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The Rhetoric of National Pride and Interest in Chinese Public Sphere

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Abstract

In the large part of the globalising world, notions like the nation, national pride and national interest have become unwanted reminiscences of the ravaged by ethnic conflicts 20th century. In the pursuing deeper integration and facing immigration crisis Europe, all these notions have been virtually excluded from the socio-political discourse. However, not the entire world followed the example of integrating Europe and resigned from the appeal to the national pride and national interest. States of East and South-East Asia have been using the notions of nation, national characteristics and national interest and pride as an indispensable element and legitimate justification for their economic, social and international policies. Among Asian countries China, facing mutual disagreements with other states of the region and economic challenges of the globalising world do not hesitate to reach for the nationalistic rhetoric in their search for arguments and resolutions. For these reasons, in presented paper an attempt will be made to presents and analyse nationalistic rhetoric as it appears in Chinese public sphere. Exemptions from the official government's and party documents, press, art and everyday conversations as they take place among people in different social settings will make a bulk of the material under scrutiny. The final objective of such an endeavour will be to find if, and in what way nationalistic rhetoric reflects the needs and expectations of ordinary citizens, and influences their perception of the state and themselves.

Keywords: China Studies, Chinese nationalism, rhetoric, China and the World

1. Public Sphere and its Theories

The way of thinking about the public sphere to the great extent has been shaped by the work of German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas (1929 -). In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere – An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Habermas argues that as the public authority was preoccupied with the matters of the state and the ruling class, private sphere comprised of the realm of “commodity exchange and the social labour” (Habermas 1989, p.30). That development of *commodity exchange and the social labour* in the 18th century brought a new tool that allowed that, very narrowly understood civil society communicate their opinions to public authorities. As a result, the public sphere detached from the official politics and economy emerged and put public authorities in touch with the actual needs of the society. The new realm became a platform for ideas exchange, debate and deliberation, an informal institution meant to regulate the authority of the state (Habermas, 1989). What then determined the emergence of the public sphere was the formation of public opinion, equal access for all citizens to unrestricted politically and economically conference and the predominance of the open debate over the governing rules. Habermas then defines the public sphere as a “society engaged in critical public

debate” (Habermas 1989, p.52). He argues that the bourgeois society not only contributed to the development of but also took its root from these principles of the public sphere. Bourgeois society created space and rules of the open for every citizen debate on the matters of common concern that should not be restricted or oppressed by the political or economic power (Habermas, 1989, p.36). However, in his later work, he admitted that the forces that established the public sphere, the bourgeois society also destroyed it. The increasing importance of consumption, growing influence of capitalist economy and uneven distribution of wealth and the commercialisation of public media resulted in the limited citizens access and the capitalists’ effective control over the public sphere (Habermas, 1992). It became then an arena of the political and economic authorities’ domination. As a consequence, it lost its original character as the platform of the open debate not only unrestricted by those powers but often led in opposition to them. As the realm of letters brought public sphere into being, its further development led to its antithesis.

Gerard Hauser (1999) presented a little different approach, emphasising the *rhetorical nature of public sphere*. Hauser believes that the public sphere has been formed not around the group involved in the public discourse, debate but around the “issues of common concern” (Hauser, 1999, p.46). The public sphere is then not the effect of the discussion that is open for every member of the society. It is the result of the activity of some members of the society that revolves around certain issues. The focal point is then the issue, the shared value or meaning and the discourse around it. An open for all potential participants arena, where the opinions might be exchanged and discussed, is rather a result of, not a precondition for the emergence of the public sphere. Those who enter the arena of public must perceive the world in a similar way, share certain values and recognise common interests (Hauser, 1999, p.70). They might be total strangers, but they all view certain issues as crucial to them and their groups. As Hauser puts it:

[Public sphere] is a discursive space in which strangers discuss issues they perceive to be of consequence for them and their group. Its rhetorical exchanges are the bases for shared awareness of common issues, shared interests, tendencies of extent and strength of difference and agreement, and self-constitution as a public whose opinions bear on the organisation of society. (p.64)

No matter if it was Habermas or Hauser, their theories all pertain to the realm of liberal views based on the appreciation of individuality and the civil society. However, as Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993) correctly pointed out, the emergence and existence of the public sphere are not always a result or the arena of the open debate on the *issues of common concern*. To the contrary, the proletarian public sphere, that they are concerned about emerged as a result of subjective feeling, resistance, and resentment of the *excluded ones*. It is then characterised by conservatism and the defensive attitude towards the society. Proletariat public sphere is then a form of an alternative that goes against the interest of the bourgeoisie society (Negt & Kluge, 1993). It might be complementary to the public sphere in Hauser’s sense, but at the same time, it is everything but inclusive and open, as Habermas would like it to be.

From the all above theories, we can conclude that public sphere arose from the individual or group sense of interests and necessity of action. Regardless of the liberal or not liberal orientation, at the bottom of the public, there is the private. The private gives impulses to action, to debate or to the defensive attitude that take place in the arena accessible or shared by more than one actor. Even though, as Hauser rightly pointed out actors do not know each other, there must be an element that they all consider as an important matter. For Habermas, the public sphere is then free space that accommodates the open and unsuppressed debate giving participant new

identity and leading to the open (democratic) society. For Hauser, the essence of the public sphere is the importance of the issue(s) which the ones who come to attend the debate do recognise. According to Negt and Kluge, it can be a result of exclusion, resistance, and resentment. As such, it can be limited in scope and as such prone to the conservatism on the one hand, and to radicalism on another. The public sphere is then the arena on which all those tendencies and aspirations of groups and individuals meet, and often goes against each other and the structure above them, the state. Now the question is: how the structure above, the state uses and controls all these tendencies and contradiction? In the following verses, we will take a closer look at how the one-party state manages the rising public sphere by appeal to, and manipulation of the needs and resentments of the participants.

2. Methodology

As we can see from the previous chapter, the public sphere is an arena of citizens' activity and the social debate. No matter which of the above approaches we consider the most accurate one, one thing is undeniable. The existence of the public sphere as such means an involvement of the citizens in the matters that are of their common concern, interest or deliberation. In other words, the common concern or interest is at least an imaginable if not a deliberated reality (Anderson, 1983). As a result, the question about the nature and the sources of the *common concern* and interest arises. Where do they come from? What are their functions and how are they create and manipulated? Just to remind, public sphere, even in Habermas interpretation has been infiltrated by political and economic powers and has been a subject of control and manipulation.

To proceed with the analysis of specific instances, that will help us to answer above questions, it necessary to specify the methodology and draw the *spatiotemporal* and the *semantical* boundaries of the research. Spatiotemporal stands then for a particular space and time in which, or through which the public sphere materialises itself. Semantic, on its behalf means the scope of the issues of common concern or interest that we are going to analyse. In the first instance, we are going to look at China (P.R.C.) after 1989 on, when the phenomenon under scrutiny became truly visible (Liu, 2001; Guo, 2004). We will then focus on the exceptions from the press, official statements from authorities, street banners and official slogans, and even recorded everyday conversations of the ordinary citizens. Regarding *semantic boundaries*, we will restrict our field of interest to the rhetoric of national humiliation and pride, and the rhetoric of national interest. The methodology applied in current research was twofold. Firstly we focus on the content extracted from the press available to the average citizens in China (*laobaixing*). Due to the level of availability for the ordinary citizen, both, printed and electronic sources were of equal value to the current research. Also, the content of some *important speeches* (*zhuyao jianghua*) of the state and/or party leaders were also an important source. Secondly, we employed quasi-ethnomethodological approach and made the direct observation a method of data collecting. The advantages of such an approach are quite evident. The public sphere, in the ideal, Habermas sense, is a space for discussion among citizens, often against the authority of the political institutions. Even though development of the public sphere led to its alienation and infiltration and manipulation from media, political and economic powers, it remained an arena of dialogue and debate. The subject of this research is the content communicated in such a sphere. The purpose of this study is to find out what are the functions of such communication in the contemporary Chinese society. It is also not less important to understand to what degree, the content used in this communication that appeals to national pride and national interest do become a part of the everyday discourse of citizens. In other words, to what extent, such rhetoric finds its way to the minds of the citizens? The content of the banners, planks and official slogans seemed then a *natural source* of knowledge about the

place of such rhetoric in the public sphere. An uninterrupted, everyday conversations that took place in *natural settings* displays an actual level of impact of such contents on the individual, and collective perception and social discourse.

3. Findings

Probably the first attempt to promote *national feelings* and *national pride* among Chinese after the *Tiananmen Incident* that made its way to the people's minds was book *China Can Say No!* (*Zhongguo keyi shuobu*; below as *Shuobu*). Published in 1996 is often referred to as an exposition of the rising Chinese nationalism and anti-western sentiment (Liu, 2001). The appraisal of *Chinese spirit and values* is also a message that comes out from its pages. Some of the examples are quite striking:

No single freedom movement in the world has not “warmed itself in the sun of Chinese thought.” No peace and progressive movements in the world have not drawn on Chinese moral values. Only Chinese people's diplomacy is characterised by unknown to ‘big countries’ ethical standards and the spirit of justice. (*Shuobu*, p.55)

On the next page, another, even stronger claim is put forward: “China is to be a hope of the world. Moreover, it will become one during our lifetime” (p.56).

From these two exceptions, we can see quite clearly the reverse of the course in the Chinese projection of the *self-image* just a few years after the airing of the very influential TV miniseries *River Elegy* (*Heshang*, aired in June and August of 1988). When the *River Elegy* was denouncing China, and its culture as backwards and inferior to what came from the West, *Shuobu* not only do not follow such a trace but to the contrary claims uniqueness and superiority for the ‘ultimately moral and just’ diplomacy of the Chinese people.

The emphasis on the ethical character of Chinese People's diplomacy is not without its significance. Since the end of the Civil War (1945-1949) People's Republic of China (PRC), have had to face the economic and military challenges from the USA and later even from other socialist countries like Vietnam or USSR. However, there has been another problem that used to undermine the legitimacy of the regime in Beijing. The *Taiwan Issue*, as Chinese authorities like to refer to it, is a constant source of anxiety for the government in Beijing. They see the lack of control over the island, despite (in theory) commonly accepted the principle of *One China* and semi-official support from the USA for Taipei as a threat and historical and legal *injustice*. Authors of *Shuobu* provides us with a clear exposition of such concerns:

Now that UN has already confirmed Taiwan being Chinese territory, any action from the Chinese government that is intended to prevent Taiwanese independence, are all coherent with the international law. At the same time, America's *Protect Taiwan clamour* should be seen as an inability to recognise the reality or an act of hostility against China. (p.95)

Another exposition of the rhetoric of national pride included the *Shuobu* has a more personal character. In 1994 the USA conducted negotiations with China about the legal status of copyrights and intellectual property. Despite the initial progress, sides did not reach the final agreement. According to the Chinese side, it was America's *unreasonable demands* that led to the failure of the negotiations. After the period of mutual accusations, American team decided to return to the table and invited Chinese chief negotiator Wu Yi to the USA. Unexpectedly, she agreed, but she refused to visit Washington demanding American team to come to Beijing. Such an action, clearly spelt out “No” gained her appreciation from the authors of the *Shuobu*, that called her an *Iron Lady of China* making a clear parallel with the British Prime Minister,

Margaret Thatcher. As they emphasised, “What she displayed by her action was today’s China brave and firm stance to protect its interests and dignity” (p.179).

Looking for instances of appeal to national feelings it is impossible not to come across the American bombing of Chinese Embassy in Belgrade that left three dead, and twenty-three injured in May 1999 during the war in Kosovo. US government later claimed it to be an accident when Chinese believed it to be a deliberate action. Right after the incident, streets of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu witnessed openly anti-American and in some instances hostile protests. Protesters yelled slogans like “Kick American hamburgers out of China!”, “Oppose invasion!”, “Down with hegemonic politics!” and even chanting “Blood for Blood!” (from Gries, 2004, p.17). The reason for such violent protests was chiefly the bombing of Chinese Embassy in Belgrade that left three dead and twenty-three injured. Soon the rhetoric of national pride had been brought up. As People’s Daily, op-ed entitled “This is not 1899 China” declared:

This is 1999, not 1899. This is not . . . the age when people can barge about in the world just by sending a few gunboats.... It is not the age when the Western powers plundered the Imperial Palace at will, destroyed the Old Summer Palace, and seized Hong Kong and Macao.... China is a China that has stood up; it is a China that defeated the Japanese fascists; it is a China that had a trial of strength and won victory over the United States on the Korean battleground. The Chinese people are not to be bullied, and China’s sovereignty and dignity are not to be violated. The hot blood of people of ideas and integrity who opposed imperialism for over 150 years, flows in the veins of the Chinese people. U.S.-led NATO had better remember this. (from Gries, 2004, p.17).

Clearly enough, Chinese national interest is to resist foreign (American) invasion and regain country’s dignity. The National pride that was hurt by the external aggression over a hundred years earlier is in danger again. The only way to not lose it again is to stand up to the aggressors, and the Chinese nation has already proven that it is capable of doing so by “defeating Japanese fascists” and “winning the victory of the US on the Korean battleground.” The Chinese nation is then proud victors ready to battle again.

As we talk about the public sphere, especially in Habermas sense we might tend to perceive it as in a sense being distant from the real of the ruling class and often being a result of the opposition towards those in power. However, even Habermas could not deny governing class its role in functioning of the realm that we call *the public sphere*. In China, the Party and the government play crucial and seems indispensable role in providing the public with the issues of *common concern*. Party’s and government leaders speeches and direct instructions given during local visitation around the country are available through TV, newspapers, local bulletin boards and recently the internet. Due to the limited scope of this paper we limit the presentation to few exceptions from the inauguration speech of the current President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping when he assumed his office in March 2013.

Generally speaking, the whole speech is full of the rhetoric of Chinese nation appreciation. Some examples are particularly interesting. As Xi states:

The Chinese nation has a history of civilisation existing continuously for five thousand years. The Chinese have created splendid Chinese culture. Chinese contribution to the humankind progress is undeniable. (Xi, 2013)

In the following verses he continues:

To realise the Chinese Dream of the Great Renaissance of the Chinese Nation is to make the country prosperous, nation revitalised, people well-off. To accomplish it is to make real the

contemporary Chinese people ideal that reflects the glorious tradition of struggling for the progress, upheld by our predecessors. (Xi, 2013)

Moreover:

To realise the China Dream, we need to consolidate Chinese power. It is the power of all Chinese ethnic groups united. The China Dream is a national dream; it is also a dream of every single Chinese. As long as we are united in the struggle for the realisation of our shared dream, our will (power) to make this dream real is second to none, and the space for realising one's individual ideal is vast. Living in our great motherland and among Chinese people of splendid times, as the time goes by we share opportunities to nourish talents, accomplish goals, grow and progress along our motherland. (Xi, 2013)

Speeches like the one used above, are an integral part of Chinese public sphere and an important way of communication between the government and society in general. The message goes mostly from the top to the bottom of the structure. However, the message itself is not detached from the concerns of the public. Quite to the contrary. It often resemblances desires and needs of the ordinary citizen, appealing to the necessity of stability, harmony and well-off society. It often also reminds about and capitalises on the memory of the past humiliation and the desire to restore the past glory. As we can see from above exemptions, President Xi Jinping did not hesitate to justify and promote his ideological slogan *Zhongguo Meng* (*China Dream*, a paraphrase of the *American Dream*) with the rhetoric of national pride and national interest. Reminiscences of Xi's ideas can be found on the thousand of banners, planks and posters around China. They not only clearly explain what China Dream is, but also tell why should Chinese citizens abide by Xi's ideological stanza. On one of them, photographed in Shanghai subway (2016) we find the following explanation what the China Dream is. China Dream is then first of all the common dream of all Chinese (*Women gongtong de meng*). To be more specific, the huge plank provides us with more detailed explanation. China Dream is then a *prosperous country, nation revitalised, people well-off and the society harmonious*. As we can see, it is our (Chinese) collective dream which realisation is our common interest. Another poster, this time from the bus in Suzhou is shorter, but not less appealing. It reads: "The rise of the country (state) is the peace of the people." (2016)

Now, to what degree, such a rhetoric reaches its audience? Does it have any effect on ordinary citizen way of perceiving his/her country, nation or even him/herself?

4. Discussion

A discussion about the place and the influence of the rhetoric of national pride and interest in Chinese public sphere is often affected by two extreme views. First of all, it is an undeniable fact that lots of the instances of such rhetoric come from the public authorities. The ones exemplified above to large degree belong to that group. It is then often an irresistible temptation to classify such rhetoric as state-sponsored propaganda used by the government for their purposes. Many western commentators of the Chinese matters display such a tendency. Thomas Christensen's writings about the mass protests in Chinese cities after bombing Chinese Embassy in Belgrade made the best example of such a bias. As he wrote: "Since the Chinese Communist Party is no longer communist, it must be even more Chinese" (Christensen, 1996, p.37).

On the other hand, there are Chinese commentators, that either affected by the state and peer pressure, or by their personal, *national feelings* takes such rhetoric as a cogent argumentation. Numerous discussions on TV, in newspapers or even in academia about the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, the status of Taiwan and first of all relations with the US and Japan, are often reduced to

the claims that Chinese position is right and backed up by the international law. It is needless to say that the actual *international law* is rarely if ever quoted in its original version. The Chinese also feel that Chinese historical experience and national feelings sufficiently support the *rightness* of Chinese position. As one eminent Chinese scholar stated in 2001:

[China's] history of superpower status makes the Chinese people very proud of their country on the one hand, and on the other hand very sad about China's current international status. They believe China's decline is a historical mistake which they should correct. (Yan, 2001: 33)

It is then not surprising that nationalistic rhetoric seeks support in the emotional appeal. However, it is quite striking that average Chinese citizen perceives the backing up the rhetoric of national pride and national interest with emotions as a well justified and coherent argumentation. If it is so, what are the functions of such rhetoric and to what degree, it does reach Chinese minds and reflects their concerns? To answer this question, we might want to hear the voice of the ordinary citizens. For instance, after bombing Chinese Embassy in Belgrade the "Ouyang from Wuhan" published a short essay in the *Guangming Daily*, in which he wrote:

Chinese, this is actually Americans humiliating us! The American desire to humiliate us is no mere recent event. Blocking our hosting of the Olympics was a humiliation. Boarding the Milky Way 17 by force to search its cargo was a humiliation. Recent allegations that we stole their [nuclear] secrets are a humiliation. Similarly, the motive for the bombing of our embassy was to humiliate China. (from Gries, 2004, p. 21)

The conclusion is quite obvious here. There is an American plot that the only target is to hurt China. China is a victim of America and the West in general hostility. Any criticism towards China or any unfavourable action, such as denying China Olympic Games in 2000, were all attempts of America and the West to humiliate and subdue China. China is under attack, and it presumably has been for more than a century. China and Chinese people are *the excluded* and *the humiliated* ones. China and its nation must stand up and reclaim its position as a world power.

Some other examples come from the free discussions with ordinary Chinese. Quite a few, for instance, made a claim that China must protect its interest in both the South and the East Sea at all costs (personal communication from 2010 to 2016). Growing tension between China and Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea and Japan in the East China Sea, make a vital question about the nature of the future relations between these countries. Ordinary citizens seem to sympathise with the official position of the government. Regarding the future of Taiwan, the discussions usually go the same direction as the official state propaganda. Even usually critical about the government individuals do not hesitate to claim sovereignty over the island for the Chinese government. It became even more apparent as the pro-independence party won elections in Taiwan. Private discussion was not as fierce as the internet forums with numerous voices calling for military unification, if the new leader, Ms Tsai Ing-wen dears not to recognise the principle of one China. As we can see then, the rhetoric of national pride and national interest is not just an attempt from the ruling party to replace the fading communism with a passionate nationalism. Even though it often comes from the top of the society, and it is intended to cause an emotional involvement, it is much more than just an attempt of ideological brainwashing. As the everyday discussions show, such a rhetoric finds a resonance even among often very critical about the government citizens. It is to a large degree simply because it appeals to the feelings that they have themselves independently. The memory of the Opium Wars, the foreign invasion and *unequal treaties* that came after and caused China losing its position as *the only civilisation in the world* plays a crucial role here. That memory of the previous glory and humiliation requires comfort and expect repayment. That is why the rhetoric of national pride and interest is used so

widely and finds resonance in the society. That is also why pictures as the one on the on the back cover of the provincial Chinese magazine Love Our China (*Ai women Zhonghua*) from 1996 that explains why China is *better* than the USA. As we read, China means 75 generations of Confucius's descendants and 5000 of history. The US has not more than 15 generations of George Washington's decedents and 200 years of history! China is not the hegemon not due to its weaknesses but due to the *self-restraint* and *warm* nature of its culture. If the US thinks about humiliating China again, Chinese people (sic!) can say *No!* People of China can stand up and restore the past glory of their nation! China then has to say *No* in the name of its vivid interests, but also because the Western world took the *self-restraint* and *warm* nature of Chinese culture for weakness. There is then clearly a connection between Chinese historical experience, the content of *Shuobu*, President Xi's speeches and concerns of the ordinary citizens, and that link is perfectly logical to the average citizen. Of course, they do have many other common concerns than just the ones regarding their history and national dignity. It is also true that the rhetoric that we are concerned about here comes mainly from the official authorities. However, all this does not mean that there is a disconnection between the authorities and the society. Even though it is quite hard to talk about the public sphere in China in Habermas' sense, the existence of public sphere in Hauser's, and even more Negt's and Kluge's is undeniable. Chinese might not be entirely free autonomous participants of the public discussion and debate, and the discussed topics might come from the authorities. However, that does not imply that they do not take part in the discussion on the issues of common concern. Looking at the themes from the Xi's speech we can see not only to what degree he tries to pass a certain message on his fellow citizens but also how much he tries to resemble their expectations towards the new government. There is then a connection between the source, the message and the recipient of it. Moreover, the primary function of the message is to keep this link between the source, usually the public authorities, and the recipient – the society. However, we must not also forget that the channels of passing down the message, and the message itself is a subject of the state control and to certain extent manipulation. The message then does not only resonance the needs and expectations of the society but also creates and determines their nature. In the case of China then, the public sphere is the arena of the debate that revolves around the issues of common concern, to a great extent put forward by the incumbent state elite. The authorities are interested in keeping the situation and their position stable, especially after the Tiananmen incident (Guo, 2004, 33). The identification of Chinese national interest with the party and the communist state, by propagating ideas like *aiguo* (loving the country) and *aiguo zhuyi* (patriotism) (Zhao, 2014, p.19) has then become one of the methods of keeping such stability. There is then a concord between them and the society's historical experience, citizens needs and expectations. Moreover, the primary function of such rhetoric is to maintain such a concord. That is why an appeal to national feelings is employed, and the whole discourse focuses on nourishing such emotions among citizens.

5. Conclusion

To conclude. The public sphere is the arena of dialogue and debate between not only the citizens themselves but also between the citizens and the ruling class. So even the public sphere arose as the opposition to the public authorities, ruling class never really had to be excluded from the debate over the topics of common concern. The ruling class may not only take part in the discussion but also become the factor that determined the nature and directions of the debate. For Habermas, that could be the end of the true public sphere, but for some other thinkers it is the reality of the most of the societies. It is hard to disagree with Hauser's claim that what makes public sphere possible is the *shared awareness of common issues* and *shared interests*. The

participants do not even have to know each other to feel that they pertain to the same symbolical reality. The sense of exclusion and/or humiliation may be another factor that makes that feeling even stronger. The ruling class then may not only be a source of such feelings but also share them and to respond to citizens call for the psychological comfort. Even the intellectuals pushing for modernisation that theoretically should be more critical about the matter and less prone to the influence of such feelings, actively participate in such an emotionally driven debate. As one of the Chinese intellectuals put it:

On the one hand, we identify with modernization without reservation, and we are ready to fight against anything that stands in its way. On the other hand, we cannot help feeling enmity and hatred towards the Orientalist's culture invasion, the marginalisation and rejection of China...(from Guo, 2004, p.127)

So here comes the second important conclusion regarding the topic of the discussion here. It is hardly deniable fact, that the debate in Chinese public sphere is too large degree determined and controlled by the public authorities, and that the very fact of such control reveals that there is a tension between the needs of the citizens and the government policies. However, it is equally hardly deniable that there is also a sort of concord, the resonance between two. The government might be manipulating the topics and the debate on them. However, the rhetorical power of the issues of common concern propagated by the government comes not only from the manipulation itself but also from the needs and expectations of the average citizen. One could, of course, argue that these requirements and expectations be a product of the state propaganda. However, be propaganda successful the response from the public is needed. (Elulle, 1960). In other words, even propaganda must appeal to some historical experience, feelings and concerns. It must then answer a call for a meaningful explanation and provide comfort in the situation of exclusion, depreciation and uncertainty. In contemporary China, that is precisely the function of the rhetoric of national pride, and interest as it is present in the public sphere.

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