framed a 1945 treaty with the Soviets as humiliating, even though many privately felt it made unacceptable concessions on Chinese sovereignty. The Communist could not take this tact because their close ties to the Soviets would make them seem culpable, and the Guomindang could not avoid responsibility because they had signed the treaty. Both parties used national humiliation narratives to convince citizens to sacrifice in support of the war effort either by joining the military

or by donating funds. The absence of national humiliation narratives before the strategic incentives were right, despite many events that would later be constructed as humiliating, suggests that it is not events themselves, which lead to the creation of national humiliation narratives.

Japan's defeat of the Qing Empire in the 1895 Sino-Japanese War marks the beginning of modern Chinese nationalism (Wang 2012, 73-74; Zhao 2004, 16). The term meaning 'national' (国民) was first introduced during this period (Chu and Zarrow 2002, 4-5). The nationalism of Sun Yat-sen's Guomindang (国民党) is shown in that it used this term in its name. Both the Guomindang and the Communist party were strongly nationalist. The desire to save the Chinese nation was largely the motivation of Communist leaders to turn to communism (Meisner 1999, 18).

2.1.1 Strategic Blame

In addition to national identity formation, the correct strategic incentives were necessary for political groups in China to begin propagating national humiliation narratives. The collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1912 created an opportunity for nationalist entrepreneurs that did not previously exist (Zhao 2004, 18). The ruling Qing were not Han but Manchu. For Sun's revolutionary nationalists, the Manchus were foreigners who were the source of China's weakness (Wright 1959, 3). The Manchu government was criticized as the "running dog" of imperialist powers (Zhao 2004, 64). The Qing themselves could not use narratives of national humiliation both because they were in power during the events constructed as humiliating, preventing them from escaping blame, and because their rule was imperial and not national.

The phrase "never forget national humiliation" (勿忘国耻) was first popularized in China and used by nationalist groups to criticize the government, led by the warlord Yuan Shikai, for accepting Japan's 21 Demands (Wang 2012, 64). That national humiliation was not used politically until 1915 despite the fact that the beginning of the "Century of Humiliation"

was later dated to the first Opium War in 1839 supports the idea that events by themselves are not humiliating but must instead be socially constructed as such. Likewise the Chinese phrase ‘unequal treaties’ (不平等条约), referring to the treaties China was forced to sign during the Century of Humiliation, was not used until the 1920s (Wang 2008, 1). Further, the portions of the treaties that Chinese later viewed as the most egregious were not the same as the provisions that caused the most consternation at the time the treaties were signed (Wang 2008, 24).

Both the Communists and Guomindang used the concept of unequal treaties and “China’s humiliating recent past” as “strategies for bringing down their common enemies—imperialism and warlordism” (Wang 2008, 7). After 1923, China’s warlords began to feel intense public pressure as language regarding the unequal treaties became more charged and they were linked with “slavery” and “misery inflicted upon China by imperialism” (Wang 2008, 66). In 1924 a speech, Sun Yat-sen said that the unequal treaties made China’s workers “slaves of world powers” (Wang 2008, 65). The Guomindang not only enshrined the abolition of the unequal treaties in its 1924 party platform but made it a “first priority” and “devoted considerable energy to renegotiating” the treaties (Zhao 1998, 83–84). In the 1920s and 1930s, the Guomindang approved textbooks titled “History of National Humiliation” (Callahan 2010, 34).

During the First United Front from 1924–26, the Communists and Guomindang coordinated on propaganda with regards to the treaties and targeted the Beijing Government, which was led by the warlord Duan Qirui until he was deposed a month after being weakened when his government’s violent repression of protests against Japanese imperialism sparked mass anger in 1926 (Ji’an 2006, 11). While the Communists and Guomindang referred to members of the Beijing government as “running dogs of imperialism,” the Beijing government itself rarely mentioned the unequal treaties (Wang 2008, 67–68). Mao’s propaganda reports show that both the Communists and Guomindang believed that the unequal treaties were an effective method of rallying public opinion (Wang 2008, 70).

When the Guomindang began to violently suppress Communists in 1927, the Communists started to accuse the Guomindang of prioritizing protecting foreigners over abolishing the unequal treaties (Wang 2008, 73). To maintain control of the narrative, the Guomindang assumed management of formerly independent groups that commemorated national humiliation (Callahan 2010, 77). After the success of the Northern Expedition in 1928, the power of the warlords was largely broken and the Guomindang now prioritized both political and military competition with the Communists.

As the Guomindang was now their main opponent, the Communists “made every effort to discredit the KMT [Guomindang] for betraying the nationalist cause” and criticized the Guomindang for not doing enough to resist Japan, but this argument was weakened by the Communists’ inability to provide meaningful amounts of troops to fight Japan (Zhao 2004, 107). Chiang still believed that the Guomindang could avoid blame and took active steps to do so, including sending forces in 1932 to aid Zhang Xueliang in defending Rehe from Japan. Chiang secretly sent his weakest troops and was able to scapegoat Zhang for the loss (Vogel 2019, 239–40). Further, Chiang formed a political affairs office in Beijing to make unpopular concessions to Japan, including the Tangku Truce, to deflect blame from the Guomindang government in Nanjing.

However, building nationalist pressure eventually resulted in Chiang getting detained by his own forces and being forced to agree to unite with the Communists to fight Japan (Vogel 2019, 245).⁴ In 1937 after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident when Japanese and Chinese forces fought near Beijing, Chiang, fearing the Guomindang would lose support if he failed to respond, rejected advice that China was not ready and ordered a military response (Vogel 2019, 249).

This strategic use of national humiliation narratives by both the Communists and the

⁴The Grand Chinese Alliance for Stopping the Civil War argued that “external humiliation is related to internal chaos and chaos comes from the civil war” (Zhao 2004, 101). While the Communists did not create this movement they did back the National Salvation movement and New Enlightenment movement, which made similar claims. This resulted in protests against Chiang’s policy of defeating the Communists before Japan (Zhao 2004, 101).

Guomindang is consistent with H3a. Both the timing of narrative construction and the events that these parties choose to construct as humiliating are consistent with a strategic explanation rather than an events-based explanation. The failure of the Qing Dynasty and later ruling warlords, who were in power during the events constructed as humiliating, to disseminate national humiliation narratives provides further support for H3a.

2.1.2 Motivating Sacrifice

Both the Guomindang and the Communists wanted to mobilize public support. As the above account shows, political mobilization was costly for protesters who faced violent repression. Further, the parties used narratives of national humiliation to convince citizens to take costly steps to support the war effort. In 1922, Sun sold the planned Northern Expedition as an attack on the government in Beijing, which he claimed was a Japanese tool. He believed that maintaining the loyalty of his troops was even more important than support among the general population, so there is reason to think the justifications he gave to his soldiers were carefully chosen (Fitzgerald 1998, 200).

During the war against Japan, nationalism was seen by both the Guomindang and Communists as a means to mobilize fighters (Zhao 2004, 79). The “National Humiliation Fund” was created to raise money to “buy arms to fight Japan” (Callahan 2010, 69). Likewise, “National Humiliation Day” was officially recognized by the Guomindang during this period and used to raise funds to fight the Japanese and motivate citizens to “produce a strong Chinese nation” (Callahan 2010, 83). The Japanese invasion was also a way for the Guomindang government to convince liberal intellectuals to “painfully sacrifice” their liberalism in the name of “the state’s capacity to fight” (Zhao 2004, 126). The use of national humiliation narratives to motivate citizens to sacrifice for national defense during this period corroborates H3b.

2.1.3 Alternative Explanations

The first alternative explanation for this period could be that humiliating or traumatic events drove the Guomindang and Communists parties' use of national humiliation narratives. Indeed, this period includes no shortage of events that could be and were constructed as nationally humiliating, so at first glance the humiliating events explanation appears to fit well. These events include: the First and Second Sino-Japanese wars, the presence of colonial powers in the foreign concessions of treaty ports, the invasion by the Eight-Nation Alliance, and the sacking of the Old Summer Palace on the orders of Lord Elgin, the British High Commissioner to China (Bicker 2012, 5–6). It would stretch credulity to argue that these events have *no* relation to the construction of national humiliation narratives in China during this period.

However, there are several reasons that humiliating events-based explanations fall short. First, there is variation among political groups in the use of national humiliation narratives. If the events listed in the previous paragraph were objectively humiliating to all Chinese, then the Qing dynasty should have constructed national humiliation narratives around these events. The behavior of the Qing dynasty can only be accounted for by understanding that the Qing dynasty was an imperial rather than a nationalist political group (it did not share a national identity with its audience) and that the Qing dynasty was in power during most of these events (it would have been blamed for allowing the events to occur, so constructing a national humiliation narrative was not strategically beneficial).

Second, there is variation in the timing of the construction of events as humiliating. The First and Second Opium wars and the signing of many unequal treaties took place prior to this period, but these events were not constructed as humiliating until this period. If these events themselves were sufficient for the construction of national humiliation narratives, then they should have given rise to such narratives at the time they occurred. The ability of political groups to construct events from the past as humiliating also calls the necessity of any given event into question for the construction of national humiliation narratives,

since there is always some other event from the past that political groups can seize on. Understanding the timing of the construction of national humiliation narratives during this period requires understanding that Chinese national identity did not exist prior to this period and that the political competition among groups that creates the incentives for the construction of national humiliation narratives did not exist until around the time the Qing Dynasty collapsed.

Third, the events constructed as humiliating themselves vary. If treaties that concede sovereignty over Chinese territory to foreign powers are humiliating and give rise to humiliation narratives, then the Guomintang's 1945 treaty with the Soviet Union, which contained secret provisions both Guomintang members and Communists regarded as limiting China's sovereignty, including an independent Outer Mongolia, should have been constructed as humiliating but was not (Wang 2008, 93–94). While members of both the Guomintang and Communist parties had reservations about the treaty, they refrained from criticism, instead praising the treaty in public (Wang 2008, 97–98). Only a theory that accounts for the strategic aspects of national humiliation narrative construction can explain this. It was strategic for neither party to raise the issue. The Guomintang was vulnerable to blame because they signed the treaty and the Communist were vulnerable because of their close links with the Soviets.

Another alternative explanation for the construction of national humiliation narratives is that ruling political groups created these narratives when they faced a legitimacy crisis. Arguably, this could account the behavior of the Guomintang during this period because there were times when they held many of China most important cities but their legitimacy faced serious questions due to corruption and mismanagement (Fairbank 2006, 288). However, this explanation does not account very well for the strategies used by either the Communists or the Qing Dynasty. The Qing Dynasty clearly faced a legitimacy crisis during this period and, indeed, ultimately collapsed. However, the Qing Dynasty did not attempt to shore up its legitimacy with national humiliation narratives. The Communists in contrast did not control

China's major population centers until the end of this period. For much of this period, the Communists were confined to relatively isolated rural outposts. Since the Communists were not in power and were not seen as responsible for the welfare and defense of the Chinese people, they did not face a comparable legitimacy crisis during this power. Despite this, the Communists still used national humiliation narratives to blame their political opponents for failure to defend China.

The last alternative explanation is that political groups constructed these narratives to increase their bargaining positions during international conflicts. This explanation fits this period the least well. Often the narratives were constructed after the international conflict had already ended, as was the case with narratives about both Opium wars and the First Sino-Japanese War. In these cases, the need to convey resolve had already passed and, therefore, could not have motivated narrative construction. Further, national humiliation narratives were often constructed in reaction to rather than in the process of negotiating international agreements. This was the case with most of the treaties that later came to be labeled "unequal" (Wang 2008, 24). Further, the length of time over which the Communists and Guomindang constructed national humiliation narratives raises doubt that these narratives were created to engage in a discrete international bargaining process after which they would no longer serve a purpose.

2.2 Statehood to the Tiananmen Massacre (China 1950-1988)

2.2.1 Strategic Blame

The Guomindang's relatively greater contribution to the war against Japan limited the ability of the Communists to use national humiliation narratives during this period (Wang 2012, 88). The Communists would potentially face blame for holding their strength in reserve to fight the Guomindang, fellow Chinese, rather than Japan. Further, the Communists still viewed reactionaries, including the Guomindang, as a threat to their rule. Chiang Kai-shek maintained his hope to retake the mainland until his death (Sui 2009). References

to national humiliation in China from 1940-1990 both in Chinese state media (see Figure 1) and in published books were very rare (Callahan 2010, 26). Instead the party shifted to emphasize Marxism in its propaganda during this period (Callahan 2010, 35). This reticence in deploying national humiliation narratives for fear of facing blame coincides with H3a.

2.2.2 Motivating Sacrifice

This period includes plenty of events that required the Communists to ask citizens to sacrifice, including the Korea War, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the Sino-Vietnamese War. Despite this, the Communists did not disseminate narratives of humiliation during this period. This is consistent with the theory. Political groups will only use narratives of national humiliation to mobilize support for costly policies if the conditions for H3a are met, meaning that they can avoid blame for the events constructed as humiliating. Avoiding blame is a necessary condition to use humiliation narratives to gain support for policies because it does a political group little good to gain support for its policies by fostering opposition to its rule. As the previous section argues, narratives of national humiliation did not provide a good avenue for the Communists to cast blame on their main political opponent, the Guomindang, relative to themselves during this period, which accounts for the absence of humiliation narratives.

2.2.3 Alternative Explanations

As with the previous period, this period is rich with traumatic events that could be constructed as humiliating. The Second Sino-Japanese War had just ended. This war killed millions of Chinese and involved traumatic events, including the Nanjing Massacre, that would later play a central role in Communist narratives of national humiliation (Wang 2012, 208). China also fought a war against United Nations troops in Korea in 1950–51 that posed a major challenge to the People’s Republic of China, which was in its infancy, and killed hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops (Meisner 1999, 69–70). Either of these events

could have been constructed as humiliating, yet during the Mao era, the Chinese government framed these events as victories while playing down their humiliating aspects (Gries 2005).

In 1969, China fought a border conflict with its erstwhile ally, the Soviet Union (Gerson 2010). While casualties were limited the Sino-Soviet split was a hugely important event for China's security as China, for a time, face a hostile relationship with both of the world's super powers. The Soviet Union's behavior could have been portrayed as a stab in the back and a humiliating betrayal. While some government rhetoric about the Soviet Union could fall in this category, it was short lived and was directed towards international rather than domestic audiences (more on this below). China also fought a war in 1979 against Vietnam. Although the Chinese government could have framed its 1979 war with Vietnam as a humiliation based on Chinese casualties and poor battle performance, it choose to suppress information about causalities (over which it could have faced blame) and frame the conflict as a victory instead (Zhang 2005, 866).

The legitimacy explanation arguably accounts for this period relatively well. While the Chinese government certainly faced challenges that could, in theory, have led to legitimacy crises during this period, Communist rule was never seriously under threat. These crises include mass starvation during the Great Leap Forward as well as political violence during the Cultural Revolution. While the failure of the Great Leap Forward did weaken Mao's position within the Communist Party relative to those who wanted China to more closely follow the Soviet industrial model, no group within China seriously challenged the Communist Party's right to rule, let alone proposed an alternative ruling party (Meisner 1999, 249–250). The Cultural Revolution precipitated mass violence and intimidation against those perceived as deviating from the party line, particularly intellectuals. If anything, the Cultural Revolution reinforced Mao's authority and entrenched his cult of personality (Meisner 1999, 347). A proponent of the legitimacy explanation could argue that the lack of a Communist Party legitimacy crisis during this period accounts for the absence of humiliation narratives during this period.

The evidence for the international bargaining explanation during this period is mixed. The Korean War was portrayed as a victory rather than a humiliation, which does not fit well with the idea the Communist Party used national humiliation to enhance its bargaining position over the issues at stake in the conflict. However, there is evidence from this period consistent with the idea that China sought to convey a sense of humiliation to deter adversaries. In diplomatic communications between the US and China in 1964, China sought to deter US escalation in of the Vietnam War with statements, such as, “650 million Chinese cannot be bullied easily” (Goldstein 2003, 756).

The bargaining explanation also fits the Sino-Soviet border conflict in 1969. Chinese Communist officials sought to convince the Soviet Union that China could not be “bullied” or “intimate[d]” into territorial concessions (Gerson 2010, 32). The Chinese government went through great effort to convince other nations that it was the victim in the conflict. The most intense effort of China’s propaganda campaign was directed across the border into the USSR (Urbansky 2012, 267), which is consistent with the idea that the Chinese government wished to signal resolve to its adversary. The largest protests over the dispute within China took place outside the Soviet embassy (Gerson 2010, 23–24), which suggests that the Chinese government may have allowed protests there to send a message to its adversary. The Soviet side threatened escalating the dispute and even deploying nuclear weapons (Lüthi 2012, 390). The Chinese government wanted to signal that it would use its large population to rapidly raise the cost of any escalation, to deter further hostilities (Gerson 2010, 43–44).

In contrast with the Soviet border conflict, China’s war against Vietnam does not fit well with bargaining explanations. China’s military expeditions were portrayed as victorious, and Chinese leaders regarded their casualties, despite the fact that they were much greater than in the Soviet conflict, as relatively unimportant (Zhang 2005, 866-76). The mixed evidence for the bargaining explanation during a period where national humiliation narratives were not used domestically may suggest that, at least in a country that fully controls its citizens’ access to information, an international message of humiliation can be cordoned off from

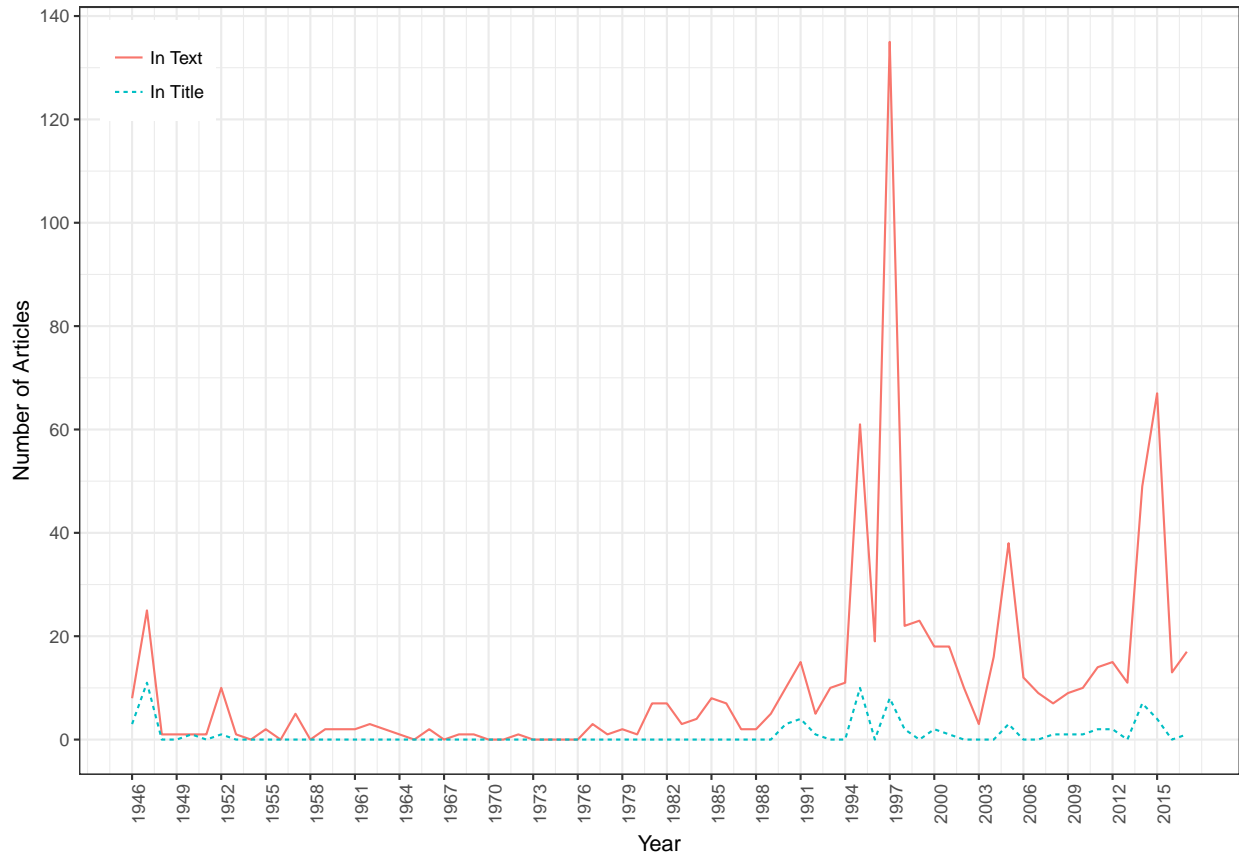
domestic public perceptions. This could indicate that separate explanations are required to explain why messages of national humiliation are sent to international rather than domestic audiences for such cases. The fact that the Chinese government did not always send a message of national humiliation to adversaries during this period suggests that this choice may be endogenous to the bargaining process in ways that have yet to be fully explored.

2.3 After the Tiananmen Massacre (China 1989-1999)

2.3.1 Strategic Blame

Now that the Communists had ruled the mainland for several decades, their rule was recognized by almost every country in the world, and their military power was vastly greater than Taiwan's, they no longer viewed the Guomintang as a major threat to their rule. However, with the global decline of communism and the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989, the Chinese government now imagined a new threat: democracy. Liberal movements within China worried the leadership much more than external territorial threats (Zhao 2004, 35). China faced sanctions and human rights pressure from Western countries in response to the massacre (Deng 2008, 76-77). Communist leaders saw national humiliation as a way to shift the public's attention from corruption and the lack of political reform, for which the Communists could be blamed, to external issues (Callahan 2010, 35). Further, the patriotic education campaign, launched in 1991, linked democratic values to foreign humiliators and internal critics of the regime to historical "traitors" who sold out China to foreigners (Callahan 2006, 35, 43).

After the Tiananmen Massacre, the Chinese government launched the patriotic education campaign that emphasized China's pre-1949 humiliation at the hands of Japan and Western powers along with the Communists' role in winning national independence (Wang 2012, 96-97). The Communists could escape responsibility for China's humiliation prior to 1949 because they were not in political power. Further, the information that the Communists held back in the war against Japan to preserve their strength for fighting the Guomintang

Figure 1: *People's Daily* Articles Containing 'National Humiliation'

Data scraped from People's Daily Press (2017), which includes articles from 1946 to the present.

was now suppressed. Chinese history textbooks typically begin with summaries of China's "glorious past" followed by its humiliation by foreign powers. These textbooks omit tragedies that occurred after the Communists took control in 1949 and instead focus on events that can be "blamed on outsiders" (Callahan 2010, 14). Figure 1 shows articles from the Communists' main mouthpiece newspaper, the *People's Daily* mentioning 'national humiliation' (国耻) from 1946 to 2017. State media followed a similar pattern as state approved textbooks, publishing only 2 articles with national humiliation in the title from 1949 to 1989 with surges of articles before and after this period.

2.3.2 Motivating Sacrifice

After the decline of Marxism as a source of legitimacy, the Communists needed an ideology to convince citizens to “bear hardship” (Zhao 2004, 212). Both reformers and conservatives within the Communist Party agreed that after the Tiananmen Massacre, they needed to get citizens “to support and even sacrifice for the regime” (Zhao 2004, 213). Reformers, lead by Deng, argued that paying the costs of reform was necessary because only economic reform could make China strong (Callahan 2010, 44–45). This was part of the motivation for the patriotic education campaign, and textbooks emphasized patriots who “sacrificed themselves” for the nation (Zhao 2004, 224). A 1995 *People’s Daily* article summarizes the message of the patriotic education campaign in the national anthem as promoting a spirit of sacrifice, unity, and a sense of danger (Zhao 2004, 241). Patriotic education campaign textbooks are not merely designed to impart information but also emphasize the way students should “feel” (Callahan 2010, 52). This further suggests that the regime may be attempting to make use of the emotion of humiliation’s effect, shown in Chapter 3, of decreasing sensitivity costs that come in the name of national defense, which is consistent with H3b.

2.3.3 Alternative Explanations

The events explanation does not account for this period very well. The patriotic education campaign was not triggered by any externally imposed humiliating event and focused almost exclusively on events that took place before the Communist Party took control in 1949. A proponent of the events explanation might argue that these pre-1949 events produced narratives of national humiliation after a time lag. However, many of these events were discussed as humiliating prior to 1949. Such an explanation could not account for why these narratives ceased for a forty year period and then began again. To understand this, it is necessary to examine the strategic incentives of narrative propagation.

Again, the legitimacy crisis explanation arguably accounts well for this period. Many scholars have argued that the Chinese Communist Party faced a legitimacy crisis in China

following the Tianamen Massacre. However, looking beyond this period raises questions for explanations that attribute China's narratives of national humiliation to this legitimacy crisis. In 2020, the Communist Party is arguably more confident than ever. The 2008 and 2009 financial crisis raised questions in China about the relative effectiveness of democratic alternatives (Kurlantzick 2013). Trump's election and the severe mismanagement of the Coronavirus response in the United States have further reinforced confidence in the Chinese system (Rachman 2020). To convincingly account for narratives of national humiliation within China during this period, a legitimacy crisis theory would need to explain why these narratives have long outlasted the initial crisis. The continued presence of national humiliation narratives despite the weakening of the perceived challenge of democratic political competitors is better accounted for by the continued need to justify the sacrifices necessary to modernize China's military and increase China's global influence.

The international bargaining explanation does not well account for the Communist Party's decision to use national humiliation narratives during this period, but it does a better job of accounting the intensity of the narrative's dissemination during periods when the party has decided to use it. While China is involved in ongoing disputes over Taiwan and territory in the South and East China seas, these disputes predate this period, so they cannot explain the initiation of the patriotic education campaign. Further, the integration of national humiliation into the education system suggests a more long term process than a tactic that the Chinese government ramps up when these disputes come to a head. However, the bargaining explanation arguably could account for cycles within the prevalence of national humiliation in public discourse. As seen in Chapter 4, discussion of national humiliation greatly increases during international crises, such as the 2012 Diaoyu Islands crisis. Scholars have noted that modern national humiliation protests within China also follow this pattern (Weiss 2014). It may be that the decision of political groups to use and maintain national humiliation and the cycles in the prevalence of national humiliation *given* this decision require separate explanations and that bargaining theory has an important role to play in the latter.

2.4 Discussion

No single piece of evidence is dispositive, but, taken as a whole, the cases show that the hypotheses can account for variation across a wide variety of circumstances, including different political competitors, regimes, levels of development, degrees of repression, and international environments. In each case, parties use narratives of national humiliation when they are able to escape blame for the event they frame as humiliating and attribute that blame to their political opponents. Strategic blame accounts not only for what groups use the narratives and the timing of their use but also what events political groups construct as humiliating. Neither the Communists nor the Guomindang constructed the Guomindang's 1945 treaty with the USSR as humiliating, despite constructing other similar treaties as humiliating because each group could face blame for the 1945 treaty. The Communists for their close relations with the USSR and the Guomindang because they signed the treaty. In another example, the Communist Party chose to focus on events predating its rule in the patriotic education campaign it launched in the 1990s rather than contemporaneous international sanctions because it was much more clear that the Communists were blameless for events that predated their rule. Further, these events could be tied to the Communists' perceived domestic enemy of democratic reformers because China's humiliation came at the hands of the same Western powers associated with democracy.

Further, the cases provide compelling evidence that alternative explanations cannot fully account for important variation in national humiliation narratives. In particular, traumatic or threatening events such as war defeats do a poor job in predicting national humiliation narratives. Further, these events cannot account for variation in the propagation of national humiliation narratives among political groups within the same country. The ability of political groups to reach far into the past for events to construct as humiliating suggests that no one event provides a necessary or sufficient explanation of national humiliation narratives.

The legitimacy crisis explanation admittedly fits the second two periods relatively well. However, it does a poor job of explaining the first period when the Qing dynasty failed

to disseminate national humiliation narratives despite facing a severe legitimacy crisis that ultimately lead to its collapse, and the Communist Party did propagate national humiliation narratives despite not being a ruling power and not facing a legitimacy crisis. Further, the following chapter that examines the use of national humiliation narratives in India will show that this legitimacy crisis explanation does not travel well outside of China.

The international bargaining explanation provides a poor account for when political groups within China choose to disseminate narratives of national humiliation. However, it does a much better job of accounting for variation in the prominence of national humiliation narratives once a political group has chosen to use this strategy. This is particularly true for the modern period. This suggests that while international disputes do not themselves cause national humiliation narratives, these disputes may create further incentives for a ruling group that has already adopted to such narratives to temporarily increase their circulation.

3 When Do Narratives of National Humiliation Resonate?

Although my theory explains when groups disseminate national humiliation narratives, it does not explain the factors that cause narratives to resonate with domestic audiences once used. For this reason, I draw inductions from the cases about these factors. Correspondingly my use of historical evidence in this section is not intended to test my hypotheses nor to rule out alternative explanations. Instead the purpose of this evidence is to illustrate larger trends in the cases that suggest the importance of each factor of narrative resonance.

I examine two indicators of whether narratives resonate with domestic audiences. First, does the party's propagation of the narrative help it gain or maintain political control? Second, what kinds of individuals are most likely to accept the narrative?

I find that three conditions affect narrative resonance. First, if the government is determined to repress narratives of national humiliation, to the extent that it is willing to ban

political groups propagating the narratives, then the ability of these narratives to resonate is limited. To be clear, this is *not* about repression in general but about repression specifically targeted at groups disseminating narratives of national humiliation. As the case of modern China shows, a regime can be very repressive towards political groups it does not like and still be relatively permissive towards narratives of national humiliation.

The second condition is the density of networks that connect the political group propagating narratives of national humiliation to its audience. Two types of networks are particularly important. First, media networks provide political groups a means of spreading their narrative and reaching audiences that they could not otherwise reach. Second, institutions including political parties, the education system, local governments, and state media outlets help sustain the narratives over time and provide the resources needed to expand the reach of the narratives and foster trust between the political group controlling the institutions and its audience. The final condition is the level of economic welfare of the audience. As more individuals are freed from the immediate concerns of economic survival, they become available for mobilization over symbolic issues.

Below I briefly summarize the evidence for the importance of each of these factors for the resonance of national humiliation narratives within China. If repression limits the success of national humiliation narratives, then we would not expect these narratives to succeed in places and times when they faced strict repression and would expect these narratives to be more likely to resonate when periods of strict repression are lifted. If the evidence supports the importance of networks, then two conditions should hold. First, as media networks linking a political group propagating narratives of national humiliation to its audience expand, national humiliation narratives should be more likely to resonate. Second, the more institutions that the political group controls when propagating a humiliation narrative, the more likely the narrative will persist and the group's audience will embrace that narrative. Likewise, two indicators would support the importance of audience welfare. First, if economic development is unevenly spread, then narratives of national humiliation should be

more likely to resonate with wealthier urban professional classes than those living in poverty in the countryside. Second, as a country's economy develops and citizens are lifted out of poverty, national humiliation narratives should be more likely to resonate.

3.1 Evidence of Narrative Success

The repression of criticism during the Qing empire helps explain why national humiliation narratives did not emerge until after the Qing empire collapsed (Fairbank 2006, 156-159, 261-62). Nationalist critics of the Qing empire were forced to live in foreign concessions or Japan to escape persecution (Spence 1990, 236). However, after the end of the Qing empire in 1912, repression did less to limit the success of national humiliation narratives because it was not the idea of national humiliation that was suppressed. Instead, Communist propaganda was suppressed in areas controlled by the Guomindang, and Guomindang propaganda was suppressed in areas controlled by the Communists (Fairbank 2006, 291, 312).

This initial period, ending 1949, also shows evidence for the importance of networks and economic welfare. The appeal of national humiliation narratives was concentrated among the elites and had little resonance among poor farmers. National humiliation was primarily discussed by intellectuals and business leaders (Wang 2012, 75). National humiliation narratives were first popularized by teachers' organizations and the press (Callahan 2010, 25). The importance of teachers organizations, the press, and political parties in the dissipation of narratives of national humiliation during this period also suggests the significance of networks both in the form of media networks for disseminating the message and insitutional networks in organizing and supporting its spread. While the Communists attempted to use national humiliation narratives to gain support, in rural areas, they focused more on class issues. The Guomindang prioritized urban centers, devoting relatively less effort to winning rural support (Wang 2012, 82). Since villagers, who were generally less receptive to national humiliation narratives, were the key to the Communists' ability to take over the country, this case suggests that national humiliation narratives are unlikely to determine

political success during periods of low economic development.

The middle period, 1950–88, suggests the power of a determined state to use repression to prevent narratives of national humiliation from resonating. National humiliation narratives were completely muzzled. No books on national humiliation were published from 1947–1990, and the history of the Nanjing Massacre was suppressed (Wang 2012, 82). The utter lack of national humiliation narratives during this period provides strong evidence that determined government repression can prevent national humiliation narratives from spreading.

The extent of repression largely alleviates the need to discuss the influence of networks and economic welfare during this period because humiliation entrepreneurs could not use any media that did exist to reach any class that might have been receptive to their message. However, this period does suggest that the factors of repression and control over networks are closely related in a one-party state. Since the Communist Party controlled the only permissible political party, all meaningful media networks, as well as the educational system during this period, it could easily deny these avenues to potential political opponents who, if they had been permitted to exist, might have attempted to use them to spread narratives of national humiliation blaming the Communist Party for one or more of the events discussed in section 2.2.3. The Communist Party's tight control of these networks also allowed it to reverse its position on national humiliation narratives to great effect in the final period.

The final period, beginning in 1989, continues the theme found in the middle period of the close relationship between repression and control over networks in a one-party state. The Communist Party's control of the media, local governments, and the education system allowed it to suddenly permit national humiliation discourse that had previously been prohibited (Wang 2012, 86). Further, suggesting the importance of media networks, the Communists took advantage of multiple forms of media to spread national humiliation, including films, museums, novels, songs, poems, and online videos (Callahan 2010, 16). The institutional organization of the Communist party allowed it to mobilize these resources in concert.

In a reversal of the role repression played in the previous two periods, censorship of alternative views aided the narrative's spread, allowing it to become more pervasive and unchallenged than it would be in a democratic society (Shen 2010). The Communist Party uses a combination of propaganda and censorship to ensure that there is only one national narrative, the narrative of national humiliation and rejuvenation by the Communists (Callahan 2010, 33). The correspondence of this change in censorship tactics and the reach of national humiliation narratives supports the proposition that state repression is a determinate of narrative success.

Aside from the fact that the Communist Party now sought to use its repression and network power to foster rather than limit national humiliation narratives, one other factor distinguishes this period from the middle period. This is the increased economic development within China that lifted large segments of the population out of poverty. This created a receptive audience for the Communist Party's narrative. The coincidence this development with the strong resonance of national humiliation narratives disseminated in the patriotic education campaign is consistent with the importance of economic welfare to the impact of these narratives. From 1978 to 2009, China's per capita GDP grew an average 8.7% per year (Hu 2011). In addition, development remained uneven, and the more well off groups were disproportionately receptive to national humiliation narratives. Young, educated, urban, and internet-using members of the public are still the most likely to be mobilized by national humiliation narratives (Wang 2012, 232). While it is impossible to know if the Communists would have lost control of the government had they not adopted national humiliation narratives, the common use of nationalism among the world's few surviving communist regimes is suggestive (Dimitrov 2013).

4 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the conditions that lead political parties to propagate national humiliation narratives. The three periods of Chinese politics examined support the theory that a prior conception of national identity is necessary for the construction of national humiliation narratives. Further, these cases show the importance of strategic incentives in the construction of national humiliation narratives. Political groups use narratives of national humiliation when they can associate their rivals while disassociating themselves from the event constructed as humiliating. Groups further use these narratives to gain support for costly policies that can be framed in terms of national defense. The value of narratives for motivating sacrifice may help explain why the Communist Party continues to use narratives of national humiliation even as its perception of the threat of political competition from democracy proponents wanes. While the cases are not a decisive test of the hypotheses about narrative formation because factors other than the ability to cast blame on political opponents and the desire to motivate sacrifice for national defense inevitably also vary across political groups and time periods, the theory does fit a wide variety of situations and does so better than alternative explanations, including those based on humiliating events, legitimacy crises, and international bargaining.

The cases also provide initial, suggestive evidence about what factors cause narratives of national humiliation to resonate with their audience. When the Chinese state is controlled by a single party that is determined to repress national humiliation narratives it is able to halt their spread, suggesting that for narratives to spread, the state cannot be determined to repress them. In each period, political parties are the key actors that organize either the dissemination or repression of the narratives, which points to the importance of institutional networks. Further, the media plays a key role in disseminating the narrative to its audience. Finally, the significance of economic welfare above a certain minimum threshold for audience receptiveness to the narrative is seen both within period, as wealthier and more urban audiences are more receptive than their poorer rural counterparts in both the first and final

period, and between periods, as the period of greatest economic welfare, the final period, was also the time of the narrative's greatest resonance.

While international relations research has found that both nationalism and emotions influence foreign policy, the origins of particular manifestations of emotional nationalism require additional explanation. This is especially pressing because international relations researchers have argued that national humiliation increases the propensity for aggressive foreign policies in important cases, including China and Russia (Wang 2012; Larson and Shevchenko 2014).

Understanding when narratives of national humiliation emerge helps explain how emotions spread socially, enabling them to become a political force that can influence foreign policy. This provides an important link that is often missing in literature that examines the influence of individuals' emotions on foreign policy. It also avoids the pitfalls of attributing emotions directly to states (Hafner-Burton et al. 2017, 18), which do not have brains and therefore cannot experience emotions (McDermott 2014, 562). Disaggregating emotions also allows researchers to account for when particular emotions might influence the policies of particular states and why emotional narratives might resonate with some individuals, influencing their foreign policy preferences, and not others.

Knowing more about how narratives of national humiliation originate and spread also has implications for research examining the effects of humiliation on foreign policy, both in terms of potential confounds and how humiliation should be measured. Because narratives of national humiliation are strategies adopted by political parties due to domestic political incentives, rather than stemming directly from international events, such as defeat in war, the risk that international conditions might confound analysis of humiliation's effect by creating both national humiliation narratives and future conflicts is greatest in cases where these international events directly impact the strategic competition among domestic political parties. For example, the Second Sino-Japanese War was important not just as a foreign policy event but also for its role in preventing the Guomindang from focusing their initially

superior might to crush their domestic political opponent, the Communists. Researchers examining the effects of humiliation must take care to control for such events.

Because the use and success of these narratives does not vary along with objective events, measures of events that *might* get framed as humiliating, such as defeat in conflict or territory loss, are poor proxies for national humiliation. Researchers interested in the effect of national humiliation on foreign policy must instead use measures that account for the social construction of events as humiliating (or not). Tools including computational text analysis and discourse analysis could help create more direct measures.

While the case studies in this chapter terminate in 1999, national humiliation narratives still shape politics in China. The Communists under President Xi have continued to use narratives of national humiliation to affirm their rule. This suggests the continued importance of understanding national humiliation narratives to politics today, both in terms of how the Communist Party maintains power and the implications of these narratives for its foreign policy. The continued presence of these narratives raises questions for future research as well. In addition to evaluating explanations for when national humiliation narratives resonate with domestic audiences, future research should examine when successful national humiliation narratives end.

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