

Testimony before the
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China's State Control Mechanisms and Methods

Chinese Nationalism

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[Views expressed here are my own, not those of the Department of Defense or any other organization of the U.S. Government]

Mr/ Madam Chairman, and members of the Commission:

Thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts with you on this important issue. As China moves to modernize its economic and military infrastructure and hardware, it has become increasingly imperative for the United States to grasp the enormity and seriousness of the major concomitant of this rapid modernization drive, i.e., the rising tide of Chinese nationalism. Throughout history, there have been many rises and declines of nations and states, some of these rises have posed grave challenges to international order, such as those of revolutionary France, fascist Italy and Germany, imperialist Japan and totalitarian communist systems of governments. Others have barely caused a ripple, such as the rises of post-WWII democratic Japan and Germany as world industrial giants, and post-communist Eastern Europe as rejuvenated nation-states and vibrant democracies. Unfortunately, the rise of Chinese nationalism of late is destined to become a major stimulant for trouble, and if not handled promptly and properly, a recipe for catastrophe of great scale.

This is so because of the two basic frameworks within which today's Chinese nationalism is being bred: a dominant, albeit waning, state ideology of Marxism-Leninism and a deep sense of vengeance and grievances against the outside world generated from a deliberately distorted understanding of historical records, especially the records of the past 150 years of the Chinese history. As a result, notes the political scientist Lucian Pye, Chinese nationalism in modern times has always tended to be "Shanghaied." It is certainly so in the latest surge of Chinese nationalism.

In this testimony, I will attempt to address some of the key features in today's Chinese nationalism.

CHINESE NATIONALISM AND THE ZEITGEIST OF DEMOCRACY: No where is more clearly manifested the convergence of Marxist-Leninist state theory and China's quest for a nationalistic state to redress historical grievance than in today's version of Chinese nationalism. According to Marxist-Leninist teachings, a communist state must concentrate all powers in the hands of the Communist Party; similarly, a sweeping consensus among the Chinese has emerged that all of China's problems in the past several hundreds of years have come as a result of a weak state. To solve all of China's problems, it is absolutely essential to create and sustain a strong state at any cost. Therefore, all quests for individual freedom and for the voice of the common man must be regarded as working against such a lofty goal of creating a strong government. Consequently, today's practitioners of Chinese nationalism are overwhelmingly anti-democratic and hostile to liberal values such respect for human rights and individual dignity. The Chinese government, partly motivated by its communist innate urge to suppress any challenge to the power of the state, and partly emboldened by the rising tide of popular Chinese nationalism, has dramatically stepped up its systematic purge of dissidents and pro-democracy advocates. In the past ten years, while China has advanced remarkably in the economic arena, the number of dissidents, or any others deemed unfavorable to the state, jailed has also advanced even more remarkably, often in the name of preserving "national security." Today, according to the latest Amnesty International report, China executes about 90% of the world's prisoners condemned to death; year after year, China holds the dubious honor of being the country that jails most journalists; and by the account of the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders, over 80% of the arrested in the world for voicing opinions on the Internet are Chinese.

CHINESE NATIONALISM AND ITS ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES: For the past twenty five years, China has been known for its robust economic revival. However, the profound economic changes in China should not be confused with democratic capitalism that is governed by clearly defined legal frameworks and property rights. Instead, while millions in China have benefited materially from China's booming economy, the dominant political policy that guides China's economic reform is a "Socialist Market Economy." In essence, this seemingly oxymoronic policy has an unmistakable objective, that is, to use economic liberalism to sustain a dictatorial socialism. The Chinese government scholar-official He Xin has termed such policy as "Economic Nationalism," which is to say, as He Xin elaborates, this type of economy has a "statutorily clear political objective, i.e. to make our nation rich and strong. It does not serve any individuals per se, but it serves the

nation only.” Throngs of other government-sanctioned economists and scholars have vociferously echoed such a definition. Following such policy, the government of China, not the ordinary Chinese people, has taken the lion’s share of the economic progress in recent years, as demonstrated in China’s ever increasing government spending on communist-style landmark projects such as huge hydraulic dams, an expensive showcase magnetic rail system, as well as cutting edge military hardware such as modern submarines, surface warships, missiles and surveillance technologies, and so on.

CHINESE NATIONALISM AND CHINESE IMPERIALISM: With every rising nation, there is a natural tendency for its citizens to take pride in its historical roots and cultural heritage. In the current surge of Chinese nationalism, however, the Chinese government has not guided the Chinese masses to relish the greatness of Tang poetry, Song arts, or ancient sages’ wisdom on war and peace. Instead, the Chinese government, with a monopoly on mass media, has deliberately indulged the nation as a whole in taking nostalgic trips to China’s past imperialism, fanning popular sentiment for conquests and glory. In the past ten years, the Chinese communist government has spent enormous budgets to produce multi-episodes series of China’s great emperors during its imperial period--all are China’s greatest conquerors of vast territories and populations. These series often have 40-50 episodes, invariably running during the evening prime time slots on national TV (CCTV). Of these, four of them have created a national obsession. Some, produced and broadcasted in the late 1990s, are hagiographical biographies of the 17th and 18th century Qing emperors Kang Xi, Yongzheng and Qianlong, during whose reigns China’s territorial conquests reached its zenith. The 44-episode series on the Yongzheng emperor, broadcast in 1998, is particularly popular. Many have believed that the then President Jiang Zemin tried to portray himself as another Yongzheng emperor. When the agonizingly long power transition is over and Hu Jintao takes over China, an even more explicitly “imperial” TV series comes out in January 2005 to exalt a past conqueror and to draw relevance of greatness from the past emperor to today’s new communist leader Hu Jintao. This series, entitled “HanWu Dadi” (the Great Han Emperor Wudi), has 60 episodes, recounting the glory and virtues of the 1st century Han Dynasty emperor Wudi (Liu Che). It is widely viewed by analysts as Hu Jintao’s efforts to exalt his own image as reflected in history long past.

But the message in those operatic schemes could not be more explicit: China has a rich past glory of conquest and virtues, and greatness of a nation is often accompanied by great territorial expansion, just as in the case of Wudi, Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong.

In addition to television, another mass media used by the Chinese government to trumpet imperialistic nationalism is motion pictures. No better example can be found than in the 2002 movie “Hero,” directed by China’s best known director Zhang Yimou. This biopic is about China’s Qin dynasty emperor Shi Huangdi who first unified China through the use of blunt force in 221 BC. Through stunning cinematography, the movie reminds the audience of Leni Riefenstahl’s legendary “Triumph of the Will” in which Hitler’s fanaticism and twisted German nationalism are effectively conveyed by sophisticated artistic rendition. “Hero”’s message is unmistakable —no matter how brutal a dictator might be, no matter how many people he might have to murder, as long as he could unify

China by any means, he is China's hero. Obviously, this is an unapologetic justification for China's current advocacy for using military means to take Taiwan. No wonder the Chinese government has taken serious steps to mobilize the nation to view the movie for its explicit political message.

CHINESE NATIONALISM AND THE UTILITY OF HISTORY: It has been said repeatedly that whoever controls memory controls the present, and whoever controls the present controls the memory. With rising Chinese nationalism, the efforts to rewrite history, to reinterpret history according to the demands of Chinese nationalism have become a major national pastime.

It must be said at once that distorting history is not China's monopoly. The most glaring case of course is the attempt by Japanese ultranationalists to whitewash its World War II history. But it must also be said that of the eight history textbooks approved by the Japanese government in 2001 for local schools to choose, less than one fraction of one percent of the Japanese schools have chosen the distorted history textbook. The overwhelming majority of the Japanese schools are using the textbooks that faithfully address Japanese criminal past with regards to its wars against other nations in Asia. In the Chinese case, however, there are only two versions of high school textbooks available and no other version is allowed by the government. These two versions of Chinese history books are almost entirely identical in contents. The only difference is that they are published by two presses. And both of them are severely distorted.

The Chinese government has been vigorously engaging in a persistent "Patriotism Education" movement by using China's modern history since the Opium War (1840) as a tool. The initial purpose of such movement was to demonstrate the abject ineptitude of all those "feudal" and "bourgeois" leaders in the past, from the Qing emperors to Sun Yat-sun and Chiang Kai-shek, to deal with foreign imperialism and foreign invaders, thus leaving the Chinese Communists as the only savior of the Chinese nation and its people. With such a teleological purpose, the "Patriotism Education" often demonstrates blatant distortion of basic facts in China's modern history. In the current Chinese history textbooks for high schoolers, a dichotomy between China the virtuous and the rest of the World the evil is explicit. Little self-awareness is displayed in treatments of such momentous events as the xenophobic Boxer Rebellion of 1900 whereby the Boxers are exalted, without any criticism for its indiscriminating killings of foreigners, as the ultimate heroes of Chinese patriotism. In such a textbook, xenophobia becomes virtuous, foreign forces become invariably negative and often evil.

The Chinese leaders are frequent murderers of historical facts when they argue for their current policies. Since the mid-1990s, the Chinese leaders have often cited the 16th president of the U.S. Abraham Lincoln as a good example for waging war to preserve "the territorial integrity of the Motherland." They have said that Lincoln was right in using the instrument of arms to keep the Union from falling apart; therefore, China is justified to wage war on Taiwan to prevent Taiwan's independence. But they would never say that the fundamental reason for the American Civil War was slavery, not just to preserve the Union, just as the fundamental reason for the China/Taiwan conflict is the

conflict between a dictatorial communist system and a vibrant democracy. When persuasion failed to materialize, the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in March 2005, in a desperate attempt to justify China's Anti-Secession Law, openly fabricated history by claiming that the U.S. government had a couple of anti-secession laws passed in the Congress before the Civil War started, while in fact no such laws had ever been in existence before the Civil War. But for ordinary Chinese, Wen's words are taken as a truism.

CHINESE NATIONALISM AND CHINESE CHAUVINISM: China prides itself for being one of the longest continuous civilizations in the world. Indeed there are many marvelous achievements in the Chinese civilization. But the current surge of Chinese nationalism has hijacked this great sense of pride and turned it into a peculiar brand of Chinese chauvinism that often publicly manifests itself as blatant racism. In March 2005, the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited China. While there, she made a few statements mildly critical of China's belligerent "Anti-Secession Law" aimed at Taiwan, and urged the Chinese government to embrace more democratic virtues. Many Chinese burst into racist tirades against African Americans in general and Secretary Rice in particular on many of China's government-sponsored Internet BBS forums. "Black b***ch!", "woman n**er," "Americans' IQ is so low that they have chosen a black b***ch to be their Secretary of State," "Rice is nothing but a lackey of the American hegemonism," are among the ugliest racist commentaries that remained uncensored by the otherwise ubiquitous Internet police in the world's most monitored cyberspace.

If these racist outbursts reflect some extreme tendencies among the extreme elements in China's society, internalized chauvinism in China's popular culture remains pervasive among ordinary Chinese citizens. The Chinese government in its vigorous campaign of "Patriotism Education" strongly endorses "patriotic songs" that blatantly advocates chauvinism. Earlier this year (2005), the CCP authorities in Shanghai endorsed three such "patriotic songs" for all high schools in the region. One of them is called "The Chinese"(Zhongguoren) by the pop star Liu Dehua. The lyric defines what qualifies one as a "Chinese," i.e. one must have "yellow face and black eyes." Another popular song by Luo Dayou, called "The Pearl of the East" (dongfang zhizhu), also urges that "please don't forget my forever yellow face." Perhaps the most popular "patriotic song" in the last 25 years in China is Zhang Mingmin's "Dragon's Descendants" (long de chuanren), which defines a Chinese as someone with "black eyes, black hair, and yellow skin." The latest "patriotic song" performed at every major national TV event is Ye Fan's "Dear China, I Love You!" (qinai de zhongguo wo ai ni), which goes even further by claiming that "My yellow skin is China's national flag."

This is of course blatant display of "Han Chinese" chauvinism. It says that if you do not have "yellow skin, black eyes, or black hair," you are not Chinese and patriotic. Consequently, others living inside China--the Tibetans, the Koreans, the Mongolians, the Muslims, etc—are not "Chinese" per se, therefore fall outside of the "patriotic love" by the motherland.

In conclusion, the current surge of Chinese nationalism has in many ways been hijacked by Chinese politics to serve the interest of the Chinese Communist Party who desperately needs new sources of legitimacy. The CCP government fears a violent uprising against its glaring lack of democratic virtues. Consequently, it has engineered with great skill a twisted “Chinese nationalism” that embodies a mishmash of latter day Marxism/Leninism, Chinese chauvinism, xenophobia, and blatant historical revisionism.