

Manuscript version: Published Version

The version presented in WRAP is the published version (Version of Record).

Persistent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/152462>

How to cite:

Please refer to published version for the most recent bibliographic citation information. If a published version is known of, the repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing it.

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial- 4.0 International

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



Publisher's statement:

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk.



SPECIAL SECTION: THE POLITICAL WORK OF NEGATIVE AFFECTS: A VIEW FROM POST-REFORM CHINA

The affective life of the Nanjing Massacre

Reactivating historical trauma in governing contemporary China

Kailing XIE, *University of Birmingham*

Under the current Xi administration, China has marked December 13 as the national public Memorial Day for the Nanjing Massacre's victims. The reaffirmation of this historical trauma under Xi continues the official narrative of the rejuvenation of a humiliated Chinese nation promoted in patriotic education of the 1990s. Simultaneously, there have been widespread state-promoted campaigns of "positivity," with frequent announcements that China has entered "a New Era." This article traces the representations of the Nanjing Massacre in different "contact zones" to reveal how certain negative emotions associated with the trauma are deliberately activated to serve instrumental purposes in China's contemporary governance. It shows the party-state's time-tested strategy of encouraging the public to internalize positive feelings of living in a great new era through comparison with past misery. It also demonstrates the extension of the party-state's disciplinary power in the affective realm to inspire unity and legitimize its rule.

Keywords: nationalism, propaganda, contemporary China, main melody, Nanjing Massacre, negative affects

Every state is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level; a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes.

—Antonio Gramsci (1971: 258)

The "nation," according to Max Weber, "is a community of sentiment manifest in a state" (1994: 25). But the formation of national sentiments often involves their strategic cultivation by the ruling class. Fostering and maintaining a cultural state that is "ethical," according to Gramsci, comes not only from the school and the courts serving, respectively, positive and repressive educative functions, but a multitude of other initiatives and activities which "form the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes" (Gramsci 1971: 258). In Gramsci's view, any class that wishes to dominate in modern conditions has to move beyond its own narrow "economic-corporate" interests, to exert intellectual and moral leadership by forming alliances with a variety of forces that form the basis of consent to the social order. It also needs to manipulate the culture of

that society so that the social, political, and economic status quo appear to be natural and inevitable, perpetual and beneficial for everyone. The technologies of communication utilized in achieving cultural hegemony are tied to a political passion that can sustain the willing compliance of citizens.

This article focuses on the ways in which the Nanjing Massacre is used in the Chinese party-state's attempts to re-establish and consolidate its political cultural hegemony in the post-reform era. In particular, it evaluates the instrumentalization of the emotional dimension of the atrocity situated in the discourse of national humiliation that has been central to legitimizing the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) rule since the Tian'anmen Square protests in 1989. The analysis of affects and emotions as "instrumental mechanism(s) of governmental power"





has largely become commonplace in the anthropology of the state (Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017: 3). Linke (2006) defines “contact zones” as spaces between embodied subjects and the political state apparatus where emotions reflect the type of political subjectivity desired by the state, and it is such contact zones that I seek to identify in contemporary China. However, unlike Linke’s phenomenological focus on the perspective of political subjects, this article explores the emotional contours the party-state attempts to shape through these “contact zones,” with its aim being to consummate the relationship between subjects and the state. To point to the existence of such “zones,” however, does not assume congruence with the lived emotional impacts among the public, which deserves further investigation.

Development and globalization have stimulated increasing social complexity in China, where both state and social actors possess varying interests, resources, and strategies to achieve their disparate goals (Gries and Rosen 2010). Individualization adopted by the state as a development strategy has successfully boosted the market economy. Yet the diverse aspirations of desiring and enterprising individuals generated by the market economy are often at odds with the socialist morality endorsed by the party-state (Kleinman et al. 2011). State power operates in China, as elsewhere, not only through its institutions, but through the way the state creates itself as an imagined entity (Anderson 1991). The Chinese state often portrays itself as a unified and unifying political power that binds the nation together through the embodiment of the will of the masses. However, this claim of representation has become enormously complicated in the post-Mao era. Consequently, the CCP worries about its own legitimacy as Communist ideology decays. Rofel (1994) incisively argues that the rejection of Maoist socialism and the introduction of a market economy presents the state with ambiguity and uncertainty about how to represent the voices of its people. Moreover, Chinese people living through radical social economic transformations face multilayered trauma inflicted by the party-state, such as the political violence of the Mao era and the massacre at Tian’anmen Square in 1989. Consequently, it becomes imperative for the party-state to operate through “soft power” on “traumatic ground” that is safely located outside the CCP’s reign to legitimize its rule.

“Soft power,” coined by Joseph Nye (2009), often refers to the promotion of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies on the international stage, in contrast to “hard power” relying on its military or economic might.

China, Glaser and Murphy (2009) argue, takes a holistic approach to soft power, conceiving the domestic and foreign policy aspects of soft power development as an organic whole, with culture as its core. Therefore, being able to present an inspirational national culture is essential to building comprehensive soft power. Perry (2013: 5) elucidates the ways through which the CCP has relied heavily on cultural governance, the deployment of symbolic resources in legitimating its rule, creatively blending “culturalist” and “nationalist” claims. In particular, she contends that the propaganda operation process continually “re-Orients” its message so as to come across as culturally congruent with its principal target audience, which is as attentive to popular emotions as to party ideology. The discursive space within which the Nanjing Massacre operates precisely reflects such a tendency. It thus illuminates the state’s intention in presenting an emotionally charged “spiritual principle” constituted by “a rich legacy of memories” and “present-day consent” (Renan 1994: 19).

Locating “contact zones” in China’s (un)official culture

Since the 1990s, the rise of mass media has been accompanied by a burgeoning mass culture, which is celebrated by many as the emergence of China’s unofficial (民间), and implicitly democratic, public space. However, Dai (1999) highlights marketization and commercialization as integral components of China’s official move to reform and opening up. Therefore, instead of an official/unofficial dichotomy, mass cultural space is better understood as a shared space with Chinese characteristics, within which the state, international capital, domestic enterprises, and individuals are dramatically resisting or intimately colluding depending on their interests. Chinese citizens often equate popular culture with the unofficial, referring to realms of life established outside the formal structure of the party-state (Link, Madsen, and Pickowicz 2001). Nevertheless, within the landscape of China’s mass culture productions, where all market activities remain within the state’s ideological control, so-called unofficial/popular culture still exists inside the power domain of the official, and is thus a product of its policies (Dai 1999).

Simultaneously, new media has broken the state’s monopoly on information, which removes its hold on popular imagination. The collapse of official methods of ideological dissemination after the reforms transformed popular culture into a new battleground for ideological



control. Since television became a household item by the end of the 1980s, its ubiquity and openness to state control have made it an important means through which “the national order of things” is continuously imagined (Malkki 1992: 37). Moreover, Perry (2013) notes that systematized emotion work has long been part of the CCP’s conscious strategy of psychological engineering, where carefully orchestrated emotional performances led by the Propaganda Department live on, from traditional community theaters to contemporary communications technology, including TV and cinema.

Responding to ideological challenges, in 1994 the party adopted the main melody (主旋律) strategy, “promoting main melody, encouraging diversity,” proposed by a group of official film critics in 1987 to substitute for its inefficient direct propaganda (Ma 2014: 5). By definition, a successful main melody production should exemplify China’s national spirit and unite the people in praising the historical achievements of the party, the army, and the Chinese revolution (Zeng 2019). Ma notes that following this strategy, “cultural products should uphold the party’s ideology at the center,” meanwhile absorbing new resources, various alternative discourses, rhetorical techniques, and expressive strategies, as well as including experiences from both elite and popular culture to win audiences and realize its historical mission (2014: 5). Following the 1989 Tian’anmen Square protests, main melody films and TV dramas have been vigorously promoted and became a dominant genre backed by the state (Yu 2013; Ma 2014). In the context of both cultural diversification and contestation generated by the market reform, main melody TV and film productions have increasingly adopted a Hollywoodized creative mode in order to win the competition for the redefined masses as consumers/people with diverse needs. Marketization has changed China’s cultural productions systems, television, films, and publication houses alike, to the “market-based party organ model” (Pan and Chan 2000: 256). Actors operating within this model have to serve two masters, the party and the market, striking the right balance between profitability and ideology, which further blurs the boundary between main melody/official and popular/unofficial productions. With such a system, the party-state has effectively ameliorated tensions and conflicts that arise between increasing mass demands and ideological control. It also enables the “mapping of social vision into subjectivity” (de Lauretis 1984:8) and safeguards the crucial process whereby individuals are interpellated as subjects of the nation (Edgerton and Rollins 2001). Thus, main melody TV and film productions reveal a significant “con-

tact zone” between ordinary citizens and the state, where state ideology can be slowly infused into the public’s consciousness, facilitated by the wisdom of the market.

This article examines the ritual and official discourse surrounding the National Memorial Day ceremony for the Nanjing Massacre victims between 2014 and 2019. It unpacks the symbolic meanings communicated at the ceremony and offers a close reading of the speeches given, tracking how these texts are framed to generate particular emotional effects through “figures of speech (which) are crucial to the emotionality of texts” (Ahmed 2014: 12). Moreover, I consider the ways in which texts are constructed to perform different emotions by differentiating between the subject and object of feeling. In these speeches, the Chinese nation is presented as both “a feeling subject” and the object of “our feeling”: I therefore argue that they orchestrate a series of emotional movements through a reliance on a well-established national historical narrative.

In particular, I highlight the relationship between the positive and negative emotions that the party-state aims to evoke through cultural productions and the state ritual related to the Nanjing Massacre. Specifically, main melody productions have increasingly adopted ordinary people’s perspective as their narrative strategy to humanize state propaganda. Therefore, they potentially convey a more relatable and moving message for a contemporary audience of people who are predominantly concerned about their individual family fortunes. The groundwork done by China’s peculiar mass culture paves the way for the party-state to “act out” its political legitimacy according to the established narrative at the Memorial Ceremony. In analyzing the ideological work accomplished by popular and political culture, this article contributes to wider anthropological concerns regarding the ethnography of the Chinese state, in particular the instrumentalization of public memory and emotions to establish its nationalist cultural hegemony. By revealing the interconnections between “the popular” and “the political,” this article also invites a rethinking of the operations of popular culture for authoritarian regimes in an increasingly deterritorialized world saturated by mass media, and shaped by the market and global capital.

As Rogers Brubaker succinctly points out, “people do not necessarily respond particularly energetically or warmly to the nationalist utterances of politicians who claim to speak in their name” (1998: 284). Even when framed by state power, the everyday formation of political sentiments “cannot properly be taken as given or axiomatic” (Brubaker 1998: 298). People’s feelings about



the nation cannot simply be inferred from the hegemonic order of discourse; whether there exists any congruence between the state's intention and the people's everyday sense-making begs separate analysis. This is particularly relevant considering China's increasingly diverse cultural and moral landscape since the reforms (Kleinman et al. 2011). Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to investigate the ways in which the party-state attempts to rise to the challenge of remaking itself as the guardian of the nation after the public's disillusionment with its previous class politics.

Activating and configuring the memory of national trauma

Nanjing, the Chinese capital during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1937–1945), fell to the Japanese on December 13, 1937.¹ The following six weeks or so witnessed atrocities that later became known as the Nanjing Massacre. During this time, hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers and civilians were slaughtered, women assaulted, children killed, and properties looted and destroyed. It has remained a bitter chapter in Nanjing's history, inflicting painful and shameful memories on its citizens. The massacre was recognized during the International Military Tribunals for the Far East after the Second World War, with an official victim count of two hundred thousand killed and twenty thousand raped (Seo 2008).² However, the massacre did not receive much public attention from the international community or the governments of the two countries involved, a situation referred to as “collective amnesia” (Rose 2005: 36).

The Nanjing Massacre as an object of historical memory remains contested in different political contexts (Yoshida 2006). This means that the memory of such

an event must be treated as a public and political issue. As Rose points out, policies regarding the past “are the product of political situations and judgment of the time, and are open to manipulation or bargaining” (2005: 47). Barmé contends that “every policy shift in recent Chinese history has involved the rehabilitation, re-evaluation and revision of history and historical figures,” and that “using the past to serve the present” has been a prevalent approach in writing Chinese history under the CCP's rule (1993: 260, 286). The domination of the Chinese party-state means remembering the Nanjing Massacre in China has always been a political issue. At the regime's establishment in 1949, the Nanjing massacre was not among the priorities for the CCP in narrating China's history.

During the pre-reform era, the heroic struggle and ultimate victory of the Chinese people against Japanese aggression, led by the CCP, was the focus of party propaganda. This promoted a spirit of nationalism and heroism, within which the victimization of China was discouraged (Fogel 2000). The failed morality and irresponsibility of the Kuomintang (KMT) for their passive resistance against Japanese aggression, as well as the brutality and formidable strength of Japanese imperialism, were emphasized in order to highlight the achievement of the CCP.³ The Maoist period emphasized resistance over victimization for the dominant narrative of the war (Coble 2011). Personal tragedy experienced during the massacre appeared pathetic and insignificant, even embarrassing for the government at the time, therefore the discussion of it was usually suppressed (Qian 2009). Consequently, within the history of the “victorious” Chinese revolution, which the CCP tried to tell before the reform, there was no reason or space to dwell on the Nanjing Massacre.

Since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the war has proven a popular subject with filmmakers and audiences alike. The genre's conventions dictate that the Japanese invaders play the part of the “bad guys,” yet their villainy also shifted to reflect China's own shifting ideological landscape and sociocultural atmosphere. For example, representations of Japanese soldiers in movies from 1949 up until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966

1. In 2017, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued a directive stating that textbooks were to refer to the war as the “Fourteen Years' War of Resistance,” reflecting a focus on the broader conflict with Japan going back to 1931. I retain the use of 1937 as its start, for historians more commonly agree it was the start of full-scale Japanese aggression and China's nationwide war of resistance. In this article, it is also referred to as “the war.”
2. The number of three hundred thousand killed in this Massacre was cited in the indictment against Lieutenant General Tani Hisao by the Nanjing Military Tribunal, March 10, 1947; this is also the number that continues to be used by the Chinese government.

3. During the Korean War (1950–1953), the massacre was used to stir up anti-American sentiment, with false accusations against Nanjing-based American missionaries, implying their complicity with the Japanese killing of Chinese civilians. See Eykholt 2000.



confirm the classic narrative of the revolution: under the leadership of the CCP, victory in the “people’s war” is certain (Wu 2020). A massacre that had occurred in territory that was held by the KMT had little value for the CCP as it produced no Communist heroes to endorse (Buruma 2002).

Memories of the Nanjing Massacre resurfaced after 1982, when the Japanese Ministry of Education tried to play down Japanese war conduct in school textbooks, part of a series of attempts by the right-wing faction in Japan to call for revisions of its 1931–1945 history. For the Chinese government, it was this particular incident that led it to activate memories of the Nanjing Massacre and embed it in public memory on a national level (Seo 2008; Yoshida 2006). It is also only from the 1980s that the Chinese authorities started to encourage survivors of the massacre to speak with journalists about their experiences (Buruma 2002), which lead to individual victims’ stories finally being recognized by the state through the publication of the first survivor testimonies in 1985 (D. Yang 2000). In the same year, the construction of “The Memorial Hall of the Victims in the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders” was completed and designated by the Central Government as a national site for patriotic education (Qian 2009).⁴

Seo (2005) also observes a change in China’s historiography in the 1980s, within which the victims of the Nanjing Massacre were newly understood in terms of the pain and suffering of the nation. Furthermore, as a response to the Tian’anmen movement in 1989, the CCP launched the patriotic education campaign in the 1990s (Wang 2012). In this context the national humiliation discourse, which had been part of the construction of China’s citizenship and national identity in the early twentieth century, was revived. According to this discourse, China lost both its territory and prestige to external imperial intrusions, understood as an ancient empire humiliated. It offers a basic storyline for China’s victimization under imperialism and the CCP’s subsequent victory, which became crucial justifications of the CCP’s right to rule. Facing a legitimacy crisis in the 1990s, it became imperative for the CCP to ensure that later generations were “reintroduced to the imperialist past, to re-experience its bitterness and shame” (Cohen 2002: 18–19). Consequently, there was a major narrative change from China as victor during the Mao era to China as vic-

tim under the patriotic education campaign. Wang (2012) notes that this change of narrative is reflected in both the official documentation, including textbooks, and popular culture. This shift certainly facilitated the Nanjing Massacre becoming an iconic event symbolizing national trauma. It also reflects a turn to major negative instances in Chinese history to forge collective identity, because victimhood is believed to be an emotionally powerful and unquestionable means of binding people together (Fogel 2007).

Meanwhile, the commercialization of the Chinese cultural industry in the 1990s has led to the proliferation of productions including books, films, and television programs related to the war and the massacre, where people increasingly turn to learn about history. Consequently, these productions profoundly shaped the public understanding and memories of these events, influencing the formation of collective memory and popular history (Cai 2016) and reflecting a new shift of ideological control after the Tian’anmen protest. The tight political grip on commercial TV productions in China has generated a formidable number of TV dramas that aim to bypass censorship by attaching themselves to the Anti-Japanese War history, a theme encouraged by CCP. As a result, TV series focusing on the war are part of China’s daily TV schedules. According to a local news report, seventy of the two hundred prime-time dramas on major TV networks in 2012 were about the Sino-Japanese War. Some of these productions are criticized for their vulgar contents and commercially driven fake patriotism (Lei 2015). Yet, the genre’s unquestionable dominance has successfully produced a popular history about the war with which ordinary Chinese are widely acquainted, demarcating a national identity rooted in victimhood.

The massacre as a symbol of China’s historical victimhood has developed into a cultural trauma. Smelser (2004: 44) defines cultural trauma as “a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions.” A general Baidu search on popular movies on the Nanjing Massacre will lead to numerous “must watch lists” compiled by zealous netzines.⁵ Movies commonly featuring on the lists include Chinese productions such as *Don’t Cry Nanjing* (1995), *May & August* (2002), and *Qixia*

4. For more details on the construction and further extensions of the Memorial site, see Qian 2009.

5. Baidu is the Chinese equivalent of Google in China.



Temple 1937 (2004). Notably, there are two Hollywood-style blockbusters: *The City of Life and Death* (2009) and *The Flowers of War* (2011), directed, respectively, by the rising star Lu Chuan and by the internationally renowned director Zhang Yimou. There are also international productions such as *John Rabe's Diary* (2009), *The Children of Huang Shi* (2008), and Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* (2008), which enjoy wide popularity in China. Berry's (2001) analysis of three films about the massacre demonstrates that a series of pedagogical documentaries were reused in recreating the tragic historical moment in the context of popular culture.⁶ Repetition creates iconicity that makes images become recognizable and thus develop a shared vocabulary (Landsberg 2004). Such popular culture productions can potentially contribute to a coherent collective identity closely associated with the cultural trauma through generating "public reflection and discourse" (Eyerman 2001: 3).

The aforementioned movies, facing the double burden of the market and censorship, have significantly honed skills in presenting stories that are attuned to public emotions while treading the party line. These stories are often told from a humanist angle with Hollywood narrative techniques that highlight the personal and emotional lives of flawed characters and their sufferings, so the audience can relate to them. These narratives allow the sufferings of ordinary Chinese civilians, which were erased before the reform, to re-emerge, thus catering to the audience's desire for humanism noted since the early reform era (Dai 2012). As Schwarcz (2002: 191) states, "instead of single, frontally idealized heroes, we are drawn closer to the subject of helpless victims."

By the early 2000s, China's film industry became even more commercially oriented, which meant even more technically sophisticated productions adapting to the tastes of the country's maturing film market. *The City of Life and Death* and *The Flowers of War* exemplify such trends with their domestic commercial success and reach to international audiences. *The City of Life and Death*, with box office earnings over 100 million yuan, gained numerous international film festival awards.⁷ *The Flowers of*

War collected US\$ 93 million in gross earnings in its first five weeks and it was the highest-grossing Chinese film of 2011. Both movies draw on historical characters and diaries to emphasize the complicated dynamics between Chinese refugees, Westerners, and Japanese soldiers and to tell touching human stories of the atrocity. Schultz's (2016) analysis of *The City of Life and Death* shows how the film achieves its immense affective power through using poignantly emotive imagery that immerses viewers in the sufferings of the city. The film's tremendous commercial success, despite being a state-sponsored project, as argued by Dai (2012), was due to its successful articulation of the Chinese middle class's desire for the universal human through its ungodlike heroes.⁸

In revealing affect's role in trauma-based films, Schultz (2016) points to its potential ideological use as a universal language. As Berry (2008) shows, in some of these films, fictions have begun functioning as facts to represent history and *prove* that it occurred. The totalitarian film language used in *The City of Life and Death* is a case in point. Differing from previous "hard" propaganda films with their crude patriotism, Kraicer (2010) contends that this film presents itself as if it is history and recasts it in a liberal-humanist mode by allowing recognition of the potential humanity of even so-called enemies while spreading "ideology that pins down the viewer, shuts down thought, and demands total emotional submission." He notes that "films (and other culture forms) that repeat and reinforce the horrors of the past, that masochistically spectacularize Chinese suffering and safely locate it in the pre-1949 era, are more politically necessary now than ever" (2010: n.p.); they reinforce the CCP's political legitimacy by proclaiming "there will be no more Nanjing massacres under the rule of the CCP" (Kraicer 2010: n.p.). *The Flowers of War's* depiction of a group of Chinese prostitutes in seductive, glamorous silken dresses who sacrificed themselves to save schoolgirls from the Japanese soldiers offers a touching story contrasting with the conventional wisdom that "courtesans perceive not the sorrow of a perished empire."⁹ This moral tale is an emotionally powerful means of stirring up patriotic sentiments.

6. These three films are *Massacre in Nanjing* (Tucheng xuezheng) in 1987 by PRC director Luo Guanqun, the docudrama *Black Sun: The Nanjing Massacre* (Hei taiyang: Nanjing datusha) by Hong Kong based director T.F. Mou (Mou Dunfei), and *Don't Cry, Nanking* (Nanjing 1937) from another PRC director Wu Ziniu in 1995.

7. The number is the threshold for blockbuster status in China's film market.

8. It was approved directly by the central government and funded entirely by the China Film Corporation.

9. A verse from the famous poem "Mooring on River Qinhuai" by Dumu, a leading Chinese poet of the late Tang dynasty to lament the Tang empire. The river Qinhuai is in Nanjing, which historically had a reputation for its famous courtesans.



If “lowly” prostitutes were willing to sacrifice for the nation, there is no excuse left for other citizens. The combined burdens of art, entertainment, commerce, education, and politics lead to recreations of the massacre that enjoy considerable currency as part of China’s cultural-cum-nationalist propaganda.

The discipline of positivity in China’s New Era

Alongside activating historical trauma, promoting happiness and positivity is also high on the CCP’s agenda (Wielander and Hird 2018). Happiness became a corollary of the Chinese political project of building “a harmonious society” envisioned in 2004 under Hu’s administration. This was initially a response to many social challenges generated by the neoliberal growth policies following the reforms, such as growing income inequality and persistent bureaucratic corruption. Through ubiquitous propaganda, the notion of happiness or social harmony has focused attention on the project of sustaining symbolic, social, and political stability (J. Yang 2014). Since Xi came to power, he has been portrayed as architect of a dawning new age in official media (Holbig 2018). During Xi’s first five-year term, he managed to strengthen the emotional appeal of the party’s message, that its leadership is at the heart of “Great Rejuvenation of the Great Chinese Nation.” For example, right after the 18th Congress, he made a well-publicized visit to “The Road to Revival” exhibition at the National Museum, which features the heroic role of the Communist Party in spearheading China’s national struggles. During this visit, Xi delivered his first speech on the “Chinese dream” as the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” to encapsulate his vision for the country (Xinhua News 2012). In his first address to the nation as head of state in 2013, Xi proclaimed: “The rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since the beginning of modern times; we call this the Chinese Dream. The idea in essence is to make the country prosperous and strong, rejuvenate the nation, and see that the people are happy.” Positivity quickly became central to this propaganda campaign: it was declared that “Today, we are closer, more confident, and more capable than ever before of making the goal of national rejuvenation a reality” (Xi 2013). Since the 19th party Congress in 2017, Xi’s name has become synonymous with the “New Era” in China. This New Era, according to the “important” speech he gave to ministers and provincial leaders in July 2017, will continue “China’s historic rise since

1949 from standing up, growing rich to getting strong.”¹⁰ Under Xi, China is said to be entering the new period of “getting strong” that starts in 2020–21 and will end in 2049–50 with its increasing global prestige (Holbig 2018).

Despite the more pragmatic and rational policy agenda pursued throughout the reform era, ideology remains indispensable to the PRC’s political system with propaganda as its life blood (Klimeš and Marinelli 2018). The current Xi administration has further tightened ideological control, through both encouraging and limiting public expression in its ideological work. Repnikova and Fang (2018) illuminate the increasingly participatory form that online persuasion is taking under Xi. An effective dispersive power structure is found in use in Xi’s “positive energy” campaign, which penetrates popular culture and private lives, “shaping hearts and minds,” thereby disciplining people’s subjectivities through internalizing the state’s interests as their own (Chen and Wang 2019: 17). These trends indicate the party-state’s ambition to rule through positive affects as a form of soft power in supporting the CCP’s legitimacy.

Analyses of the ideology, propaganda, and political discourse under Xi reveal that instead of a paradigmatic shift, Xi’s New Era appears as “an overall reassertion-cum-innovation of previous Maoist and post-Maoist uses of ideology, propaganda, and political discourse” aimed at strengthening one-party rule (Klimeš and Marinelli 2018). Although Yingjie Guo (2019) believes that there is an increasing conversion to nationalism under Xi’s Chinese dream, nationalism has long been the basis of the CCP’s official historiography. The more recent turn to state nationalism as societal glue began as a necessity for the CCP after the Tian’anmen protest; “since the CCP is no longer communist, it must be even more Chinese” (Christensen 1996: 46). Jiang Zemin, president of China from 1993 to 2003, initiated a nationwide patriotic educational campaign in the 1990s which skillfully utilized China’s humiliating past to arouse its citizens’ historical consciousness and to promote social cohesion. Jiang was the first to use the word “rejuvenation (复兴)” and created the catchphrase “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” This discursive emphasis is significant, as it aimed to rekindle people’s memory of China as a central power in the world, which allows the party to reclaim its legitimacy through restoring China to that former position and glory. Jiang’s successor Hu Jintao continued the narrative

10. The “standing up” referred to the Maoist period from 1949 to 1976, the “growing rich” to the reform and opening up launched by Deng in 1978.



of rejuvenation. Hu was even more of an enthusiastic proponent of the “great rejuvenation”; in his speeches he repeatedly called for people to “strive harder for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (Wang 2012: 130). When it comes to Xi’s Chinese Dream, the rejuvenation of a powerful and wealthy nation is presented as the Party’s response to the collective yearnings of the Chinese people (Perry 2015). From Jiang to Xi, there has been an explicit instrumental use of cultural governance for nationalistic ends. Jiang’s signature campaign of “Three Represents,” according to Wang (2012: 125), means that the party, instead of being the vanguard of the Chinese working class, can be all things to all people.¹¹ Xi furthers this trend in his elaboration of the Chinese dream as the “pursuit of happiness. It is the dream of the nation, and the dreams of the individuals,” which emphasizes the dialectical unity of individual dream and collective dream (Liang 2018). In doing so, Xi presents a codependency between individual happiness and the fortunes of the nation, where the Party is the deliverer of both. The nation is increasingly represented as a living organism comprised of interrelated and interdependent members with loyalty at its core, built through a web of affective attachments and discursive linkages. Under Xi, the strategies utilized to enhance the CCP’s ideological work are more diverse, with his conductor’s baton coordinating the loud chant of the main melody.

In addition, the commercialization of China’s film industry from the early 2000s further transformed main melody films’ blunt and heavy-handed messages, and gave way to a more sophisticated cinematic language (Zeng 2019). Ever since, Hollywood production values have contributed to the dissemination of CCP’s political values through catering for the taste of the new generation. Similar to movies focusing on historical trauma, the genre that celebrates national achievements and strength employs a formula that fully merges political ideology with the commercial blockbuster. This has become a popular paradigm with evident commercial success. Popular appeal is reflected in bombastic action fare like *Operation Mekong* (2016), and its spiritual sequel *Operation Red Sea* (2018). The *Wolf Warrior* series

(2015, 2017) has enjoyed a huge success with reports of Chinese audiences being emotionally touched by a sense of national pride (Zhang 2017). These movies use sophisticated modern cinematic language to present a popular narrative of China in the New Era: its economic power and military might can protect its own citizens and defend world peace. There is no clearer way to get this message across than as it was in *Wolf Warrior Two* (2017). With a Chinese passport to the right, the film calls for national pride by telling the audience, just before the closing credits: “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China: if you encounter dangers overseas, do not give up easily! Please remember you have a strong nation behind you!” (P. Liu 2017). These movies present China’s military strength through a hypermasculine lens with doses of appealing individualist heroism that enjoy wide domestic appeal. Together, they produce a positive image of a new China that not only cares for its people and is able to defend their safety, but is also a defender of world peace. The image resonates with Xi’s proclamation of the arrival of the “strong” China that contrasts with its “weak” past. Another important but slightly different example of this genre, *My People, My Country* (2019), is an epic seven-part anthology to mark the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China. It chronicles the nation’s greatest technological and cultural achievements. The state narratives are slickly told from the perspective of ordinary people and link their individual contributions to various national “big moments.” This deliberate choice of narrative angle conveys significant political meanings: first, it signifies the CCP’s rule as humanistic in that it genuinely cares for the fortunes of ordinary people. Second, by focusing on ordinary people and linking their personal lives with China’s national advancement, it allows the national identity to claim ownership of individual identities, therefore legitimizing its representation. Third, through making the link between ordinary people’s lives and the nation’s fortunes explicit in such storytelling, it serves to persuade the people to believe that building a strong prosperous Chinese nation will ultimately benefit everyone.

As a result, cultural productions that strike the main melody, portraying the nation’s past trauma and current glory, visualize an emotionally charged national history following a redemptive path led by CCP. The optimism of the Chinese dream of the New Era remains reliant on the national humiliation nightmare to build regime legitimacy and strengthen national cohesion. The positive soft power of the Chinese dream is exemplified by the National Memorial Day for the Nanjing Massacre’s victims,

11. According to Jiang’s speech at the Sixteenth Congress in 2002, the Communist Party should represent “advanced productive forces, advanced Chinese culture and the fundamental interests of the majority,” which has been written into Chinese Communist Party Constitution since 2002.



which provides a fitting means for evaluating ideological work under Xi.

Narratives of suffering and their official validation

In 2014, the 12th National People's Congress made an official announcement that the 13th of December would become the National Memorial Day for the Nanjing Massacre's victims. Since then, an annual National Memorial ceremony has been held at the Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre, organized by the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council with extensive state media coverage. Each year, it is attended by top party officials, including members of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee and the Central Military Commission of the CCP, together with an organized mass rally comprising representatives of survivors, soldiers, local youth, as well as international friends and diplomats from neighboring countries. China's top leader Xi Jinping attended the first ceremony in 2014 and returned on the eightieth anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre in 2017. Xi's appearance at the ceremony signals the political significance of this event. The speech he delivered at the first National Memorial ceremony in 2014 has become part of widely circulated study materials for Xi Jinping thought.

As the first and only memorial event on the national level, the intended message is embodied within its carefully selected venue and rituals. The venue, one of the original sites of the massacre and now part of the official museum, is filled with strong symbolism such as a wall engraved with names of individual victims (Qian 2009). The ceremony follows a similar sequence each year, which includes an opening with the Chinese national anthem, and observance of one minute's silence marked by a siren alarm ringing across the city. Sixteen soldiers carry eight large wreaths of white and yellow chrysanthemums to the "Disaster Wall" at the front, while the military band plays ethereal music.¹² A party leader from the Central Politburo then delivers a speech, and youth representatives read the "Peace Declaration" that was written for the commemoration of the Nanjing Massacre. The ceremony often ends with ringing the "Peace Bell" and releasing three thousand peace doves into the sky.

12. Chrysanthemums are a traditional choice for mourning in China. The choice of white represents sorrow, whereas yellow represents hope according to a CCTV commentator.

Each year, the first rows of the gathering are reserved for survivors of the massacre, who are now well into their eighties and nineties. Apart from offering condolences for their personal suffering through state recognition, their presence gives real human faces to the suffering of the nation. In 2014's first national memorial ceremony, Xi assisted eighty-five-year-old Xia Shuqin, a prominent survivor, in unveiling the National Memorial Tripod together with a thirteen-year-old student, Ruan Zeyu, whose ancestors were killed during the massacre. This consolidates the national narratives from suffering to redemption through symbolically performing the inheritance of a coherent national history by young and old, leaders and ordinary people. Using the specially made tripod (鼎), a traditional sacrificial vessel that symbolizes state power, demonstrates the CCP's creative deployment of imperial and revolutionary symbolism in its cultural governance. Its inclusion signals the historical continuity of a Chinese nation, from ancient dynasties to their contemporary successor, thereby enhancing the Party's legitimacy. Party analysts have specified that this ceremony was designed to generate a sense of ritual for the public to help them internalize an emotional experience that can extend beyond the ceremony itself (Lu and Zhu 2018). Therefore, as a public mourning event, the ceremony can also be understood as a disciplinary exercise employing affective cultivation through ritual performance. The ceremony is thus participatory theater, through which participants' learned emotions can be further imbued with nationalistic political significance. The speech pattern followed by each speaker reveals explicitly the affective experience the state intends to cultivate.

The six speeches given at the ceremony from 2014 to 2019 are similar in terms of choice of vocabulary, rhetorical pattern, and the sequence of narration. All start with declaring the purpose of such events, describing the cruelty of the Japanese invasion and brutality of the massacre, acknowledging international humanitarian support, praising the CCP's leadership of Chinese people in winning the war, and restating the CCP's commitment to defending world peace and achieving great national rejuvenation. It presents a revolutionary narrative centered on the CCP's leadership moving from the century of humiliation to national rejuvenation. Xi's speech at the first National Memorial Day is the main material for the following analysis, as it is the most significant and revealing for understanding the governing ambitions of the CCP through such events.

All speeches given at the event are addressed to "compatriots, comrades, and friends." Though there are



multiple categories of intended audiences, including international communities, my analysis focuses on its message for the domestic audience. The word “compatriots” (同胞 *tongbao*) has a double connotation in Chinese. It can literally mean siblings from the same parents, and it can refer to people of the same “ethnicity” (民族 *minzu*). The term “*zhonhua minzu*” (中华民族), coined by the father of Chinese nationalism, Liang Qichao, is frequently used to designate the Chinese nation. The use of such terms is significant in China’s nation-building process, as their common appearances suggest the existence of a “naturalized” Chinese nation with a shared bloodline that is distinct from external others. Xi (2014: 2) started his speech by stating the purpose of the ceremony: “to remember those innocent victims, and Chinese *tongbao* who were killed by Japanese invaders, to remember revolutionary martyrs and national heroes who died in fighting against Japanese militarism.” He explains that it is also to “to express Chinese people’s lofty desire to unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, and to declare the Chinese people’s firm stance of remembering history, cherishing peace, and creating the future.” Using the same term “*tongbao*” in addressing the Chinese audience and describing the victims intends to generate emotional proximity by calling self-identified Chinese into an imagined community with a shared national history.

His speech then retold the history of the massacre in chronological order: the cruelty and destructions of the Japanese invasion from 1937 that led to the Nanjing Massacre: “July the 7th, 1937, the Japanese invaders brazenly launched a full-scale war of invasion against China, which brought unprecedented disaster to the Chinese people.” The following selected phrases vividly paint cinematic scenes of an unfolding disaster: “The war quickly spread across the country, ravaged Chinese cities and countryside. The Chinese people were devastated and suffered tremendously from pain and loss. There was bloodshed and people starved to death everywhere across China.” “Chinese” was repeated to describe people, cities, and villages, as well as land, highlighting the severity and enumerating the multiplicity of disasters brought to China by the Japanese invaders. In doing so, it hammers a deep sense of victimhood into the Chinese national identity.

The speech then goes on to illustrate the massacre on December 13, 1937, describing it as a brutality that is incomparable anywhere in the world (惨绝人寰). Giving the figure of three hundred thousand Chinese who were killed renders a shocking effect itself. His speech then de-

tails various tragedies witnessed in the city, particularly the suffering of women and children: “numerous women were raped and killed, countless children died in the disaster.” The female body has long been a common marker of national boundaries and is often used as a weapon of war (Yuval-Davis 1997). The sexual violence against Chinese women by Japanese soldiers during the war, and particularly in the Nanjing Massacre, permeates Chinese TV, movies, and textbooks, and has become an iconic shared cultural memory. Raped women are an embodied symbol of a humiliated nation that builds Chinese identity through a patriarchal nationalism (Hillenbrand 2020; L. Liu 1994). The brutal death of countless children symbolizes the threat to the nation’s future. The damage to Nanjing city—“one third of the buildings were ruined, large amounts of property were plundered”—together with its desperate defenseless civilians can evoke familiar images commonly circulated in mass media about the atrocity. Furthermore, “this exterminating human massacre, created by the Japanese invaders, [was] one of the ‘three tragedies’ in the history of World War II. It was an appalling crime against humanity and a very dark page in human history.” The speech acknowledges “international friends,” German John Rabe, Danish Bernhard Arp Sindberg, and American John Magee, who provided protection for civilians and recorded the Japanese war crimes in Nanjing. Together with the verdict from “the International Military Tribunal for the Far East and the Chinese Military Tribunal for the Trial of War Criminals,” all provide external verification of the brutality of the atrocity and China’s victimization.

Importantly, the audience is repeatedly reminded in these speeches that they now belong to a rather different China, as Xi (2014: 5) proclaims that “today’s China has already become a great nation that has the strong ability to defend its people living peacefully” and “farewell to the time when China was slaughtered and bullied carelessly.” Similarly, Yu Zhengsheng states at the 2017 ceremony attended by Xi that “today, Chinese people are much closer to, feeling more confident about, and are far better able to realize the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than at any other time in Chinese history.” The recognition of past trauma evidences the massive progress the nation has made, which can stimulate confidence in and celebration of the CCP’s leadership. Essentially, the speeches instrumentalize the undeniable atrocity as a means of guiding a carefully crafted emotional journey, designed to evoke the audience’s pride and love for the nation.

In the book *China: The pessoptimist nation*, William Callahan reveals the intimately intertwined relationship



between China's sense of pride and sense of humiliation as a "structure of feeling" that informs China's national aesthetic, and therefore "allows us to understand actions and events that emerge from different combinations of reason and emotions" (2009: 10–11). To grasp the nuances of how this positive/negative dynamic serves its political functions, it is necessary to attend to a positive emotion: love, particularly the love of nation that binds people together as one nation. "Love of nation" (爱国 *aiguo*) first emerged in China's popular literature in the late nineteenth century, which associated heroism with serving the nation as a citizen in the time of crisis (T. Guo 2020). Many scholars agree that the "Century of Humiliation," within which many Chinese expressions of dignity take root, is central to Chinese nationalism today (Fitzgerald and Chien 2006; Callahan 2009). The massacre, as a prime symbol of this humiliation, legitimizes the CCP's claim of its redemptive mission: to rejuvenate the great Chinese nation. Accordingly, *aiguo* in this context connotes supporting the CCP's leadership as fundamental to Chinese citizenship. Just as Xi (2013) emphasized "the Chinese spirit" in realizing the Chinese dream, which he explains as "a fusion of the spirit of the Chinese people, central to which is patriotism," Ahmed (2014: 142) perceives love as an investment that creates an ideal that then envelops the one who loves and the loved (the collective ideal). The idealization of the nation as an object of love sheds light on the work of the negative emotions evoked through the nation's past trauma, as love has the power to demand commitment and discipline actions.

The killings and mass rape of the Nanjing Massacre are familiar to Chinese people, evoking pain and fear through accounts of the suffering of defenseless civilians, helpless women and children. Their suffering bodies have become signs of a humiliated nation attached to a sense of shame that the nation was unable to defend its people, women and children, young and old. Ahmed (2014) suggests that the pain of others is often evoked in public discourse with the aim of demanding a collective as well as individual response. Reading signs of national pain and suffering can activate the audience's emotional allegiance to their nation, which was proven effective in the early twentieth century. Xi's speech emphasizes the injustice of the past to evoke collective shame with the hope of engendering a sense of moral obligation towards the nation by its members. By extension, it evokes a form of emotional involvement in the collective "we" that the nation embodies by validating a sense of justice that was long due.

Importantly, in contrast to the pre-1980s official silence on the individual suffering of the massacre, today's national recognition of victims and survivors showcases a "new China" that is loving and worthy of being loved. The presence of survivors and the national recognition of countless victims at the ceremony provides a stage for the nation to perform its love and, more crucially, display its ability to love. bell hooks (1989:155) suggests that bringing pain into politics is intended "not to forget the past but to break its hold." The CCP aims to arrive at similar positive moral high ground by proclaiming that today's China is a strong defender of its own people and world peace. The acknowledgment of the individual pain of the massacre showcases a "caring nation," as well as a "strong nation," which has the resolution to right past wrongs and has the power to defend its people. Ironically, the foreign perpetration of the massacre, which happened before the CCP came to power, serves to silence other traumatic experiences of Chinese people, including the other massacre perpetrated by the party-state itself in 1989.

To understand how the shame of the past helps to build pride for today's China, we need to look into the role of idealization in mediating the relation between the self and others who witness the shame as a national community. Ahmed points out that "in shame, I expose to myself that I am a failure through the gaze of an ideal other" (2014:106). She argues that "if we feel shame, we feel shame because we have failed to approximate 'an ideal' produced through love" (2014: 106). Here the subtle evocation of the shame associated with a national humiliation is contingent upon the love for the nation's ideal self, a well-established belief in China as the paramount civilization of the ancient world, a place that it shall regain "through the hard-won victory of Chinese people with patriotic spirit led by the CCP and their continuing stride towards the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation" (Xi 2014: 3). The temporally managed exposure of "bad feelings" of the past is intended to enhance the declared "positive feelings" of the present, in contrast to that past. Essentially, the narrative plays with a time-tested negative/positive structure of feelings as the basis of Chinese identity, which has proven effective in its patriotic education campaign (Callahan 2009). Proclaiming the nation as successfully approaching its ideal self-image is a reliable strategy to engender a sense of love and pride among those who identify with it.

In addition to producing feelings, shame also demands action. The national humiliation discourse has successfully propelled various actions that are represented as



“cleansing humiliation” (雪耻), from mobilizing militant revenge against foreign devils in the early twentieth century to addressing development issues in the 1990s (Callahan 2009). The figures of the powerless victims of the past can activate the powerful agency of the present; Xi’s speech calls for Chinese people of great patriotic spirit to be united under the CCP’s leadership and commit themselves to the great mission of national rejuvenation. The ideal nation remains yet to be fully realized, as Xi (2014: 5) states: “The Chinese people are vigorously following the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, striving for the realization of the ‘two centenary’ goals and the realization of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” Claiming the proximity of the realization of the dream avoids disillusionment with a current reality that is fused with inequality and injustice. It also motivates people to keep investing in the goal under the CCP’s leadership. Exposure to China’s weak past serves to remind “us” that “we” should continue the national rejuvenation that will, it is said, benefit the Chinese people (Xi 2013).

Since Chineseness is increasingly defined by patriotism under Xi, the Chinese are being addressed in his speech as feeling national subjects, experiencing shame and pride in belonging to a nation that represents their interests and claims their allegiance. The ceremony creates an emotionally charged experience with its theatrical effects, encouraging its audience to internalize the CCP’s political agenda. The totalitarian emotional power carried in past victimization demands unity and submission to a strong state, which can neutralize other, negative affects individuals might experience under the CCP’s rule. In this way, the ceremony teaches Chinese the “correct” feelings expected from a qualified national subject. In addition, the spiritual and material well-being of the “small self” of the Chinese individual is made contingent upon the provision and protection of the “big self,” the nation, which enables the party-state to legitimize its representation and claim unity over the diverse moral landscape of the country. Such a discursive construction of Chineseness narrows the available space for different emotional expressions and gives the party-state a free hand to condemn any expressions that it deems as politically challenging, as anti-Chinese/anti-state. Hillenbrand (2020) reveals that there is a tense interplay between a party-state with real muzzling powers and a citizenry conflicted over the troubled past, which explains silences of the present as a densely collective endeavor in China. Public secrecy in contemporary China, according to Hillenbrand (2020: 3), is a highly agentive process, within which actors,

managing troubled pasts, “choose to obey the law *omertà* for shifting, mindful reasons.” In reality, many Chinese living in this time of rapid social changes need to navigate multilayered traumas, while many feel discontent with, if not antagonism towards, the state. However, the “national humiliation to rejuvenation” discourse encompasses a popular longing for identity, economic prosperity and stability under a strong benevolent state. This portrays growing state power as intrinsically good for the people. The backdrop of the nation’s historical suffering makes this hard to refute, even for those who have suffered under the CCP’s rule. Therefore, it tends to contribute to public secrecy and state hegemony through silencing or marginalizing voices that might restrain state power.

The National Memorial ceremony implements cultural governance by attempting to coordinate sentiments, foster identity, signal state power, set agendas, and manage attention. Through managed exposure to historical trauma that is safely located outside the CCP’s reign, it cautions those who might feel discontent under its rule that things could be even worse without it. For those who already enjoy its benefits, the moralist claim in its future promise could further justify their emotional support for a strong state with tightened domestic grip and increasing global ambition in the name of stability and prosperity. Furthermore, the strong Han-centric view embedded within the CCP’s nationalistic discourse can easily lead to an overly simplistic reading of resistance against the party-state from ethnic minorities such as Tibetans and Hui Muslims as unpatriotic/unChinese. These can, therefore, be interpreted as security threats that deserve harsh punishment and control. This might partially explain the largely unsympathetic response to Tibetan unrest in 2008 and the general domestic silence if not compliance with the party-state’s current treatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang.

In the 1960s and 70s, the political movement “recalling bitterness and reflecting on sweetness” (忆苦思甜), which encouraged people to recall how “bitter” life was in the old society and how “sweet” life was in the new one, prevailed. A similar strategy can be seen in the ways that the discourse and memory of national humiliation is instrumentalized today, where citizens are encouraged to “feel” their fortunate existence in China’s New Era. Importantly, the National Memorial ceremony provides formal validation of emotions that are already widely popularized among the public through subtle but pervasive “informal” contact zones in China’s (un)official culture. Xi’s speech, therefore, addresses a largely already receptive domestic audience using a narrative pattern



that easily resonates with their structure of feelings and that facilitates the CCP's moral claim as a strong benevolent protector for its people. Essentially, the negative affects exposed in the ceremony serve to consolidate the ever more positive and righteous national image the CCP is trying to produce.

Conclusion

In today's China, nationalist discourse remains rooted in Chinese people's victimization at the hands of foreign invaders, with the Nanjing Massacre as an iconic event. As a cultural trauma, the "time-delay" and "negotiated recollection" of the memory of the Nanjing Massacre makes it a valuable source to mine for China's contemporary governance. As a discursive creation, cultural trauma requires no individual experience to produce traumatic effect; through the reflective process of linking "past to present through representation and imagination," it allows members of each succeeding generation, who have had no experience of the "original" event, to represent the collective memory and "continue to be identified by it and to identify themselves through it" (Eyerman 2001: 3, 12, 15).

In analyzing the discourse circulated through main melody films and TV productions, as well as the National Memorial Day for Nanjing Massacre victims, I have sought to reveal how, since the 1990s, the CCP has narrated a triumphant national history, rooted in national humiliation, that scaffolds regime legitimacy. Through tracking the carefully orchestrated emotional journey on which the National Memorial Day ceremony takes its audience, I argue that the negative exposure to feelings associated with the country's weak past facilitates the positivity of a new China under Xi. Whether it can live up to its self-projected national image, as a strong, powerful defender of peace and justice for its people and the world, remains to be seen.

As Xi stressed at the beginning of his tenure, ideological work is extremely important for the party. In this article I have explored the party-state's heightened propaganda efforts, through both formal and informal channels, to exercise influence by shaping the affective realm and thus public emotion. Through exploiting negative affects of the past, the National Memorial Day provides another space to teach the Chinese "correct" feelings about their nation and their role within it. The narrative's focus on "individual human experience," tied to the waning and waxing of the fortunes of the nation, serves to both satisfy and contain the demands of the "rising individual" in Chinese so-

ciety, through presenting to its audience a nation that is relatable and worth defending. Tying individual fortunes to the power of the Chinese nation justifies the necessity of supporting a strong state. Love of the nation becomes not merely an abstract patriotic spirit, but exerts a grip on individuals' emotional loyalty through an appeal to their material interests. Patriotism promoted through representing a state that is "strong and caring" for its citizens aims to foster emotional closeness between citizens and the state to make the latter loveable. Negative emotions associated with the past, therefore, serve to authenticate the claimed positivity of the present, and contribute to sustaining the hegemonic state culture rooted in nationalist moralism, which consolidates the CCP's rule. Despite the state's investment in propaganda to achieve these ends, we cannot know the actual emotional effects on the public without further ethnographic investigation.

Acknowledgments

I thank four anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2014. *The cultural politics of emotion*. 2nd edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*. Revised edition. New York: Verso.
- Barmé, Geremie R. 1993. "History for the masses." In *Using the past to serve the present: Historiography and politics in contemporary China*, edited by Jonathan Unger, 260–86. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Berry, Michael. 2001. "Cinematic representations of the Rape of Nanking." *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 19 (4): 85–108.
- . 2008. *A history of pain: Trauma in modern Chinese literature and film*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 1998. "Myths and misconceptions in the study of nationalism." In *The state of the nation: Ernest Gellner and the theory of nationalism*, edited by John A. Hall, 272–306. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buruma, Ian. 2002. "The Nanking Massacre as a historical symbol." In *Nanking 1937: Memory and healing*, edited by Fei Fei Li, Robert Sabella, and David Liu, 3–9. New York: M. E. Sharpe.



- Cai, Shenshen. 2016. "Contemporary Chinese TV serials: Configuring collective memory of socialist nostalgia via the Cultural Revolution." *Visual Anthropology* 29 (1): 22–35.
- Callahan, William A. 2009. *China: The pessimist nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chen, Zifeng, and Clyde Yicheng Wang. 2019. "The discipline of happiness: The Foucauldian use of the 'Positive Energy' discourse in China's ideological works." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 48 (2): 201–25.
- Christensen, Thomas J. 1996. "Chinese realpolitik: Reading Beijing's world-view." *Foreign Affairs* 75 (5): 37–52.
- Coble, Parks M. 2011. "Writing about atrocity: Wartime accounts and their contemporary uses." *Modern Asian Studies* 45 (2): 379–98.
- Cohen, Paul A. 2002. "Remembering and forgetting National Humiliation in twentieth-century China." *Twentieth-Century China* 27 (2): 1–39.
- Dai, Jinhua. 1999. *Yinxing shuxie*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Renming Chubanshe.
- . 2012. "I want to be human: A story of China and the human." *Social Text* 29 (4): 129–50.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. 1984. *Alice doesn't: Feminism, semiotics, cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Edgerton, Gary Richard, and Peter C. Rollins. 2001. *Television histories: Shaping collective memory in the media age*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Eyerman, Ron. 2001. *Cultural trauma: Slavery and the formation of African American identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eykholt, Mark. 2000. "Aggression, victimization, and Chinese historiography of the Nanjing Massacre." In *The Nanjing Massacre in history and historiography*, edited by Joshua A. Fogel, 11–69. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fitzgerald, John, and Sechin Y. S. Chien, eds. 2006. *The dignity of nations: Equality, competition, and honor in East Asian nationalism*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Fogel, Joshua A. 2000. "Introduction." In *The Nanjing Massacre in history and historiography*, edited by Joshua A. Fogel, 1–10. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2007. "The Nanking atrocity and Chinese historical memory." In *The Nanking atrocity, 1937–38: Complicating the picture*, edited by Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, 267–84. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Glaser, Bonnie S., and Melissa E. Murphy. 2009. "Soft power with Chinese characteristics." In *Chinese soft power and its implications for the United States*, edited by Carola McGiffert, 10–26. Washington: Center for Strategic & International Studies.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Selected and translated by Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Gries, Peter, and Stanley Rosen, eds. 2010. *Chinese politics: State, society and the market*. London: Routledge.
- Guo, Ting. 2020. "Modern 'ai': Passion, patriotism, and China's politics of love." *Sixth Tone.com*, August 25, 2020. <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1006077/modern-ai-passion%2C-patriotism%2C-and-chinas-politics-of-love>.
- Guo, Yingjie. 2019. "From Marxism to nationalism: The Chinese Communist Party's discursive shift in the post-Mao era." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 52 (4): 355–65.
- Hillenbrand, Margaret. 2020. *Negative exposures: Knowing what not to know in contemporary China*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Holbig, Heike. 2018. "China after reform: The ideological, constitutional, and organisational makings of a New Era." *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47 (3): 187–207.
- hooks, bell. 1989. *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston: South End Press.
- Kleinman, Arthur, Yunxiang Yan, Jing Jun, Sing Lee, Everett Zhang, Pan Tianshu, Wu Fei, Guo Jinhua, eds. 2011. *Deep China: The moral life of the person*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Klimeš, Ondřej, and Maurizio Marinelli. 2018. "Introduction: Ideology, propaganda, and political discourse in the Xi Jinping era." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23 (3): 313–22.
- Kraicer, Shelly. 2010. "A matter of life and death: Lu Chuan and post-zhuxuanlu cinema." *Cinemascope* 41 (March). <http://cinema-scope.com/features/features-a-matter-of-life-and-death-lu-chuan-and-post-zhuxuanlu-cinema-by-shelly-kraicer>. Accessed on March 2, 2021.
- Landsberg, Alison. 2004. *Prosthetic memory: The transformation of American remembrance in the age of mass culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Laszczkowski, Mateusz, and Madeleine Reeves. 2017. *Affective states: Entanglements, suspensions, suspicions*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Lei, Zhilong. 2015. "The survival logic behind ridiculous anti-Japanese drama." *Renming Wang* 16 (June). <http://history.people.com.cn/n/2015/0616/c372331-27164145-2.html>. Accessed on March 2, 2021.



- Liang, Liang. 2018. "Chinese Dream is a dream for national prosperity and rejuvenation, as well as people's happiness." *Renming Wang*. August 27, 2018. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0827/c223633-30253433.html>. Accessed on March 2, 2021.
- Link, Perry, Richard P. Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds. 2001. *Popular China: Unofficial culture in a globalizing society*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Linke, Uli. 2006. "Contact zones: Rethinking the sensual life of the state." *Anthropological Theory* 6 (2): 205–25.
- Liu, Lydia H. 1994. "The female body and nationalist discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong's field of life and death." In *Body, subject and power in China*, edited by Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow, 157–77. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Liu, Petrus. 2017. "Women and children first—jingoism, ambivalence, and crisis of masculinity in Wolf Warrior II." *Wolf Warrior II: The rise of China and gender/sexual politics*. MCLC (Modern Chinese Literature and Culture) Resource Center, Ohio State University. <https://u.osu.edu/mclc/2018/02/22/wolf-warrior-ii-the-rise-of-china-and-gendersexuality-politics/>.
- Lu, Yanming, and Chenshan Zhu. 2018. "Interpreting the narrative from the ritual of national memorial ceremony." *Qunzhong*. May 31, 2018. http://m.qunzh.com/tbch/201805/t20180509_39163.html. Accessed on March 2, 2021.
- Ma, Weijun. 2014. "Chinese main melody TV drama: Hollywoodization and ideological persuasion." *Television & New Media* 15 (6): 523–37.
- Malkki, Liisa. 1992. "National geographic: The rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees." *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1): 24–44.
- Nye, Joseph S., Jr. 2009. *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Pan, Zhongdang, and Joseph Man Chan. 2000. "Building a market-based party organ: Television and national integration in China." In *Television in contemporary Asia*, edited by David French and Michael Richards, 233–63. New Delhi: SAGE.
- Perry, Elizabeth J. 2013. "Cultural governance in contemporary China: 'Re-Orienting' party propaganda." *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*. <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/11386987>.
- . 2015. "The populist dream of Chinese democracy." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74 (4): 903–15.
- Qian, Fengqi. 2009. "Let the dead be remembered: Interpretation of the Nanjing Massacre Memorial." In *Places of pain and shame: Dealing with "difficult heritage"*, edited by William Logan and Keir Reeves, 17–33. London: Routledge.
- Renan, Ernest. 1994. "What is a nation?" In *Nationalism*, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, 17–18. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Repnikova, Maria, and Kecheng Fang. 2018. "Authoritarian participatory persuasion 2.0: Netizens as thought work collaborators in China." *Journal of Contemporary China* 27 (113): 763–79.
- Rofel, Lisa. 1994. "Yearnings: Televisual love and melodramatic politics in contemporary China." *American Ethnologist* 21 (4): 700–22.
- Rose, Caroline. 2005. *Sino-Japanese relations: Facing the past, looking to the future?* Oxon: Routledge.
- Schultz, Corey Kai Nelson. 2016. "Mediating trauma: The Nanjing Massacre, City of Life and Death, and affect as soft power." In *Chinese cinemas: International perspective*, edited by Felicia Chan and Andy Willis, 53–68. New York: Routledge.
- Schwarcz, Vera. 2002. "The 'black milk' of historical consciousness: Thinking about the Nanking Massacre in light of Jewish memory." In *Nanking 1937: Memory and healing*, edited by Fei Fei Li, Robert Sabella, and David Liu, 183–204. New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Seo, Jungmin. 2005. "Nationalism and the problem of political legitimacy in China." In *Legitimacy: Ambiguities of political success or failure in East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Lynn T. White, 141–82. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing.
- . 2008. "Politics of memory in Korea and China: Remembering the comfort women and the Nanjing Massacre." *New Political Science* 30 (3): 369–92.
- Smelser, Neil J. 2004. "Psychological trauma and cultural trauma." In *Cultural trauma and collective identity*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka, 31–59. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wang, Zheng. 2012. *Never forget National Humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Weber, Max. 1994. "The nation." In *Nationalism*, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, 21–25. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wielander, Gerda, and Derek Hird. 2018. *Chinese discourses on happiness*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Wu, Haiyun. 2020. "'Devils' on the silver screen." *Sixth Tone* 11 (September). <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1006166/devils-on-the-silver-screen>.



- Xi, Jinping. 2013. Speech at the first meeting of the 12th National People's Congress. March 17, 2013. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/xuexi/n/2015/0717/c397563-27322349.html>.
- . 2014. "The speech at the National Memorial Ceremony for Nanjing Massacre Victims." Beijing: Renming Chubanshe.
- Xinhua News*. 2012. "Xi Jinping: Striving towards the great mission of national rejuvenation." The Central People's Government of the PRC, November 29, 2012.. http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2012-11/29/content_2278733.htm. Accessed on November 20, 2020.
- Yang, Daqing. 2000. "The challenges of the Nanjing Massacre: Reflections on historical inquiry." In *The Nanjing Massacre in history and historiography*, edited by Joschka A. Fogel. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yang, Jie. 2014. "The politics of affect and emotion: Imagination, potentiality and anticipation in East Asia." In *The political economy of affect and emotion in East Asia*, edited by Jie Yang, 3–28. New York: Routledge.
- Yoshida, Takashi. 2006. *The making of the "Rape of Nanjing": History and memory in Japan, China, and the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yu, Hongmei. 2013. "Visual spectacular, revolutionary epic, and personal voice: The narration of history in Chinese main melody films." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 25 (2): 166–218.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. *Gender and nation*. London: SAGE.
- Zeng, Yuli. 2019. "China's filmmakers fine-tune patriotism for a new generation." *Sixth Tone*, December 13, 2019. <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1004833/chinas-filmmakers-fine-tune-patriotism-for-a-new-generation>. Accessed on November 20, 2020.
- Zhang, Liping. 2017. "Noutai thanks hit movie 'Wolf Warrior 2' for free advertising." *Sixth Tone*, August 8, 2017. <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1000645/moutai-thanks-hit-movie-wolf-warrior-2-for-free-advertising>. Accessed on November 20, 2020.

Kailing XIE (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8751-0510>) is a lecturer at the University of Birmingham. She received her PhD from the University of York. She has written articles on a variety of topics in gender politics in China. She was awarded an Early Career Researcher Prize by the British Association of Chinese Studies in 2017 for her article "Pre-marital abortion—What is the harm? The responsabilisation of women's pregnancy among China's 'privileged' daughters." Her monograph, *Embodying middle class gender aspirations: Perspectives from China's privileged young women*, will be published by Palgrave in 2021.

Kailing Xie
k.xie@bham.ac.uk

