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Chinese Nationalism and Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping

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Master's in International Studies

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SOCIOLOGIA
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History Department

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Resumo

Este estudo analisa a influência do nacionalismo na política externa chinesa sob a liderança de Xi Jinping, com um enfoque especial em saber se isso resulta numa postura mais assertiva. À medida que a China se afirma como uma potência global, a sua política externa sob a liderança de Xi Jinping tem despertado uma atenção considerável, sendo frequentemente descrita como cada vez mais assertiva e muitas vezes vista como sendo impulsionada por um sentimento nacionalista.

Através de uma análise qualitativa e sumativa dos discursos e escritos de Xi Jinping, este estudo conclui que o nacionalismo não conduz, necessariamente, a uma política externa mais assertiva. No plano interno, Xi destaca o orgulho nacional e a ideia de rejuvenescimento para promover a unidade e legitimar a liderança do Partido Comunista Chinês. No contexto internacional, os seus discursos enfatizam a cooperação e o multilateralismo, apresentando a ascensão da China como vantajosa para o desenvolvimento global. Xi reconhece que a China não pode alcançar os seus objetivos de forma isolada, por isso defende uma postura pacífica e colaborativa, integrando a China em fóruns internacionais e multilaterais enquanto avança os seus interesses nacionais. Esta estratégia combina o nacionalismo com a colaboração internacional, mantendo o apoio interno e posicionando a China como uma potência global responsável.

Palavras-chave: Nacionalismo, Política Externa Chinesa, Xi Jinping, Relações Internacionais

Abstract

This study analyzes the influence of nationalism on Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping's leadership, particularly examining whether it leads to a more assertive stance in Chinese foreign policy. As China asserts itself as a global power, its foreign policy under the leadership of Xi Jinping has garnered considerable attention, often described as increasingly assertive and frequently seen as driven by nationalist sentiment.

Through a qualitative summative content analysis of Xi Jinping's speeches and writings, this study finds that nationalism does not necessarily lead to an assertive foreign policy. Domestically, Xi emphasizes national pride and rejuvenation to promote unity and legitimize the Chinese Communist Party rule. Internationally, his speeches focus on cooperation and multilateralism, portraying China's rise as beneficial to global development. Xi understands that China cannot achieve its goals in isolation, so he promotes a peaceful and cooperative stance, integrating China into international and multilateral forums while advancing national interests. This strategy intertwines nationalism with international collaboration, maintaining domestic support while positioning China as a responsible global power.

Keywords: Nationalism, Chinese Foreign Policy, Xi Jinping, International Relations

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Glossary of Acronyms

AIIB	Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CI	Confucius Institute
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
KMT	Kuomintang
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WEF	World Economic Forum
WTO	World Trade Organization

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

China's emergence as a global power is one of the most significant geopolitical developments of the 21st century, particularly under Xi Jinping's leadership, a leadership characterized by its high nationalism reflected in concepts like the *Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation*. As China's influence on the world stage increases, its foreign policy has faced more attention and scrutiny. It is often characterized as increasingly assertive and frequently argued to be driven by this nationalist sentiment. Hence, this study raises the question of whether nationalism influences Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping.

This study investigates whether nationalism impacts China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping, particularly whether it leads to a more assertive stance, exploring whether his nationalist discourse drives a more assertive tone on foreign policy and international relations or not necessarily. Understanding the influence of nationalism on China's foreign policy is essential for several reasons. It provides insight into the motivations behind China's actions on the international stage, which is vital for anticipating future behavior and developing effective foreign policy strategies. As China continues to rise as a global power, comprehending the factors that drive its foreign policy is critical for fostering international stability and cooperation.

This study used a qualitative research approach that utilizes summative content analysis to examine nationalist and foreign policy themes in Xi Jinping's speeches and writings. A total of 24 speeches/writings from Xi's mandate were analyzed: 12 domestic and 12 international, spanning from 2013, when Xi assumed office, to 2024. Four sources were utilized to collect materials. For domestic and international speeches/writings from 2013 to 2020, I referred to *The Governance of China*, which compiles Xi Jinping's major speeches and writings during that period. Since this publication only covers up to 2020, I turned to *Xinhua News Agency* and *Qiushi Journal* for domestic speeches/writings from 2021 to 2024, both credible official sources of the Chinese government. For international speeches/writings from 2021 to 2024, the official website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs was consulted, as it provides authoritative and regularly updated information on China's foreign policy. Domestic speeches/writings were selected based on thematic relevance, inspired by chapters from *The Governance of China*. International speeches/writings were selected based on significant events at high-level international or multilateral forums. By analyzing these texts, the research sought to identify recurring nationalist rhetoric and foreign policy principles, assessing whether they aligned or conflicted with each other.

The dissertation begins with a historical context of Chinese nationalism and China's foreign policy, setting the stage for understanding the current landscape. A literature review follows, synthesizing existing academic perspectives on the relationship between nationalism and foreign policy under Xi Jinping's leadership. The methodology is outlined to clarify the research approach, while subsequent chapters focus on analyzing Xi's speeches and writings.

As China's global influence expands, understanding the drivers of its foreign policy is crucial for international relations. This study investigates whether nationalism under Xi Jinping shapes China's engagement with the world. While substantial literature addresses Xi's assertive foreign policy, with many attributing it to his nationalist agenda, there remains a significant gap in discourse analysis that focuses on his rhetoric. To illustrate this assertiveness, previous research often highlights case studies or specific instances—such as territorial disputes in the South and East China Sea and responses to Taiwan. However, these analyses might not frame Xi's overall foreign policy stance and frequently overlook an examination of Xi's speeches, which might reveal a better understanding of Xi's nationalist tone and foreign policy stance and then understand whether one influences the other. As Chilton and Schäffner (2011) assert, political activity does not exist without the use of language; the practice of politics is predominantly constituted through language. By analyzing the language and themes present in Xi's domestic addresses—where nationalism is a recurring motif—and then the themes presented in his international speeches, this study aims to answer the research question of whether nationalism influences Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping's leadership.

CHAPTER 2

Chinese Nationalism and Foreign Policy Across History

To comprehend nationalism under Xi Jinping and its impact on foreign policy, one must examine the historical evolution of Chinese nationalism. Initially rooted in culturalism influenced by Confucian norms, Chinese identity emphasized cultural superiority and shaped interactions with neighboring entities. The chapter explores the shift from this culturalism to modern political nationalism, catalyzed by Western imperialism and the Opium Wars, which challenged the traditional Sino-centric worldview—the *Century of Humiliation* significantly reshaped Chinese national consciousness, stimulating a sense of national humiliation and a need for a more robust, unified identity. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 is highlighted as a key moment, spurring intellectual and cultural reforms that redefined Chinese national identity and laid the groundwork for modern nationalist movements. The chapter traces the evolution of Chinese nationalism under various leaders: Mao Zedong’s nativist and anti-imperialist stance, Deng Xiaoping’s liberalization and economic reforms, Jiang Zemin’s patriotic nationalism, and Hu Jintao’s internet-driven nationalism. Each leader’s approach contributed to developing a robust national identity and informed their foreign policy strategies. Finally, the chapter analyzes how these historical shifts have influenced Chinese foreign policy, from historical diplomatic strategies to the assertive approaches under Xi Jinping. It provides insights into China’s modern global stance and its implications for international relations.

2.1. From Culturalism to Nationalism

James Harrison’s *culturalism-to-nationalism* thesis proposes a significant transformation in Chinese self-perception, delineating a shift from an identity rooted in shared historical heritage to a contemporary emphasis on political parameters. While cultural considerations predominantly shaped ancient Chinese identity, the thesis argues that modern Chinese nationalism signifies a transition towards a focus on the political dimensions inherent in the concept of a nation-state. Harrison highlights that the development of this self-image spans over two millennia, originating from the Qin-Han imperial unification in 221 BC. The core of Chinese identity remained cultural, and the primary allegiance was to the culture itself rather than any specific state or nation. Townsend (1996) further argues that culturalism, rejecting the idea of formally equal states, insisted on legitimate rule based on adherence to Confucian norms. This perspective, bolstered by the Chinese empire’s substantial size, wealth, and power, exerted a lasting influence. As a crucial factor in the empire’s enduring survival, culturalism provided integrity to its worldview

and bridged periods of disunity. Moreover, it left a mark on both Chinese and alien governments, shaping values in line with traditional cultural norms. Harrison identifies two focal components in the evolution of culturalism in China. Firstly, a conviction in the unparalleled cultural superiority of China led to the categorization of non-Chinese peoples as potential military threats—not as genuine rivals but rather due to perceived backwardness. The second element involves expecting rulers to undergo education and govern based on universally valued Confucian principles. In both these aspects, Confucianism arises as the guiding force shaping the foundational beliefs of culturalism.

The first element, deeply rooted in Confucian thought, involves a hierarchical worldview that classifies non-Chinese entities as potential military threats due to perceived cultural backwardness. Mao (2022) argues that Confucianism significantly influences Chinese nationalism (culturalism), mainly through the concepts of *yí-xià* (夷夏). These terms clearly distinguish between the civilized Chinese and the barbarians, underscoring a cultural superiority rooted in Confucian principles. This superiority is attributed to the “cultured” Chinese (*xià*), or the Han Chinese, in contrast to the “uncivilized” barbarians (*yí*). Bhattacharya (2007) points out that the perceived dominance of the Chinese Han culture, evident through its advanced institutions, thought systems, language, and cultural richness, not only garnered recognition from neighboring entities but also led to their voluntary assimilation. This cultural superiority advanced a Han-centric civilizational state that justified Chinese sovereignty over non-Han communities, incorporating them, including the so-called “uncivilized barbarians” (*yí*), into its empire. Concerning the second aspect of culturalism pinpointed by Harrison, Confucianism is again underscored, notably for its substantial focus on moral governance and the fostering of leaders deeply versed in Confucian virtues. Essential virtues include *rén* (仁), symbolizing compassion and humaneness; *yì* (义), emphasizing moral integrity and ethical righteousness; *lǐ* (礼), relating to adherence to societal norms and rituals for harmony and order; *zhì* (智), involving wisdom and knowledge for informed decisions; *xìn* (信), highlighting honesty and trustworthiness in personal and political spheres; *zhōng* (忠), signifying loyalty and devotion; *shù* (恕), advocating for ethical reciprocity and empathy; and *xiào* (孝), stressing respect and obedience towards family, crucial in shaping societal and moral order (Lang et al., 2012). This focus on moral governance matches with another key concept identified by Mao (2022) within Confucianism—the term *tianxia* 天下 (“all under heaven”), which emphasizes the significance of cultural identity and the pursuit of benevolent politics by emphasizing the interconnectedness of the world under a harmonious order, promoting a collective sense of shared values and ethical governance, reflecting the Chinese civilizational state.

Townsend (1996) contends that China’s shift from culturalism to nationalism was intricately shaped by external factors, particularly imperialism and Western ideas. Despite the perceived strength of Chinese culturalism, the formidable Chinese empire faced a significant challenge from a competitive foreign culture, as foreign imperialism, armed

with robust military power and explicitly defying the Chinese worldview, eventually led to the empire's decline. The transition from culturalism to nationalism accelerated after the Opium Wars (1839–1860), challenging the Sino-centric worldview as Western forces intruded. Recognizing the prosperity and advancement of nations once labeled as “barbarians,” the Chinese underwent a deep shift in national consciousness, viewing China as part of the broader global community (Zheng, 2012). This resulted in a rejection of culturalism and the development of nationalism that would serve as a new basis for China's defense and regeneration. In essence, the undermining of cultural confidence, coupled with the absence of a robust nationalist identity, led to the disintegration of imperial China, paving the way for a new form of identity grounded in nationalism (Townsend, 1996).

2.2. Transition to Modern Nationalism and the May Fourth Movement

The shift from culturalism to modern nationalism in the late 19th century was ignited by a feeling of humiliation, tracing back to the onset of the First Opium War in 1839, during the Qing Dynasty, the final imperial dynasty of China, which was ruled by the Manchu ethnic minority. Central to this shift and the emergence of Chinese nationalism was China's *Century of Humiliation*, spanning from the First Opium War of 1840–1842, when the British forced China into opening its ports to the opium trade, until the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 (Scott, 2008; Kaufman, 2010). Following the First Opium War, China faced mounting pressure from Western nations and Japan, resulting in significant territorial losses, including ports, Manchuria, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. This period of humiliation persisted through the 1910s and 20s with independence movements in Tibet and Mongolia, as well as Japanese incursions into Manchuria. China lost nearly a third of its territory during this tumultuous period. Internally, the nation grappled with rebellions fueled by resistance to the foreign presence and perceived Qing court compliance with foreign demands (Kaufman, 2010).

Scott (2008) elucidates the significant impact of the First Opium War, noting how British military superiority led to the forced introduction of opium into China, causing widespread addiction and social unrest. He highlights the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, which started a series of unequal treaties favoring Western powers and included territorial seizures and economic exploitation. Shanghai served as a symbol of Western dominance through extraterritorial concessions that underscored China's subjugation. These events fueled nationalist sentiments and resistance against Western imperialism, catalyzing France's involvement alongside Britain in the Second Opium War following the murder of a French missionary in 1857. Scott underlines the great humiliation for China with the destruction of the Yuanming Yuan (圆明园), the emperor's Summer Palace, as a stark symbol of the clash between Western powers and China. The Convention of Beijing further constrained China, solidifying the “treaty system” and fueling resentment, which prompted Chinese intellectuals to shift from a Sinocentric worldview to that of a nation-state within the Western order. Additionally, Scott details the reshaping of East

Asian dynamics during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895. Japan’s unexpected military strength led to China’s swift defeat, tarnishing its image and jeopardizing its territorial integrity. The Treaty of Shimonoseki ceded Taiwan to Japan and reduced China’s influence over Korea, sparking internal reflection and strategic maneuvers among reformers like Sun Yat-sen and Zhang Zhidong. Scott also discusses the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 as a response to increasing Western influence and perceived imperialism, characterizing it as a religious war targeting Christian converts supported by foreign presence, which escalated tensions. The Western depiction of the uprising as the “Yellow Peril” led to sensationalist reactions and called for punitive measures, culminating in an international relief force crushing the rebellion, resulting in harsh consequences for China under the Protocols of Beijing, including heavy penalties, the stationing of foreign troops, and restrictions on Chinese armaments, marking a significant low point in China’s global standing.

China underwent self-reflection and introspection as it grappled with its perceived decline relative to Western powers and Japan. This sense of national inferiority was particularly acute when juxtaposed with Japan’s rapid modernization and success in adapting to the modern world (Kaufman, 2010). The portrayal of China as the “Sick Man of East Asia” in an 1896 British journal article impacted Chinese society, fueling a collective desire to shed this negative image (Garrity, 2017). The late Qing dynasty saw Chinese intellectuals recognizing China’s inability to integrate into the modern international system, prompting a quest to understand its weaknesses compared to the West and Japan. This led to an influx of foreign texts on economics and political sociology as intellectuals sought insights into China’s resurgence (Kaufman, 2010). This period signified a radical departure from China’s historical path as the nation endeavored to reinvent itself as a modern nation-state. Central to this transformation was emphasizing economic advancement and embracing modernization, which involved adopting Western methodologies for national progress. This ideological shift was part of an intellectual and *Cultural Revolution* known as the *New Culture Movement*. Beginning in the 1910s, this movement significantly altered Chinese intellectual thought, influencing the evolution of China’s national identity. Leaders such as Chen Duxiu, Liang Qichao, and Lu Xun advocated moving away from traditional Confucian values, which they believed contributed to China’s weaknesses. They agreed that adopting modern Western concepts of nationalism, which emphasized forming a nation-state, was essential (Zheng, 2012). This consensus led them to call for urgent cultural reforms to remedy perceived flaws in the Chinese national character, a movement vigorously championed by reformers like Lu Xun (Wu, 2008).

Zheng (2012) outlines two influential political factions that shaped modern Chinese nationalism. Firstly, the anti-Manchu revolutionaries, under Sun Yat-sen’s leadership, aimed to dismantle the Qing Dynasty to establish a Han-dominated nation-state. This group’s ideology, heavily inspired by Western nationalism, centered around the concept of Zhonghua Minzu 中华民族 (Chinese nation), promoting a predominantly Han, unified Chinese identity. Conversely, the constitutionalists, led by Liang Qichao, advocated for

a more inclusive, multinational state, acknowledging the Manchus as an essential component of Chinese society and envisioned a Chinese state that embraced the Qing Dynasty's multicultural legacy. The 1911 Xinhai Revolution, led by Sun Yat-sen and his Kuomintang (KMT) party, ended China's imperial rule and the Qing Dynasty, establishing the Republic of China with Sun as its Provisional President; during this period, Sun Yat-sen's philosophy evolved, adopting Liang Qichao's "great nationalism" and moving away from Han nationalism. His shift was evident in his advocacy for the integration of China's ethnic groups—Han, Manchus, Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetans—in his speech on the Three People's Principles (Democracy, Nationalism, and People's Livelihood), as noted by Harris (1997). The inception of the new republic, as Sun Yat-sen professed in his 1912 inaugural address as Provisional President, was based on the concept of "the republic of the five nationalities" (五族共和), representing a notable shift in the nation's approach to its ethnically diverse populace (Zheng, 2012). Besides, in a demonstration of political pragmatism and to uphold national unity, Sun Yat-sen, initially the chosen leader of the republic, eventually ceded his role to Yuan Shikai, the Beiyang government's architect. This decision tacitly acknowledged the need to negotiate with the Qing, given their military predicament.

The ideological foundation for the May Fourth Movement, identified by Zheng (2012) as a critical moment in the development of Chinese nationalism, was well-established by 1919. This movement reached a defining moment when 3000 university students gathered at the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing, voicing their opposition through a manifesto criticizing the Paris Peace Conference's decision to transfer Japanese territorial claims in Shandong province. This surge in nationalism, deeply rooted in national humiliation, was crucial in shaping China's modern national identity (Wu, 2008). The period around May Fourth witnessed an unprecedented rise in national self-determination, characterized by remarkable political engagement and intellectual sophistication. This era not only heightened the Chinese people's awareness of nationalism but also significantly accelerated the country's journey toward modernization (Zheng, 2012). The Beiyang Government, grappling with legitimacy and control challenges, resulted in a fragmented China amidst rising Chinese nationalism and external pressures from Japan, the Soviet Union, and Western nations. Influential figures from the May 4 Movement founded the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921, while others, including Sun Yat-sen's successor, Chiang Kai-shek, joined the KMT, the Nationalist Party. Both parties united in their opposition to the Beiyang government and, in advocating for national liberation, formed the First United Front under Sun Yat-sen to combat foreign influence and warlordism (Babones, 2019). However, influenced by his Soviet training and opposition to communism, Chiang Kai-shek launched a purge in 1927 to eradicate the Chinese communist presence, leading to many casualties (Cucchisi, 2002). A decisive military action followed this campaign against the communists, as Chiang's KMT successfully overthrew the Beiyang government

during the Northern Expedition, culminating in the establishment of a new national government in 1928 (Babones, 2019).

The Nationalist government's early years brought optimism with hopes for political unity, economic prosperity, national pride, and security. However, the administration became increasingly ineffective and corrupt, losing unity and popular support (Hong, 1999). At the same time, the civil war between the KMT and the CCP from 1927 to 1949 highlighted their conflicting visions for a unified, modern China, with significant divergences in their approach rooted in historical and ethical perspectives on the global order (Fitzgerald, 1995). Influenced by Fascism's success in Europe, Chiang and his supporters admired its emphasis on strong leadership, national superiority, and militarization, proclaiming Fascism as the remedy China needed (Hong, 1999). The KMT drew ideological inspiration from European fascism, linking its nationalism to that of Italy and Germany.

In the 1930s, China saw two political movements: the *Blue Shirts* and the *New Life Movement*, supported by Chiang Kai-shek. The *Blue Shirts* mirrored fascist youth movements, while the *New Life Movement* aimed to revive Confucian morals with a fascist twist, emphasizing control, military power, and male supremacy (Hong, 1999). The *Blue Shirts Society*, formed in 1932, was a secretive and feared faction within the KMT, dedicated to revitalizing national revolutionary spirit and maintaining strict discipline, promoting Confucian fascism through education, militarization, and moral indoctrination, and the *New Life Movement* of 1934 exemplified this approach, seeking to instill traditional virtues in everyday life (Chen, 2021). Chiang launched the *New Life Movement* from Nanchang to spread the *Blue Shirts*' spirit nationwide, addressing China's social degeneration by promoting a disciplined, militarized lifestyle rooted in Confucian virtues. This movement emphasized cultural, productive, and militarized modes of life, aiming to transform the population into disciplined citizens with rules for daily behavior, encouraging propriety, righteousness, integrity, and a sense of shame (Hong, 1999). Unlike European fascism, Chinese fascism was rooted in traditional Confucian values, seen as essential for national rebirth and opposing communism (Chen, 2021).

Chiang's nationalism drew him towards traditional values, believing that the revival of China's "fundamental spirit" could restore the nation's prestige and linking Sun Yat-sen's *Three People's Principles* with ancient Chinese virtues while advocating for character development, self-discipline, and sense of duty. Anti-communism was central to his beliefs, viewing communism's class struggle as destructive to the Chinese family and social order, prioritizing the internal threat of communism over the external danger from Japan, considering the former a more dangerous "disease of the heart" (Chen, 2021). This made him initially hesitant to confront Japan and place a higher priority on battling the Communists; however, he was later compelled to redirect his military efforts when a full-scale Japanese invasion occurred in 1937 (Cucchisi, 2002).

The Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) unfolded as a devastating conflict characterized by substantial casualties and atrocities, including the Nanjing Massacre, which

served to intensify Chinese nationalism and reinforced the narrative of the *Century of Humiliation*, symbolizing the enduring struggles and suffering experienced during China's history of foreign aggression. The concept of national humiliation has played a significant role in shaping China's history and quest for independence. It gained prominence during the late Qing Dynasty. It was closely linked to patriotism in early 20th-century editorials and history textbooks, contributing to the construction of citizenship and national identity in the Republic of China (Wang, 2008). By 1945, with the conclusion of World War II, the KMT's forces were depleted, and confidence in their leadership had eroded. China's economy was in shambles. After the war, both the KMT and CCP resumed their civil war, but the CCP had significantly expanded its influence (Cucchisi, 2002). The *Blue Shirts'* disdain for the masses and inability to address socioeconomic issues further alienated the rural population, allowing the CCP to gain support through radical land reforms. The KMT's failure to centralize power and govern effectively, coupled with the CCP's strategic rise, culminated in the KMT's downfall and the establishment of the PRC in 1949 (Chen, 2021). This civil war eventually led to Chiang Kai-shek's defeat and retreat to Taiwan in 1949. He established an exiled government in Taiwan while still asserting his claim over all of China. Meanwhile, Mao Zedong emerged as the new leader of the Communist government in mainland China, leading to the foundation of the PRC.

2.3. Evolution of Nationalism from Mao Zedong to Hu Jintao's Leadership

The PRC's formation in 1949 marked a transformative moment in Chinese nationalism. The CCP blended Marxist principles with nationalist ideals to create a unified identity based on language, history, and culture. Under Mao Zedong's leadership, this approach successfully united China's diverse ethnic groups, elevating the nation's global standing and fostering national pride (Modongal, 2016). This shift replaced traditional notions of "citizen" and "race" with a focus on "class," symbolizing state sovereignty and unity (Fitzgerald, 1995). The CCP, condemning the KMT as imperialist tools, embraced the nationalist spirit of the May Fourth Movement, with Mao using national liberation rhetoric despite Soviet communist internationalism (Babones, 2019). State nationalism in the PRC emphasizes a unified national identity across its diverse population, where 93% are Han Chinese and 7% belong to 55 minority nationalities. It acknowledges ethnic differences while asserting that all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, are part of the Chinese nation (Townsend, 1992). This nationalism has been evident in development efforts and advancements since 1949, which are crucial for national consciousness (Suresh, 2002). Zhang (2013) outlines Mao Zedong's nationalism as a staunchly anti-imperialist and anti-feudal ideology shaped in response to historical events like the Opium War. Central to Mao's ideology is the *New Democracy Theory*, framing the revolution as led by the proletariat against imperialism and feudalism. Mao's nationalism extends beyond national independence to the goals of socialism and communism, integrating Lenin's theory of national colony with Chinese historical realities into a two-step action plan addressing the national-democratic and socialist revolutions. Notably, Mao's nationalism incorporates

an internationalist perspective, advocating proletariat unity across capitalist countries to overthrow imperialism globally. Mao emphasizes equality among ethnic groups, opposing discrimination and supporting policies for equal rights and autonomy. Additionally, his nationalism underscores self-reliance, with foreign aid playing a supplementary role. Suresh (2002) notes that state-driven nationalism in China peaked from 1949 to 1969 due to government appeals for national defense during the Korean War, Taiwan Strait tensions, and conflicts with the Soviet Union. International conflicts, including the Korean War and others up to the 1979 Vietnam invasion, significantly shaped Chinese nationalist sentiments, often involving popular mobilization and continuous rhetoric in state media. However, in subsequent years, the PRC adjusted its approach to coordinate with the evolving global order, departing from mass mobilization politics in favor of a more nuanced engagement with international realities.

Zhao (2000) outlines that a blend of nativism and anti-traditionalism marked Mao's era. Nativism is a solid nationalistic sentiment emphasizing self-reliance and independence from foreign influences, including strategic distancing from the Soviet Union. Mao's policy of "zili gengsheng" (self-reliance) epitomized this nativist nationalism, aiming for a fundamental transformation of China's national spirit. The *Cultural Revolution* (1966–1976) can be seen as the apex of Mao's nativist policies, where he sought to isolate China from the rest of the world—this period emphasized internal development and minimal external dependency, attempting to reshape the global capitalist system. Conversely, the anti-traditionalism aspect is particularly evident in his stance towards Confucianism. During the *Cultural Revolution*, the CCP vehemently opposed Confucius, symbolizing tradition and hierarchy, as his ideals conflicted with the movement's radical goals. Mao Zedong's campaign against *The Four Olds* intensified this opposition, destroying Confucian symbols and severely criticizing his philosophies (Zhang & Schwartz, 2020). In 1973, Mao and the *Gang of Four*¹ launched the *Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius* Campaign, which lasted until shortly after Mao died in 1976. Initially focused on Chinese history, it evolved into an attack on Lin Biao, Mao's former "Second-in-Command," accused of trying to assassinate Mao in 1971. The campaign ended with the *Gang of Four's* arrest and the *Cultural Revolution's* conclusion. Politically motivated, the campaign falsely accused Lin Biao of using Confucian teachings to oppose Mao and restore capitalism when the real issue was Lin's anti-Maoist stance (Fanxi & Benton, 2020). This campaign targeted Confucian values contrary to Maoist principles, marking a shift from earlier periods that acknowledged some progressive aspects of Confucianism and continued the *Cultural Revolution's* radical policies by emphasizing ideological purification and framing Confucianism as opposed to Marxist class struggle (Gregor & Chang, 1979). Mao saw Confucianism as promoting self-interest, nepotism, and corruption, hindering socialist progress. His anti-corruption efforts and theory of permanent revolution aimed to address these issues,

¹The *Gang of Four* was a political faction of four CC officials, led by Jiang Qing, Mao Zedong's last wife, who were blamed for the excesses of the *Cultural Revolution* and arrested in 1976, shortly after Mao's death.

recognizing that corruption could collapse communist rule, as with the KMT after the Anti-Japanese War (Fanxi & Benton, 2020). It also aimed to consolidate Mao's power by eliminating traditional local elites and reinforcing central control. The condemnation of Confucius was linked to internal Party struggles, especially following the *Great Leap Forward* and subsequent famine, which led to significant criticism of Mao's policies (Zhang & Schwartz, 2020).

Following Mao Zedong's death in 1976 and the end of the *Cultural Revolution*, Deng Xiaoping rose to power, initiating a new political era. He addressed the erosion of social values by rehabilitating political prisoners and condemning the *Cultural Revolution* and its leaders (Zhang & Schwartz, 2020). Between 1979 and 1989, Deng Xiaoping's push for modernization and openness to Western ideas significantly enhanced China's international standing and relationships (Mondongal, 2016). In the late seventies, the Maoist grand theory underwent a breakdown, losing its status as the official orthodoxy and dominant ideology, which deepened the "crisis of faith" within the Chinese party-state (Suresh, 2002). To maintain regime legitimacy, Mao's legacy was divided into positive early and negative later phases (*Cultural Revolution*), paralleling the rehabilitation of Confucius (Zhang & Schwartz, 2020). Subsequently, in the 1980s, a reformist discourse occurred advocating pro-Western alignment and aiming to distance itself from the errors of the *Cultural Revolution* (Mondongal, 2016).

Deng Xiaoping's reforms marked a significant shift from class struggle to modernization, encapsulated in the "Four Modernizations," emphasizing economic development. These reforms were driven by the trauma of the *Cultural Revolution*, highlighting the need for stability and economic growth. As a victim rather than an accomplice of the *Cultural Revolution*, Deng had the credibility to implement these changes (MacFarquhar, 1987). This departure from the original vision of the Chinese revolution was marked by the implementation of new social and economic policies, celebrated by the CPC and official media, which omitted any reference to social classes (Suresh, 2002). In contrast with Mao's anti-traditionalism, the 1980s saw significant cultural changes in China, notably the "culture craze" (wenhua re 文化熱), where intellectuals redefined Chinese culture through *New Confucianism*, driven by cultural and political needs. This movement blended Chinese traditions with Western influences, revitalizing Confucian studies and spurring the "national studies craze" (guoxue re 国学熱) of the 1990s (Song, 2003). Confucianism became central in official discourse, aligning with academic views and supporting Deng's focus on stability and modernization. The seventh five-year plan funded extensive New Confucian research to counter Western influences and address the ideological gap left by the *Cultural Revolution* (Song, 2003). Confucius, previously used to legitimize the Communist regime, was now invoked to dignify and stabilize Chinese society amid modernization efforts. The restoration of Confucian shrines and severe punishments for vandalism symbolized this shift. Public discourse reframed Confucius's teachings to align with contemporary needs,

refuting claims that he was detached from practical matters like farming and military affairs (Zhang & Schwartz, 2020).

The peak of liberal nationalism unfolded with the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement, starting with protests following the death of Hu Yaobang, widely regarded as a liberal figure and whose forced resignation by Deng was seen as unfair by many (Mondogal, 2016; Khan, 2006). After escalating tensions due to police clashes and inflammatory media, on May 4, 1989, around 100,000 students and workers demanded media reforms and dialogue in Beijing, which the government denied, preferring talks with appointed groups. Students occupied Tiananmen Square on May 13, starting a hunger strike for dialogue and retraction of accusations from the People's Daily. Despite martial law declared on May 20, protests continued. Communist Party discussions led to military intervention to end the crisis, ousting General Secretary Zhao Ziyang for his opposition to force. The deployment of military forces resulted in violence and casualties (Khan, 2006). By 1989, the 2540th anniversary of Confucius's birth reaffirmed his relevance, promoting harmony between tradition and modernity. This event, after the Tiananmen Square Massacre, showed the government's stance against anti-traditional and democratic trends. Gu Mu's speech condemned the rejection of Chinese culture and Western worship, advocating a balanced view of Confucius. This "critical inheritance" approach evaluated his thought in a nuanced way. The shift from Mao's political focus to Deng's emphasis on national identity reflects changing political needs, with both regimes valuing Confucianism to address contemporary challenges (Zhang & Schwartz, 2020). The concerns about potential social chaos and the perceived threat of democracy to stability led the Chinese government to quash the movement decisively, concluding this era of liberal nationalism (Mondogal, 2016).

From 1989 to 2001, during the era of Jiang Zemin, China underwent a significant surge in patriotic nationalism and was shaped by a convergence of international and domestic factors (Mondogal, 2016). In the early 1990s, the CCP turned to nationalism as a means to bolster national unity in the wake of the collapse of communist regimes in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, relying on it as a cornerstone of shared political values and loyalty among the Chinese populace, including critics of the regime (Zhao, 2021). This shift coincided with efforts by Chinese elites to revive traditional values, supplanting Marxism-Leninism with principles better aligned with China's modern needs. As part of this strategy, the promotion of "academic nativism" aimed to derive new theories from ancient Chinese traditions, illustrating a delicate balance between preserving Chinese identity and embracing modernization and globalization (Zhao, 2000). In the 1990s, there was a notable resurgence in the discourse on national humiliation, primarily in response to the Tiananmen movement, aiming to shift the focus of the youth from domestic to foreign issues, which exacerbated tensions with Western nations (Callahan, 2006). This national revival was intensified by various factors, including international sanctions post-Tiananmen crackdown, escalating Sino-Japanese disputes, repeated Olympic bid failures,

the bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade, and efforts to deter Taiwan's independence following President Li Tenghui's US visit and advocacy for Taiwan independence in 1996 (Mondogal, 2016; Zhao, 2021).

The CCP significantly influenced domestic dynamics, actively promoting anti-Western sentiment through leadership speeches and educational reforms emphasizing patriotism (Mondogal, 2016). Concurrently, the perception of the West among the Chinese populace underwent a significant transformation, aligning more closely with the official portrayal (Suresh, 2002). Launched in 1991, the CCP's *Patriotic Education Campaign* marks a central shift in ideological reeducation, mainly targeting Chinese youth. It underscores China's tumultuous history and the impact of the Communist revolution, resulting in significant changes in school history textbooks. This transition from a class-struggle narrative to a patriotic one, which blames the West for historical suffering, denotes a vital shift in Beijing's identity politics (Wang, 2008). The campaign, reinforced by the 1994 *Outline for Implementing Patriotic Education*, aims to enhance national spirit, foster pride, and cultivate patriotism, supporting "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and emphasizing the study of China's history of foreign invasions and its unique characteristics compared to Western democracy (Callahan, 2006). Since the early nineties, there has been a growing disillusionment with Western nations among the Chinese population, driven by nationalist sentiments among intellectuals (Suresh, 2002). This move towards a more conservative, state-supported nationalism matches the CCP's efforts to link patriotic education with national humiliation in literature and media, channeling public sentiment towards nationalistic goals (Callahan, 2006).

Notably, nationalist sentiments, not solely controlled by the state, also stemmed from populist feelings demanding government accountability in protecting national rights and encouraging individual involvement in foreign policy, exemplified during the mid-1990s with the publication of "China Can Say No" (Zhao, 2021; Wang, 1997). Despite not being a scholarly work, its radical nationalism warrants some attention, resonating with many Chinese critical of Western admiration and advocating for resistance against perceived US imperialism (Wang, 1997). The book highlights Han chauvinism, advocating for economic nationalism and military readiness against the US. The sequel, "China Can Still Say No," shifts focus to Japan, reflecting anti-Japanese sentiment among some Chinese (Gries, 1997). This popular nationalist sentiment was also reflected later on during Hu Jintao's mandate in the early 2000s by young *fenqings* (愤青)², along with the increased use of the internet, who occasionally challenged Beijing's authority, and also through some notable incidents include the 1999 embassy bombing in Belgrade, the 2001 mid-air collision, and the 2005 anti-Japanese protests Japan's United Nations (UN) Security Council bid and historical textbooks, as well as Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine (Zhao, 2021).

²*Fenqings* (愤青) literally translates to "angry youth."

Zhao (2021) notes that popular nationalism provided a propaganda boost for the state, yet its emotional anti-foreignism posed challenges for leaders advocating extensive foreign interactions crucial for economic growth. As both a legitimate tool and a means for citizens to assess the state's performance, unchecked nationalism could lead to unpredictable consequences, particularly in the cyber age of burgeoning social media, as will be analyzed in the next section. Chinese leaders faced constant challenges in managing nationalist sentiments, risking backlash if they failed to fulfill nationalist promises. To balance these aspects, the state pursued a dual strategy in the 1990s and 2000s, tolerating and sometimes endorsing popular sentiments while following cautious policy measures. Describing nationalism as a force requiring guidance, the Chinese government stopped anti-foreign expressions, even banning some demonstrations. By talking tough but acting strategically, the state aimed to control and shape nationalist discourse as needed, manipulating its direction, content, and intensity to serve its interests.

Modongal (2016) notes internet-driven nationalism in the early 2000s, which was linked to the *fenqings*, young individuals born post-1980s. These Y generation members, shaped by a consumerist culture and China's economic rise, notably through events like the 2008 Olympics and World Trade Organization (WTO) entry in 2001, expressed their nationalistic views online. Gries (2005) explains that Chinese analysts mark 2003 as the beginning of a "second wave" of nationalism, diverging from prior manifestations centered on anti-American sentiments triggered by events like the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis and the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. This newer wave, dubbed "Internet nationalism" by Gries, notably targets Japan and exhibits a robust online presence, adept at translating public sentiment into tangible political actions. An incident exemplifies this assertion in July 2003, when Chinese nationalists led an online petition to thwart Japan's \$12 billion rail contract bid, driven by historical grievances. This digital campaign swiftly amassed 90,000 e-signatures, successfully stalling the decision process, coinciding with heightened tensions during a Japanese ministerial visit to Beijing. Gries further notes that the discovery of wartime Japanese mustard gas in Qiqihar further fueled anti-Japanese sentiments, prompting another significant petition. Building on this escalating anti-Japanese sentiment, Arsène (2020) highlights the 2006 protest within the virtual game "Fantasy Westward Journey" as a notable development. This protest, spurred by lingering discontent from the 2005 demonstrations against Japan's UN Security Council bid, underscores the central role of internet platforms in mobilizing activism. It emphasizes the evolving landscape where virtual spaces emerge as potent arenas for political and social movements, bridging gamers and netizens with broader geopolitical issues and facilitating a novel form of protest transcending physical boundaries. Gries (2005) enhances the 2005 demonstrations, noting a substantial e-signature petition with 46 million names presented to a UN aide. This petition critiqued Japan's suitability for a permanent UN Security Council seat, citing a perceived lack of contrition for past transgressions. These events demonstrate the significant impact of popular nationalism

on China's foreign policy, as seen in Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's public opposition to Japan's bid, underscoring the role of popular sentiment in shaping China's foreign policy landscape, often prioritizing nationalist concerns over economic interests.

China's ability to host the Beijing Olympics 2008 was also a significant source of nationalistic pride. Garrity (2017) discusses how the 2008 Beijing Olympics embodied China's dual motivations rooted in historical shame and political ambitions. The desire to host the Olympics stemmed from China's collective memory of the *Century of Humiliation*, marked by military defeats and subordination to the West and Japan. China sought to shed its "Sick Man" image and reclaim global standing by showcasing physical prowess through sports. Elite Chinese advocated for Western sports adoption to bolster national strength, viewing international sporting success to dispel negative perceptions. The official slogan "New China, Great Olympics" epitomized China's aspiration to demonstrate regained strength and hosting capabilities. Extensive modernization efforts in Beijing, iconic venues like the National Stadium or the Bird's Nest, and the elaborate opening ceremony reinforced China's organizational prowess and historical narrative, portraying a revitalized nation on the global stage. Yang and Lim (2010) describe this wave of nationalism as "social nationalism." They link this to various factors, including the gap between the *fenqings'* ambitions for China's international stature and their actual perceptions, a miscalculation of the global response to the Beijing Olympics, and the idea of a "Beijing Consensus" challenging the "Washington Consensus." Additionally, the influences of globalization, such as escalating trade conflicts and widening income disparities, also played a role. The *fenqings* have harnessed the internet for organizing protests and coordination, utilizing China's expanding economic influence to advance national interests and articulate their viewpoints.

2.4. Chinese Foreign Policy Through History

Chinese foreign policy, formalized with the PRC in 1949, marked China's entry into global politics. Historically, however, Confucian heritage emphasized the emperor as the "Son of Heaven," fostering China's "Middle Kingdom" perception. This influenced diplomatic relations through the tributary system and the Silk Road, highlighting China's dominance in East Asia and its openness to interactions that reinforced its perceived superiority. Fairbank (1969) explains the challenges in understanding China's foreign policy due to the lack of a formal foreign office and dispersed historical records on border control, frontier trade, and tribute embassies. Despite this, Fairbank provides a detailed analysis of ancient China's foreign policy, highlighting the focus on land-based defense against Inner Asia nomadic tribes, which influenced China's preference for continental security over maritime pursuits. This strategic emphasis shaped China's cautious naval development and foreign policy, particularly under Manchu leadership. Fairbank also highlights China's self-perception as a preeminent cultural and political entity, sustained by historical self-sufficiency, the tribute system, and Confucian education, fostering a distinctive national identity. The Opium Wars and confrontations with Japan during the *Century*

of *Humiliation* profoundly impacted Chinese nationalism and foreign policy, disrupting China's self-perception and leading to defeats and territorial losses. Determined to restore its sovereignty and international standing, China used this period as a critical narrative in nation-building and anti-imperialism efforts. Callahan (2004) notes the importance of the *Century of Humiliation* narrative, highlighted by symbols like the Yuanming Garden, to remember past humiliations and glorify China's past. This complex nationalism acknowledges historical greatness and vulnerabilities, merging communist and nationalist views, critiquing foreign influence, and shaping a cautious, strategic approach in foreign relations, particularly with Japan.

Chinese foreign policy officially began in 1949 with the PRC's establishment and has since evolved to reflect internal changes and global political dynamics. Mao's revolutionary activism sought to build a communist nation and restore national pride damaged by foreign invasions and *Unequal Treaties*; hence, in his early years, Mao emphasized the need to rise after years of humiliation (Serrano, 2018). Under Mao, Chinese foreign policy aimed to safeguard national security, ensure China's hard-won state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and enhance China's international status (Khan, 2006). From 1949 to 1959, Mao Zedong's *Lean to One Side* policy aligned China with the Soviet Union to counter US support for the Taiwanese Nationalists. This alliance, consistent with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)' anti-US stance, helped China consolidate its regime and safeguard national independence. China relied on Soviet economic assistance, capital, technology, and expertise for nation-building (Xia, 2008; Khan, 2006). The 1950 Sino-Soviet Treaty consolidated their alliance against potential US and Japanese aggression, while the Korean War heightened Sino-American tensions as the USSR backed China and the US imposed a strict embargo and blocked its UN membership, with tensions rising further during the 1954 PRC bombardment of Jinmen amidst the US-Taiwan security agreement, leading to primarily stalled Sino-American ambassadorial talks in 1955 over Taiwan and the embargo (Xia, 2008). The US efforts to isolate and contain China, resulting in limited diplomatic recognition and trade restrictions, fueled a sense of "angry isolation" in China, stimulating nationalism and reinforcing the belief in self-reliance (Qu, 2005). Nevertheless, an essential diplomatic concept from that era, the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*, was first introduced by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai in 1953 and formally outlined in the Sino-Indian agreements on Tibet signed in 1954 (Gillespie, 2012). These principles promote peace and friendship between nations with different systems and advocate for territorial integrity, sovereignty, and non-aggression while opposing hegemony and interference. Widely embraced, they shape international law and the UN charter, calling for a just world order based on respect, equality, and peaceful negotiation (Jiali & Thakur, 2004).

The Sino-Soviet relationship declined in the late 1950s and early 1960s due to ideological clashes and geopolitical tensions. China's disapproval of Soviet de-Stalinization and Marxism-Leninism, frustration over Soviet dominance, inadequate nuclear assistance,

and lack of support in border disputes with India contributed to this. Mao criticized Khrushchev's conciliatory approach to the West and their differing strategies during the Cuban Missile Crisis, leading both nations to formally condemn each other's communist policies (Xia, 2008; Khan, 2006). Following a rift in Sino-Soviet relations, China moved away from the Soviet model under Mao Zedong. In the late 1950s, the *Great Leap Forward* sought rapid industrialization through mass mobilization. The *Cultural Revolution* in the 1960s aimed to cleanse the Communist Party and combat capitalist influences. The Red Guards, mainly students, enforced Maoist policies by eliminating "counter-revolutionary" elements. This instability and political turmoil diverted focus from foreign policy and further isolated China internationally (Khan, 2006). Hence, in the 1960s, China prioritized revolutionary self-reliance and nationalism in its foreign policy. The Sino-Soviet split, driven by ideological differences and nationalism, led China to pursue self-reliance and adopt an anti-Soviet stance. This shift in Chinese nationalism significantly reshaped domestic and foreign policy, influencing the nation's trajectory (Zhu, 2001).

Mao introduced the "intermediate zone" theory, adjusting the *Two-World Theory* to position China strategically against imperialism. This later became the *Three Worlds Theory*, shaping China's stance toward the Third World (Gillespie, 2012). The 1955 Bandung Conference marked a crucial step in China's backing of national liberation movements and strategic alliances across Asia and Africa (Xia, 2008). Zhou Enlai's 1963 visit to Africa and Mao's *Three Worlds Theory* showed China's commitment to Third World nations (Zhu, 2001). The Third World became central in global power dynamics, with China supporting nations fighting for independence or resisting reactionary regimes and advocating for self-reliance (Gillespie, 2012). This shift in China's foreign policy was driven by a commitment to anti-imperialist resistance, which has been intertwined with Chinese nationalism since the late Qing dynasty. China's aid, often gifts or low-interest loans, aimed to improve its international image and geopolitical interests to counter Soviet influence (Zhu, 2001; Friedman, 2015). China's entry into the UN in 1971 and its subsequent diplomatic initiatives alarmed the USSR, prompting increased Soviet engagement with the Third World. The USSR aimed to support Third World interests, focusing on combating imperialism and addressing economic inequality (Friedman, 2015). By 1976, China's foreign aid proved unsustainable, leading to a strategic shift towards domestic economic development. In contrast, under Brezhnev, the USSR continued to advance the Third World agenda, promoting economic equality and opposing imperialism (Friedman, 2015).

By the late 60s and early 70s, Mao recognized the impracticality of confronting the Soviet Union and the US while handling internal issues. Internal and external pressures, such as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the 1969 border conflict with China, led to a reassessment of China's foreign policy as the *Cultural Revolution* turmoil eased (Gillespie, 2012). Despite anti-American rhetoric during the Vietnam War, Mao viewed the USSR as a more significant threat due to its proximity, and in seeking

to counter the Soviet threat, Mao pursued accommodation with the US (Khan, 2006). In the early 1970s, both countries seized an opportunity to normalize relations driven by mutual strategic interests. Nixon's historic 1972 visit to China ended the US containment policy, leading to China's admission to the UN over Taiwan despite efforts to maintain Taiwan's UN membership. The UN ultimately recognized Beijing's Communist government over Taiwan (Khan, 2006). Despite ideological differences, China temporarily aligned with the US, culminating in normalized relations in 1979. This realignment strengthened China's global standing through new ties with industrialized and pro-US developing nations (Gillespie, 2012). These changes altered China's relationship with the world, and China began to participate more actively in international organizations and economic integration (Qu, 2005). This era of shifting diplomatic dynamics coincided with a period of strategic maneuvering known as triangular diplomacy from 1970 to 1989. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong and later Deng Xiaoping, China sought to handle the complexities of the Cold War by improving relations with the US as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union's influence (Xia, 2008).

Ultimately, China shifted away from this alliance strategy, redirecting its focus towards domestic reform and modernization, thus adopting a more passive foreign policy stance in the immediate post-Mao era (Gillespie, 2012). Deng Xiaoping's rise to power after Mao's death in 1976 marked a significant turning point, steering China towards economic reforms and global integration while maintaining Communist Party governance (Xia, 2008). This transition coincided with China's move towards Communist "normality" following removing the radical *Gang of Four*. Ceasing direct support for revolutionary groups abroad, China sought to normalize relations with its neighbors, especially amidst internal exhaustion from the *Cultural Revolution* and tensions in nearby countries like Vietnam and Laos. Deng Xiaoping initiated sweeping economic reforms, transitioning China to a market economy and departing from Mao's revolutionary internationalism (Khan, 2006). Deng advocated for a more pragmatic and balanced approach to China's foreign policy, scaling back support for global revolutionary movements and emphasizing the pursuit of an independent foreign policy, which contributed to China's emergence as a nascent superpower during the Cold War era (Xia, 2008). Deng Xiaoping's ideology shifted from traditional socialist policies by embracing capitalist practices under "socialism with Chinese characteristics." Domestically, he spearheaded economic reforms and internationally implemented an "open door" policy to bolster economic relations with the West (Khan, 2006; Zhu, 2001). Deng's shift from Mao's isolationist policies stimulated China's modernization and global integration, enhancing economic growth through foreign investment, free trade zones, and integration into the world economy (Khan, 2006). The "open door" policy, aimed at attracting foreign investment and technology, sought to safeguard China's national independence by avoiding economic and political dependence on any dominant country, signaling a pivot from earlier self-reliance strategies that led to inefficiency and isolation (Zhu, 2001).

Under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, China's foreign policy experienced significant shifts, marked by strategic diplomatic efforts and a move towards enhanced openness and collaboration with the global community. Alongside domestic economic reforms, China reoriented its foreign policy towards promoting peaceful diplomacy and economic interactions with various countries, including former rivals (Zhu, 2001). Serrano (2018) outlines significant diplomatic policies introduced by Deng, such as the embrace of the "Four Modernizations" in 1978, which focused on modernizing China's economy in agriculture, industry, defense, and technology. Additionally, Deng implemented reforms like the "open door" policy to attract foreign investment and trade, abolished communes, supported private ownership, and established special economic zones, indicating a strategic shift towards more open and flexible policies. A crucial aspect of this new direction was the principle of "independence and peace," rooted in the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* introduced decades earlier, as previously mentioned. Khan (2006) details Deng Xiaoping's central role in transforming China's foreign relations. He normalized ties with the Soviet Union, negotiated with Margaret Thatcher in Hong Kong, and hosted Mikhail Gorbachev to improve Sino-Soviet ties. Deng downsized China's military, reflecting a reassessment of global peace. China rejoined the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund while seeking to re-enter the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. He democratized foreign policy by involving the Politburo and creating the "Politburo's Foreign Affairs Guidance Group." These reforms ended China's isolation and reinforced its global standing. Following the Tiananmen incident in 1989, China faced significant international scrutiny, particularly from the US and Western nations, which condemned the government's crackdown on the protests and imposed economic sanctions (Khan, 2006). This event underscored the Chinese government's challenge in reconciling nationalism with the necessity for global cooperation and economic advancement, putting China's foreign policy to the test amidst international sanctions and the shifting post-Cold War political landscape (Zhu, 2001). Deng maintained political stability and prioritized economic modernization, adopting a strategy of international restraint to ensure China's economic progression with a minimal political footprint internationally. Despite the initial backlash, by the mid-1990s, especially after the Taiwan Strait Crisis from 1995 to 1996, China proactively sought to redefine its global political and economic role by establishing strategic partnerships with major world powers (Khan, 2006). By the end of the 1980s, China's global perception had shifted from a revisionist state to a constructive global actor, influenced by the USSR's collapse and the international reaction to the Tiananmen protests. Deng's "24-Character Strategy," introduced in 1989 and detailed in 1992, highlighted the importance of careful observation, strengthening positions, handling changes with patience and confidence, avoiding leadership roles, and keeping a low profile. This strategy laid a roadmap for China's ascent to prominence with minimal external scrutiny (Serano, 2018).

By the time Jiang Zemin became president in 1993, the global political landscape had shifted significantly, with the USSR dissolved and many totalitarian regimes giving way

to democratic governance. Jiang faced the challenge of legitimizing Communist Party rule while integrating capitalist practices into socialism, addressing this by introducing the Theory of Three Represents (Serrano, 2018). The *Theory of Three Represents* was included in the CCP Constitution at the Sixteenth Congress when Hu Jintao was announced as Jiang Zemin's successor. It sought to broaden the party's base and align its principles with current challenges. The Three Represents framed Jiang's policies as innovative Marxist adaptations to modern China. Thus, the CCP Constitution integrated Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the *Three Represents*. This ideology continues to shape the CCP's economic, political, and social policies, ensuring continuity between past and future directions (Mohanty, 2003). Like Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin emphasized maintaining stability for China's growth. During the 1997 Asian financial crisis, China's leadership played a crucial role by stabilizing the Renminbi, assisting distressed economies, stabilizing the global financial market, and garnering widespread acclaim (Serrano, 2018). Jiang Zemin championed the "going out" or "going global" strategy, urging state-owned enterprises to pursue resources abroad and expand globally. This strategy was formally integrated into China's economic policy in the Tenth Five-Year Plan in 2000, coinciding with China's WTO accession in 2001. It sparked a surge in Chinese trade with Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa as Chinese companies invested in and rejuvenated economies, often focusing on neglected projects like reopening long-shuttered copper mines in Zambia (Serrano, 2018; Economy, 2010). The inception of the "going out" policy represents a legacy in Chinese foreign policy, significantly influencing global dynamics in the subsequent decade (Serrano, 2018).

By the time Hu Jintao assumed power in 2003, China had intensified its global engagement through multilateral organizations and direct investments, with the number of Chinese companies investing abroad tripling from 103 in 1996 to over 300 by 2002 following the formal adoption of the "going out" policy (Serrano, 2018). During this period, Zheng Bijian introduced the "peaceful rise" concept at the Boao Forum for Asia in 2003, advocating a strategy that blends economic globalization with socialism with Chinese characteristics to position China as a significant power without disrupting the international order. Although initially endorsed by Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao, internal government discomfort and external challenges, such as Taiwan's political situation, diminished its policy relevance. Objections from figures like Jiang Zemin led to the term's cessation in April 2004, highlighting the influence of leadership perspectives on China's foreign policy, broader discussions on its global role, and the impact of internal and external factors on policy trajectory (Suettinger, 2004). Hu also emphasized the Confucian concept of "harmony," integrating it with the CCP's existing principles and strategies on foreign policy and diplomacy. This approach departed from previous leadership styles, particularly Mao's, by incorporating historical Chinese values and philosophies into modern governance and international relations (Keith, 2012). Hu translated the Confucian concept of a *Harmonious Society*, which focuses on domestic

issues, into the global arena as the principle of a *Harmonious World* (Serrano, 2018). Hu's foreign policy, characterized by "pragmatic idealism" and rooted in the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*, prioritized cooperation over conflict, reflecting continuity and evolution in China's global engagement. This approach critiques dominant power structures while asserting China's unique path, balancing globalization's benefits with rejecting hegemonic stability theories (Keith, 2012). In line with this principle, at the 60th-anniversary summit of the UN on September 15, 2005, Hu outlined China's perspective on international issues and proposed reforms and enhancements for the UN's role in global development cooperation. His recommendations included establishing a security concept based on mutual trust, aiding developing countries to meet millennium development goals, respecting nations' social systems while promoting cultural diversity, and advocating for UN reforms, notably increasing developing countries' representation in the Security Council. Hu stressed China's commitment to global peace and prosperity and called for worldwide cooperation to achieve a harmonious global community.³

China's strategic integration of traditional values with modern diplomacy, exemplified by the establishment of Confucius Institutes (CIs) worldwide since November 2004, has significantly bolstered its 'soft power' and global influence (Keith, 2012). CIs are crucial for disseminating Chinese language and culture globally, fostering educational partnerships, and enhancing cross-cultural understanding. However, Hughes (2014) notes that it is essential to acknowledge that the CI program operates within China's political context, where culture is closely tied to politics, reflecting Mao Zedong's views articulated in Yan'an in 1942. Hughes further highlights that, unlike politically neutral entities such as the British Council and Goethe Institutes, CIs are closely affiliated with the CCP, with leadership primarily comprising CCP officials. This connection may restrict academic freedom, contrasting with the British Council's emphasis on principles such as freedom of thought and transparency.

Towards the end of Hu Jintao's tenure, there was a shift toward a more active foreign policy that continued under his successor, Xi Jinping. This "rise" allowed China to regain confidence and security, translating into a more active and assertive foreign policy (Serrano, 2018). Deng Xiaoping's "hide and bide" policy emphasized internal development and a low international profile to avoid confrontations, particularly with the US. This was a preparatory phase for China's eventual emergence as a global power. Under Hu Jintao, this cautious stance shifted. In 2009, Hu emphasized the need for China to "actively accomplish something," signaling a more assertive international role (Doshi, 2019). In the post-2008 economic downturn, with the US occupying the Middle East and Europe struggling with the EU's political challenges, China saw an opportunity to expand into Latin American markets. Hu Jintao's "going out" policy, including eighteen visits to Latin

³Hu Jintao, "Making Great Efforts to Build a Harmonious World with Long-lasting Peace and Common Prosperity," September 15, 2005, delivered at the summit on the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations. https://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/zt/shnh60/200509/t20050916_8413756.htm

America in 2004, made China a leading export destination and investor in these regions (Serrano, 2018). According to Chen et al. (2013), China's surge in assertive foreign policy reflects its growing power. It is influenced by domestic factors such as rising nationalism and the engagement of interest groups in policymaking. They posit that this nationalism was intensified after the 2008 financial crisis, which fueled a sense of empowerment among the populace and the government, prompting a more assertive foreign policy stance to ensure social stability and the legitimacy of the Communist Party (Chen et al., 2013).

CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

3.1. Conceptualization of Chinese Nationalism

Defining nationalism under a single definition presents a challenge due to its intricate nature and the diverse interpretations it evokes. Nonetheless, scholars in the field offer valuable insights. Gellner (1983) characterizes nationalism as “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” (p. 1). Anderson (2006) posits that nationalism revolves around the concept of a nation, which he defines as an imagined political community marked by inherent limitations in its scope and sovereignty. Anderson uses the term “imagined,” underscoring that even the smallest nation transcends individual comprehension—no single person can be familiar with every nation member. Smith (2011) defines nationalism as “an ideological movement aimed at achieving and maintaining autonomy, unity, and distinct identity for a human population, some of whose members regard themselves as constituting an actual or potential ‘nation’” (p. 231).

Pye (1990) elucidates on the case of China, portraying it not merely as another nation-state but as a civilization grappling with its statehood: “(…) China is not just another nation-state in the family of nations. China is a civilization pretending to be a state. The story of modern China could be described as the effort by both Chinese and foreigners to squeeze a civilization into the arbitrary, constraining framework of the modern state, an institutional invention that came out of the fragmentation of the West’s civilization. Viewed from another perspective, the miracle of China has been its astonishing unity.” (p. 58).

China’s identity as a “civilization state,” rooted in the historical “mandate of heaven” order, diverges significantly from the origins and development of the traditional “nation-state” model (Bislev & Li, 2014). Therefore, understanding Chinese nationalism necessitates acknowledging its departure from Western origins and developmental paths. From the Qing Dynasty onward, various movements used nationalism to build the Chinese nation and restore its respect on the international stage (Hussaini, 2020). Numerous historical, cultural, and political factors shape Chinese nationalism, spanning centuries of dynastic rule, colonial encounters, revolutionary transformations, and the pursuit of modern statehood.

Chinese nationalism must be understood within the context of global geopolitics, as it has been profoundly shaped by China’s semi-colonial past (Li, 2019), where traditional Chinese identity, initially rooted in cultural superiority (culturalism), evolved into a modern nationalist sentiment in response to late 19th-century external threats (Duara,

1993). Initially lacking a cohesive national identity, crises like the Opium War in 1840 and the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 began to foster national sentiment. Western nationalist ideas also gained significant influence during this turbulent period, crucially shaping the emergence, evolution, and resurgence of modern Chinese nationalism (Zheng, 2019). The May Fourth period was central to Chinese nationalism, with influential movements awakening nationalist sentiments and laying the groundwork for significant political developments, influenced by Sun Yat-sen's advocacy for national self-determination and the Russian Revolution and Lenin's support for self-determination (Zheng, 2012). Subsequent incidents such as the September 18th Incident, the North China Incident, and the July 7th Marco Polo Bridge Incident solidified the concept of "the Chinese nation," integrating diverse ethnic groups into a unified community, intensifying Chinese nationalism and prompting discussions on national rejuvenation through dedicated journals. This period saw a heightened national identity and collective responsibility amid internal and external challenges (Zheng, 2019).

Nonetheless, transforming the multicultural Qing Empire into a modern Chinese nation-state proved challenging for subsequent rulers aiming to unify a diverse civilization into a cohesive nation. Post-1949 Revolution, the CCP promoted a narrative defining China as a unified yet multi-ethnic nation rooted in the Yellow River Basin, maintaining unique cultural characteristics and integrating diverse ethnic groups throughout history, emphasizing a culturally unified nation unified by loyalty to Chinese culture (Bislev & Li, 2014). The CCP's 1949 victory is seen not just as a communist triumph but also as a nationalist milestone, ending a century of humiliation and uniting China under a centralized state. Mao's proclamation of the PRC emphasized China's resurgence and freedom from foreign influence, marking a crucial moment in Chinese nationalism rather than merely a Marxist ideological triumph. During the first three decades of communist rule, Marxist ideology went hand in hand with nationalism (Hussaini, 2020).

The rise of nationalism in post-Mao China can be significantly attributed to the regime's insecurity, particularly in response to the communist regime's legitimacy crisis in the late 1970s (Hussaini, 2020). Under Deng Xiaoping's late 1970s policies, China's post-socialist evolution introduced "socialism with Chinese characteristics," underscoring this nationalism. This approach facilitated economic reforms and laid the groundwork for China's global integration, including accession to the World Trade Organization. Despite setbacks like the 1989 Tiananmen incident, Deng's 1992 southern tour reignited and deepened reforms throughout the 1990s, emphasizing the effective implementation of the "Chinese model" to address domestic inequalities. This evolution from strict socialist ideology towards embracing "Chinese characteristics" reflects a broader nationalist narrative, where traditional cultural practices and a unique Chinese identity precede Western influences (Cheung, 2012).

During the 1990s globalization era, Chinese nationalism evolved significantly. In response to the Tiananmen Square protests and the decline of global communism, China

prioritized economic development for internal stability and global integration. This nationalism aligned economic reforms with an ideological framework to bolster CCP legitimacy, manage dissent, and capitalize on global opportunities (Bhattacharya, 2019). Chinese nationalism adapted to globalization by emphasizing historical victimization and resilience through state-controlled narratives, reflecting internal debates over China's evolving identity and global role (Li, 2019). It evolved with changing circumstances, highlighting China's unique modernization path and assertive global stance. By the late 20th century, a conservative resurgence reinforced China's political framework, embracing traditional elements like Confucianism for national unity, reflecting new political and economic landscapes and renewed confidence in China's global influence (Wu, 2008).

The state's post-Tiananmen patriotic education campaign aimed to foster national pride and historical consciousness among youth, highlighting China's challenges and resilience under CCP leadership. It reflects deliberate efforts to imbue nationalism with substantive content for nation-building, including pride in China's imperial history, recognition of historical humiliations in its path to nationhood, and a positive perspective on China's contemporary global ascent (Bislev & Li, 2014). Official narratives weave victory and victimization themes, positioning the CCP as a defender against external threats and a liberator of Western colonial powers (Li, 2019). This ideological shift in education, from Marxist class struggle to emphasizing China's anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles, solidified nationalism as a cornerstone of CCP rule (Bislev & Li, 2014). These dynamics illustrate how nationalism and globalization have synergistically shaped China's trajectory, supporting economic growth while consolidating CCP authority in a global context.

In the 21st century, Chinese nationalism increasingly emphasizes Chinese values over Western ones, bolstered by economic reforms since the 1990s that have enhanced China's global influence and self-assurance. This shift from socialist principles to a "Chinese model" and the resurgence of Confucianism shape China's trajectory, offering an alternative to Western-centric perspectives in global affairs while strengthening China's national identity. The 2008 Beijing Olympics symbolized China's growing confidence amid a gradual post-socialist transformation aimed at reclaiming "Chineseness" after a century of Western influence (Cheung, 2012). Simultaneously, the CCP maintains a robust education campaign promoting nationalist indoctrination, notably evident during the 2019 Hong Kong pro-democracy protests. This initiative includes mandatory activities like "Military-Civil Production" in kindergartens nationwide, designed to foster patriotic pride by honoring revolutionary figures and showcasing national strength and prosperity. Additionally, the campaign involves extensive efforts to build museums and monuments and promote red tourism to revolutionary sites, reflecting a strategy endorsed by President Xi Jinping in 2016 (Hussaini, 2020).

Hussaini (2020) highlights the varying sources driving Chinese nationalism today. These include China's remarkable economic success, which has elevated living standards

and bolstered national confidence, positioning China as a global power. Historical memories of past humiliations stemming from foreign incursions and colonialism continue to fuel nationalist sentiment both domestically and internationally. Moreover, perceived external provocations, such as territorial disputes and biased media portrayals, further stoke nationalist fervor. Lastly, nationalism has emerged as a primary ideological pillar for the CCP, particularly following the decline of communism's appeal.

Bislev and Li utilize Benedict Anderson's *imagined community* concept to assert that cultural and political constructs significantly influence Chinese nationalism. It is intricately intertwined with China's historical imperial legacy, its contemporary socio-political experiences, and its aspirations within the global context. This constructed narrative plays a dual role: it enhances internal unity among the Chinese populace and validates China's standing and impact on the worldwide stage. However, it is crucial to recognize that Chinese nationalism is driven by two contrasting forces: the top-down influence of incumbent state elites and the bottom-up impact of populist societal forces (Zhao, 2013). As Gries (2004) argues, "to understand Chinese nationalism, we must listen to the Chinese" (p. 4), emphasizing the significant bottom-up aspect often overlooked in top-down analyses. Understanding public opinion and grassroots nationalism is essential as they are crucial factors in shaping Chinese nationalism. Historical grievances, territorial disputes, and perceptions of Western containment policies have intensified nationalist sentiments among the Chinese populace. Initially leveraging nationalist expressions to bolster its legitimacy, the CCP fears nationalism's potential to challenge its authority, prompting crackdowns on dissent when necessary (Li, 2019). Utilizing a pragmatic form of nationalism that is instrumental, state-led, and reactive, the CCP strategically allows or suppresses domestic protests, aiming to unify China while mitigating potential diplomatic and economic repercussions (Hussaini, 2020). Thus, understanding Chinese nationalism requires recognizing its intricate dynamics, shaped by top-down directives from state policies and leadership and the grassroots origins of popular sentiment.

3.2. Xi Jinping's Nationalism

Chinese nationalism has evolved through various political, cultural, and socio-economic changes. From the late Qing dynasty's struggle against foreign powers and the May Fourth Movement's push for modernization to Mao Zedong's revolutionary nationalism and Deng Xiaoping's focus on economic modernization, nationalism has continuously transformed. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao used nationalism to bolster CCP legitimacy, promoting economic development and addressing new nationalist sentiments. Under Xi, Chinese nationalism continues this evolution with specificities tailored to the current era. Xi combines state-driven nationalism with the *Chinese Dream* to unify the nation and promote global greatness. This vision connects historical memories of humiliation with a revitalized national identity, reflecting a more assertive and confident China amidst economic challenges and geopolitical competition. Moreover, Xi's promotion of traditional Chinese culture and values, such as Confucianism, has been reinterpreted to bolster CCP

authority. This fosters a Sinocentric worldview, enhancing China's soft power and global influence. This nationalist strategy projects China's heritage globally in an era where cultural identity is crucial, aligning with trends toward embracing cultural and historical roots. Additionally, the legitimacy of the CCP has traditionally rested on economic success and nationalism. Rapid economic growth bolstered public trust in the CCP, showcasing its ability to modernize China. However, since Xi took power in 2012, economic growth has slowed. To maintain legitimacy, Xi has intensified nationalist rhetoric, emphasizing national pride, unity, and the *China Dream of National Rejuvenation* to rally public support and suppress dissent. By highlighting China's recent accomplishments and reviving historical narratives of its resurgence, Xi aims to shift attention from economic issues, using nationalism to reinforce the CCP's authority and ensure its continued dominance.

3.2.1. State-Driven Nationalism and the *Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation*

Tsang and Cheung (2023) argue that Xi's concept of patriotism encompasses love for the nation, the Communist Party, and socialism with Chinese characteristics. Xi Thought, as this ideology is known, demands devotion to the Party's ideology, extending this expectation to all Chinese citizens. They further argue that Xi seeks to cultivate a unified Chinese identity among the country's vast population and diaspora. This campaign, reminiscent of Mao's efforts to develop "new socialist people," aims to create "new-era people" who embrace nationalism, the Party, and socialism. Xi's approach distinguishes itself by extending beyond China's borders to include the Chinese diaspora in two concentric circles: the inner circle within China and the outer circle of diaspora members. Despite legal contradictions with China's Nationality Law, which stipulates the loss of Chinese nationality upon acquiring foreign citizenship and denies Chinese nationality to foreign-born children of Chinese parents, Xi prioritizes loyalty among all ethnic Chinese as part of his vision of "patriotic Chinese people."

Closely tied to Xi Thought and its nationalist approach is the concept of the *Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation*, which is a crucial feature, if not the most important goal, of Xi's mandate. Various authors highlight how the concept of the *Chinese Dream* is an essential feature, if not the most important feature, of Xi's mandate and is closely related to Chinese nationalism. Chávez (2022) argues that Xi's leadership has reshaped China's national perspective through the *Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation*. This concept, deeply connected to China's historical memories of humiliation and a revitalized national identity, forms a foundational element of Xi's leadership and policy direction. Unlike individual aspirations, the *Chinese Dream* represents a collective ethos to restore China's perceived rightful global position. This narrative transitions from the *Century of Humiliation* to an era where China emerges as a prosperous and formidable nation. Conversely, Lin (2023) argues that since 2012, Xi has shifted government rhetoric from

national humiliation to emphasizing China as a great power dedicated to the *great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*. Lin's content analysis of official discourse reveals Xi's strategy of minimizing past humiliations while highlighting aspirations for global prominence and national revival, which is aligned with his nationalist aims. Tsang and Cheung state, "the centerpiece that anchors Xi's brand of party-centric nationalism is the China Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (p.147). Despite everyday priorities, Xi insists that the Chinese people adopt this *China Dream* as their own, highlighting that past sacrifices for China's greatness mandate their participation. Xi aims to integrate personal ambitions with national destiny, asserting that daily activities, whether at work or home, should contribute to China's glory. Tsang and Cheung highlight Xi's emphasis on national identity over professional roles, urging scientists and entrepreneurs to support China's prosperity. During COVID-19, CEOs were encouraged to prevent job losses and engage in charity. Xi also directs the Chinese diaspora to prioritize their homeland, support the Party's goals, and promote China's image, aligning with the United Front strategy.

To bolster nationalist sentiments for China's rejuvenation, Zhao (2021) argues that Xi has ramped up patriotic education and tightened information control. This has resulted in state-driven nationalism marked by intolerance of CCP criticism, hostility towards Western values, and an assertive national agenda. Zhao describes this as a shift in Chinese nationalism from an inclusive "us" to a combative "them." Tsang and Cheung contend that Xi has implemented various educational reforms and propaganda campaigns to promote a narrative emphasizing China's historical greatness and the CCP's role in restoring its global standing. This narrative, disseminated through media, education systems, and cultural policies, aims to cultivate a unified national identity to support Xi's vision of national rejuvenation. Chávez notes that Xi strategically uses the *Chinese Dream* at major public events, such as his initial press conference as General Secretary and visits to the Road to Revival Exhibition. These events link The Communist Party's leadership to China's trajectory, emphasizing the narrative that China is correcting historical grievances under Xi's guidance and moving toward active global participation. Chávez also highlights that Xi's strategic vision focuses on two centenary goals: achieving a "moderately prosperous society" by 2021 and a "great modern socialist country" by 2049. These goals highlight the CCP's efforts to improve living standards and reclaim historical prominence. Emphasizing "core national interests" like Taiwan and maritime territories, Xi connects national rejuvenation with sovereignty, influencing domestic and foreign policy. Domestically, this nurtures national pride and support for the CCP. Internationally, it justifies assertive actions in territorial disputes, framing them as sovereignty issues. By linking the party's leadership to national prosperity, Xi legitimizes CCP rule and centralizes his role.

3.2.2. Cultural Revival

Various authors note that Xi's revival and emphasis on Chinese culture, including Confucianism, is closely tied to his strategy of nationalism and China's dream of national rejuvenation. Tsang and Cheung argue that Xi's approach involves reviving traditional Chinese values, interpreted through a modern lens, to bolster cultural pride and moral conduct. However, these values are selectively promoted to reinforce, rather than challenge, the CCP's authority and governance model. Similarly, Lin explores how cultural nationalism modernizes traditional culture and establishes a distinct national identity against historical Western influences. Terms like "Chinese culture" and "socialist Chinese culture" align national identity with Xi's vision, shifting from past narratives of humiliation to assertions of global leadership. Xi strategically uses cultural symbols to enhance the Communist Party's authority and international image, including preserving historical sites and promoting cultural exports to boost national pride.

Gries (2020) examines the intricate relationship between nationalism and foreign policy in China, highlighting how these elements are deeply intertwined with the legitimacy of the CCP. Nationalism in China is significantly shaped by historical narratives that evoke a sense of victimization and a strong desire for national rejuvenation. This narrative is leveraged by the CCP to bolster its legitimacy, positioning itself as the defender and restorer of China's national pride. The revival of Confucianism and "All under Heaven" (天下) enhance a Sinocentric worldview, where China is perceived as a central and superior civilization. This cultural framework promotes a nationalist ideology that influences China's interactions with other nations, viewing them through a lens of hierarchical relationships and competition.

Lin discusses Xi's dual strategy in cultural nationalism: promoting indigenous cultural elements while increasing censorship and restricting foreign influences. This approach supports Xi's power centralization efforts, including eliminating presidential term limits, and bolsters his legitimacy and the party's dominance through carefully curated expressions of Chinese culture. Lin further notes potential risks in Xi's strategy, including cultural xenophobia, suppression of ethnic minority rights, and stifling creative and academic freedoms. These challenges create fear and self-censorship domestically and foster international competition rather than cooperation.

3.2.3. Economic Challenges and Nationalism

Some authors argue that the CCP's use of nationalism as a tool for legitimacy is often linked to China's economic state. Blackwill and Campbell (2016) suggest that economic slowdown may compel Xi to intensify nationalist rhetoric to rally public support, suppress dissent, and consolidate power, cultivating a strongman image and using anti-corruption campaigns to strengthen control. This aligns with the CCP's history of maintaining legitimacy through economic success and nationalism. As growth falters, nationalism becomes crucial for the CCP, leveraging narratives of victimization and rejuvenation. Xi's "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" rhetoric exemplifies how the CCP uses patriotism

to consolidate power, associating nationalism with his leadership. This narrative is reinforced through education, media, and public discourse, fostering a sense of historical destiny and grievance, translating into assertive foreign policy, especially in territorial disputes. Zhao adds that since the Cold War, the CCP has relied on economic success and nationalism for legitimacy. With slowing growth under Xi since 2012, nationalism and information control have intensified. Xi has revitalized patriotic education to reinforce CCP loyalty, especially among youth and Chinese students abroad, promoting assertive nationalism that challenges Western ideologies. Zhao argues that control over public opinion has shifted to strict enforcement, with severe repercussions for dissenters like Professor Xu Zhangrun during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Great Firewall intensifies censorship and online monitoring, while the "50 Cent Party" suppresses dissent and promotes CCP propaganda, fostering youth nationalism. Xi's patriotic education and propaganda emphasize overcoming past humiliations and portray the West, especially the US, as antagonistic, strengthening national unity. Xi has shifted Chinese nationalism to a confrontational stance, as seen in establishing Victory Day of the Anti-Japanese War and the 2015 military parade. State media and education, like "Amazing China" and "Wolf Warrior II," depict China as heroic and superior, supporting aggressive foreign policies. This resonates with younger urban Chinese, who strongly back these policies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, state media highlighted China's effective response, boosting national pride against perceived Western failures. "Wolf warrior diplomacy" aggressively defends Chinese policies but risks fostering xenophobia and increasing global tensions.

Building on this view, various authors argue that nationalism as a legitimacy tool translates into a more assertive stance in Chinese politics, including foreign policy. Friedberg (2014) examines China's evolving assertiveness, attributing it to internal factors like nationalism and the concept of "great-state autism." He states, "The root cause of China's recent assertiveness can be found in the mindset and perceptions of its leaders" (p.136). He emphasizes that the CCP uses nationalism to rally popular support and fortify its political legitimacy. According to Friedberg, China's leadership views the restoration of national dignity extending beyond the Party's rise to power in 1949, addressing historical grievances and affirming China's global position. Territorial disputes remind the nation of past injustices endured during vulnerable periods in China's history. The regime faces the challenge of meeting heightened public expectations by fostering a narrative centered on national pride and resentment. Consequently, the leadership feels compelled to vigorously safeguard China's "core interests" and uphold territorial claims, especially against historically implicated countries. This often restricts diplomatic flexibility, prompting decision-makers to adopt a firm and assertive foreign policy stance. Even when facing potential diplomatic or economic consequences, this approach aims to prevent the perception of weakness among the Chinese populace and mitigate the risk of social unrest.

3.3. Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping

Scholars have analyzed the evolution of China's foreign policy under Xi, noting a significant shift from Deng Xiaoping's cautious "low profile" approach to a more proactive and assertive stance. This transformation is typical of major powers as they become more robust, with rapid economic growth, enhanced military capabilities, and increased global influence, redefining China's role on the world stage. However, many attribute this shift to a strong sense of nationalism, which Xi has emphasized through the vision of the *China Dream* and national rejuvenation. Despite the assertive elements, Xi's foreign policy also incorporates principles of cooperation. China continues to engage in multilateral organizations, promotes initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and emphasizes win-win partnerships. These cooperative efforts aim to enhance global economic integration, foster diplomatic relationships, and project China's soft power. The balance between assertiveness and cooperation reflects China's strategic approach to securing its national interests while maintaining a stable and favorable international environment.

Blackwill and Campbell (2016) portray Xi as the most powerful Chinese leader since Deng Xiaoping, emphasizing that his leadership significantly pivots in China's foreign policy. They illustrate Xi's departure from Deng's low-profile doctrine through his assertive actions, including reclaiming islands, establishing international institutions like the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and deploying military assets to disputed regions such as the East China Sea, South China Sea, and along the Indian border. This diversified mix of hard and soft power elements characterizes Xi's confident foreign policy approach, blending assertive territorial claims with strategic economic diplomacy to bolster China's status as a global power.

Central to this is the concept of *major-country diplomacy*. Chang-Liao (2016) notes that Xi's vision of *great power diplomacy* with Chinese characteristics aims to shape international rules and institutions to align with China's interests while promoting regional stability and cooperation. He argues that China's foreign policy under Xi signifies a strategic shift toward proactive global engagement and assertive diplomacy, emphasizing "striving for achievements." This shift is exemplified by establishing the National Security Committee and other policy bodies, reflecting Xi's drive to centralize and coordinate foreign policy decision-making, overcoming previous fragmentation. Lin (2018) also explores *major-country diplomacy*, highlighting that, unlike his predecessors, who relegated foreign policy to a secondary role, Xi integrates domestic and foreign policies with determination and confidence. Lin underlines Xi's efforts to synchronize internal and external ambitions, drawing parallels to historical precedents such as Mao Zedong's approach to North Korea. However, while Mao's efforts fell short, Xi appeared poised for success due to his robust diplomatic capacity aligned with his objectives. Lin argues that Xi's strategy leverages favorable international conditions, prioritizes economic diplomacy through initiatives like the BRI, and engages in sophisticated multilateral diplomacy to establish China as a central global player. Similarly, Blackwill and Campbell (2016) assert that

Xi's foreign policy employs all instruments of statecraft, including military assets, economic coercion, and financial incentives like trade deals and the BRI. These efforts aim to create strategic dependencies, enhance China's regional influence, and shape regional politics and economics. Wang (2018) also points out that Xi's shift from Deng Xiaoping's low-profile strategies to "major country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features" marks a transformative change in China's foreign policy. Unlike his predecessors, who prioritized domestic concerns, Wang highlights that Xi has been assertive on the global stage from the outset of his tenure, introducing new diplomatic concepts that have led to "Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy." Furthermore, Iida (2020) highlights that Xi's significant influence is evident in the incorporation of *Xi Jinping Thought* into the CCP's constitution and the abolition of presidential term limits, representing a shift in China's leadership structure and international strategy.

Wang describes Xi's approach to foreign policy as "PRC diplomacy 3.0," a strategic evolution from the "revolutionary diplomacy" of 1949–1979 and "development diplomacy" of 1979–2009. This new phase aims to strategically influence the international order to support the *great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*, highlighting China's role as a key global player through initiatives like the *China dream*, *community of common destiny for mankind*, and *new type of major country relations*. Xi's diplomacy reflects an ideological shift towards a more integrated global engagement strategy, adding a moral dimension by linking the *China Dream* to worldwide peace and cooperation, promoting interconnectedness and inclusive approaches to global challenges. The BRI exemplifies this, emphasizing connectivity and cooperation through infrastructure and investment projects. Chang-Liao also highlights economic diplomacy, spotlighting the BRI and AIIB to expand China's regional influence and integrate regional economies. Wang explains that Xi's foreign policy combines idealistic and practical elements, promoting global cooperation while focusing on China's national security. This "half full, half empty" approach balances high aspirations with the complexities of global relations, noting that China's assertive actions, especially in maritime disputes, have caused global controversy and skepticism. Since the early 2000s, China has framed its foreign policy as a "peaceful rise" to reassure other countries of its peaceful intentions. However, under Xi, there is an increased focus on protecting national interests, expected reciprocity, and shaping a favorable external environment. Jian highlights challenges in US-China relations and regional territorial disputes, noting that the Sino-US relationship is marked by competition rather than cooperation. China's efforts to foster closer regional ties face obstacles due to its assertiveness.

Both Iida (2020) and Zhou (2019) argue that Xi's nationalist agenda, epitomized by the *China Dream of National Rejuvenation*, drives assertive maneuvers in the East and South China Seas, escalating regional tensions and consolidating his domestic leadership. Iida highlights Xi's focus on "core interests," particularly in maritime territories, through increased People's Liberation Army and maritime law enforcement activities, and notes

how initiatives like the BRI, extensive infrastructure and economic partnerships, support for UN peacekeeping since 2015, and advocacy for globalism in 2017 seek to elevate China's global standing. These efforts align with China's "core interests," encompassing sovereignty, security, territorial integrity, reunification, and social stability. Similarly, Zhou outlines ambitious initiatives such as the AIIB, BRI, "Made in China 2025" policy, and "Amazing China" campaign to enhance global economic connectivity and soft power, reflecting a strategic shift toward actively asserting China's interests and restoring its international prominence. Zhou contends that Xi's foreign policy blends assertiveness and pragmatism, driven by nationalist sentiments and the pursuit of "core interests" to maintain CCP dominance and assert China's global standing. This approach, influenced by curated historical narratives, often leads to a defensive stance against perceived Western aggression, straining international relations, particularly with the US, and risking domestic instability. Zhou suggests recalibrating this approach to balance nationalistic ambitions with global interdependence, fostering a stable international environment, and advancing the *great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*. Chávez adds to this by highlighting the paradox in Xi's foreign policy: globally, Xi promotes cooperation and ethical engagement through concepts like the *Community of Common Destiny*, while domestically, there is a noticeable rise in assertiveness, exemplified by *Wolf Warrior Diplomacy*, where diplomats like Zhao Lijian robustly defend China's interests.

Tsang and Cheung, in their analysis, relate Xi's foreign policy to the tianxia concept, arguing that Xi envisions a harmonious world order under Chinese leadership. They emphasize his focus on regime security, nationalism, and global leadership, aiming to reshape the international order in China's favor through military strength and political control, particularly regarding Taiwan. This vision of a tianxia order strengthens party-centric nationalism, instilling pride in Chinese nationals and validating sovereignty claims through historical narratives. Xi's assertive stances include military intimidation and diplomatic pressure in regions like Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the India-China border. According to Tsang and Cheung, Xi's approach embodies Sino-centrism, emphasizing Chinese interests globally, asserting China's global position, and leveraging global divisions to maximize influence, often leading to tensions. Similarly, Ekman et al. (2017) argue that China's proactive foreign policy is driven by national pride and a mission to restore its historical international status. They highlight the ambition, supported by economic growth, for the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' and overcoming the '100 years of humiliation' since the First Opium War. However, Ekman et al. caution against overestimating the impact of popular nationalism and public opinion, noting the Party's strict control over public discourse. This control aligns with Tsang and Cheung's observation of using historical narratives to validate sovereignty claims. Both authors note China's promotion of an alternative international relations model. Tsang and Cheung discuss Xi's use of economic tools like the BRI and the AIIB to deepen global dependencies, oppose Western interventionism, and advocate for a multipolar world. Similarly,

Ekman et al. describe China's challenge to the "Washington consensus" and highlight weaknesses in Western liberal democracy. These nationalist and historical themes and realist perspectives shape China's contemporary foreign policy in both accounts. Tsang and Cheung further detail how Xi strategically positions China within international organizations to reshape governance and emphasizes cultural diplomacy to promote Chinese governance models. This is part of his aim to redefine global engagement and establish China's practical and morally superior leadership. Ekman et al.'s analysis aligns with this by emphasizing China's ambition to restore its historical international status and challenge existing international norms.

3.4. Relationship Between Nationalism and Foreign Policy

Mylonas and Kuo (2017) explore how nationalism influences foreign policy, presenting two main scholarly perspectives: "lumpers" and "splitters." "Lumpers" view nationalism as a uniform phenomenon driven by its intensity, which unites national identity and separates it from "others," potentially increasing conflicts and adversely affecting international cooperation. "Splitters," on the other hand, argue that the type of nationalism is more significant than its intensity. They assert that nationalism can foster national pride without demonizing external groups, leading to varied effects on foreign policy. They classify nationalism as state-building, irredentist, and unification nationalism and note its dynamic nature, which allows for shifts over time, such as the emergence of popular nationalism or imperial ideologies. The authors argue that nationalism influences foreign policy at multiple levels: individual masses, policy elites, and nation-states. National identities, shaped by civic education and internal processes, affect political behaviors like voting and protesting, and these identities can sway public opinion and shape national character. Policy elites shape national identities to achieve strategic goals and align with nationalist ideologies, influencing foreign policy through their dominant viewpoints. Nation-states maintain internal and external identities, reinforcing each other and impacting foreign policy decisions. Factors like elite initiatives, mass participation, and community distinctiveness shape national identity, often justifying foreign policy actions by these identities. National identities are constructed through domestic and international interactions, leading to potential internal conflicts and impacting foreign policy and cohesion. They elucidate three mechanisms—exogenous, interactive, and endogenous—demonstrating how nationalism and foreign policy reciprocally influence each other. These mechanisms emphasize the bidirectional interaction between national identity and foreign policy, indicating that identity (nationalism) shapes actions (foreign policy) and vice versa.

3.4.1. Perspective I: Nationalism's Influence on Foreign Policy

Certain scholars argue that foreign policy decisions are heavily influenced by nationalist sentiment, including that expressed by the public. They argue that the Chinese government strategically adopts assertive stances to reinforce its legitimacy and ensure domestic stability. Gries (2020) examines the influence of social factors on Chinese foreign policy,

arguing that these influences are significant. Since Xi and the CCP derive much of their legitimacy from claims of “making China great again,” social actors such as domestic nationalistic opinion in China can and do assert nationalist counterclaims regarding the conduct of foreign policy, often advocating for more aggressive stances. Gries introduces the concept of a feedback loop between public sentiment and government policy in China. He highlights the complexity of Chinese public opinion, which ranges from pro-Western cosmopolitanism to anti-Western nationalism. He suggests that the Chinese public significantly influences foreign policy, particularly during periods of widespread nationalist opinion and street demonstrations. While the CCP shapes public views through education, media, and entertainment, the nationalist sentiments of the Chinese people can strongly impact foreign policy decisions, especially on issues like Japan and Taiwan. Gries argues that the CCP strategically uses nationalism to legitimize its rule but must carefully manage it to prevent instability. This creates a feedback loop where public sentiment and government policy continuously influence each other. As China’s power grows, Gries contends, its nationalist-driven foreign policy will likely become more assertive, increasing tensions with other countries.

Similarly, Liao explores the impact of Chinese nationalism on Beijing’s foreign policy, emphasizing how collective memory, particularly memories of historical foreign aggressions, profoundly influences China’s diplomatic decisions. The author argues that the CCP strategically utilizes these memories of past humiliations to bolster its legitimacy. This collective memory is deeply embedded in China’s political culture, shaping domestic expectations of how the state should behave globally. Nationalism, according to Liao, serves as a crucial tool for the CCP to engage with Chinese society, yet it also imposes constraints on the party’s diplomatic maneuverability. The author contends that Beijing’s diplomatic strategies often fluctuate between cooperative gestures and more assertive postures due to internal and external pressures. Domestically, nationalist sentiments drive the government towards assertive foreign policies, mainly when issues of national pride and historical grievances come into play. Conversely, international expectations often lean towards a more cooperative approach from China, creating tension that manifests in a complex and occasionally contradictory foreign policy stance. Throughout Liao’s analysis, instances of China’s diplomatic conduct illustrate the delicate balance between projecting strength to domestic audiences and preserving a harmonious international image.

3.4.2. Perspective II: Strategically Managing Nationalism’s Impact on Foreign Policy

Conversely, some scholars argue that the CCP’s decisions are primarily guided by strategic considerations and long-term national interests rather than by fleeting nationalist sentiments from the population. This view suggests that the relationship between nationalism and foreign policy is nuanced and complex. The Chinese government often selectively embraces or represses nationalist sentiments based on context and strategic

interests, reflecting a cautious stance that effectively manages the complexities of Chinese nationalism.

Lian and Wang (2023) argue that China's approach to nationalism in international affairs is situational rather than uniformly assertive as its power grows. They identify that China's handling of nationalism varies depending on the circumstances. The authors term this approach "pragmatic nationalism," emphasizing that China strategically uses nationalism for domestic and diplomatic purposes while balancing potential risks to economic legitimacy. The key criterion for decision-making is whether an incident threatens the regime's security. In such cases, the government may open a safety valve to release nationalist anger and escalate the situation to appease the public. Conversely, when the regime's security risks are minimal, China prioritizes economic considerations and seeks diplomatic resolutions. Similarly, Myšička (2018) argues that the CCP strategically permits nationalist demonstrations during international crises to underscore its determination. Nationalism is essential for the PRC's legitimacy, yet its economic modernization hinges significantly on partnerships with countries like the USA and Japan. Nationalist sentiments have strengthened under the Communist Party's support, posing potential risks to foreign policy coherence as heightened emotions may influence elite decision-making or be exploited in internal power struggles. Leaders may strategically harness nationalism to bolster international credibility and manage domestic pressures, intervening if mobilizations exceed acceptable limits.

Weiss (2019) argues that the CCP strategically manages these demands to avoid military conflict despite nationalism-driven public pressure for more rigid stances. The CCP downplays incidents that could provoke nationalist sentiments and controls media coverage to prevent public demand for aggressive actions. Weiss suggests that the centralization of power under Xi makes the leadership particularly susceptible to domestic anger, necessitating careful management of nationalist sentiments and a reinvigoration of nationalist discourse. Duan (2017) further challenges the notion that nationalism is the primary driver of Chinese foreign policy's assertive stance, arguing that this view oversimplifies the complexities of Chinese nationalism and the government's cautious stance. Instead, Duan suggests that nationalism's impact on foreign policy might be more tempered, arguing that portraying Chinese nationalism as a simple instrument of state power is an oversimplification. He highlights those historical and cultural influences and reactions to international events that shape nationalism in China. Duan also challenges the assumption of an unchecked rise in nationalism since the 1990s, noting that while the government initiated patriotic education post-Mao, grassroots expressions of nationalism—visible online and during events like the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands crisis—have played a significant role. In addition, he discusses Beijing's pragmatic stance on nationalism, strategically managing these sentiments to prevent domestic instability or damaging international relations. This strategic engagement indicates an awareness of nationalism's potential as

both a unifying force and a destabilizing influence. Duan argues that nationalism's influence on Beijing's foreign policy is more complex and less direct than often perceived, highlighting this complex relationship's potential risks and benefits.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

Through the literature review, this study identifies two distinct perspectives. Firstly, some scholars argue that under Xi's leadership, nationalism has been resurgent in China, driven by economic challenges and aimed at bolstering domestic legitimacy. This nationalist sentiment is seen in an assertive foreign policy, reflecting public opinion and mass nationalist sentiments. Other scholars contend that nationalism does not directly drive foreign policy decisions. They assert that the CCP maintains a pragmatic approach, balancing nationalist sentiments with the necessity of sustaining international relations. According to this view, while nationalism may advocate for an assertive foreign policy, the CCP tempers these tendencies due to the potential adverse effects on international cooperation, which is crucial for China's long-term interests. Thus, the CCP strategically balances between embracing and repressing nationalist sentiments, resulting in a foreign policy that varies in assertiveness. This approach reflects the CCP's efforts to balance domestic legitimacy with the complexities of global interdependence and the need for stable international relations. Building on the contrasting perspectives regarding the influence of nationalism on Chinese foreign policy under Xi identified in the literature review, this study aims to explore how nationalism shapes Chinese foreign policy under Xi's leadership using a qualitative research approach.

The study analyzed a selection of Xi Jinping's domestic and international speeches and writings (see Annex A) to determine if they reflect a nationalist tone and to evaluate his stance on foreign policy while assessing whether nationalism influences an assertive stance on foreign policy. A total of 24 speeches/writings from Xi's mandate, 12 domestic and 12 international, spanning 2013 to 2024, were analyzed. To collect these materials, I utilized four resources. For domestic and international speeches/writings from 2013 to 2020, I referred to the first three volumes of *The Governance of China*, an official publication that compiled Xi Jinping's major speeches and writings. Since these publications only cover up to 2020, I turned to *Xinhua News Agency* and *Qiushi Journal* for domestic speeches/writings from 2021 to 2024, both credible official sources of the Chinese government. For international speeches/writings from 2021 to 2024, I consulted the official website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as it provides authoritative and regularly updated information on China's foreign policy.

The selection of domestic speeches/writings was based on two themes: the *Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation* and Chinese culture, inspired by four chapters from *The Governance of China*, which were "The Chinese Dream" (Volume I), "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and the Chinese Dream" (Volume II), "Cultural Confidence" (Volume

II), and “Chinese Culture” (Volume III). For speeches/writings from 2021 to 2024, the same thematic criteria were applied when retrieving content from *Xinhua News Agency* and *Qiushi Journal*. These themes represent a central nationalist narrative that emphasizes China’s return to greatness, aligned with goals of national rejuvenation, and highlights the importance of Chinese cultural heritage and pride, which are used to foster national unity and strength. Hence, focusing on these themes aimed to explore the presence of a nationalist tone and assess whether it impacted Chinese foreign policy. The selection of international speeches/writings was based on significant events at high-level international or multilateral forums. By analyzing these speeches that present China’s vision to a global audience, we can gain insights into Xi’s global strategy and foreign policy stance. This analysis helps determine whether nationalism translated into assertive foreign policy and whether these elements were in tension with each other or worked cooperatively.

A summative content analysis was used to analyze these speeches/writings. This method identified and categorized frequently mentioned terms in the speeches/writings, allowing for the detection of patterns and meanings (see Annex B). A summative approach to qualitative content analysis involves identifying and quantifying specific words or content to understand their contextual usage and explore usage patterns rather than inferring meaning directly. This approach goes beyond mere word counts to include latent content analysis, which interprets underlying meanings and themes within the content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The process involves searching for specific words, calculating their frequencies, and noting the contexts in which they appear, such as the source or setting. This methodology helps recognize patterns and interpret the contextual relevance of these words or phrases (Berkovic, 2023). The identified words can be counted manually or using computer software (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I wrote a Python script to capture both single words and meaningful multi-word expressions by generating n-grams (contiguous sequences of N words) related to nationalist tone and foreign policy, then analyzed their patterns and meanings better to understand the relationship between nationalism and foreign policy.

CHAPTER 5

Analysis of Xi Jinping's Speeches/Writings

This chapter analyzes 24 Xi Jinping's speeches and writings, focusing on 12 domestic and 12 international pieces delivered between 2013 and 2024, capturing his entire presidency. By identifying frequent words and expressions associated with a nationalist tone and foreign policy, this study explores how these themes manifest in his rhetoric and their relationship.

5.1. Domestic Speeches/Writings

Xi's domestic speeches/writings reveal a nationalist tone that is consistently present through different words and expressions. The frequent invocation of "the Chinese people" and the "Chinese nation" emphasizes a strong sense of collective identity and unity among the diverse ethnic groups within China, with "ethnic groups" also frequently invoked. As Xi states, "*We the people of all ethnic groups in China should bear our mission in mind and make concerted efforts to turn the wisdom and strength of our 1.3 billion people into an invincible force*" (2013): not only reinforces national pride but also creates a narrative of shared destiny, suggesting that unity among all ethnic groups is crucial for achieving national rejuvenation. Further reinforcing this idea, Xi emphasizes that patriotism is the binding force of the nation, stating, "*Patriotism has always been the inner force that binds the Chinese nation together...Our people of all ethnic groups must foster the great national spirit and follow the call of the times, strengthen our inner bond of unity and perseverance, and vigorously march toward the future*" (2013). This intertwining of patriotism with unity creates a vision of a cohesive national future where ethnic solidarity is critical to advancing China's goals.

In 2014, Xi deepened this narrative of unity, extending it beyond the nation's borders to include Chinese people domestically and abroad. He proclaimed, "*For Chinese people at home and abroad, a united Chinese nation is our shared root, the profound Chinese culture is our shared soul, and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is our shared dream. The shared root fosters eternal brotherhood, the shared soul links our hearts, and the shared dream holds us all together—we will write a new chapter in the history of the Chinese nation.*" This statement underscores the idea that national unity, cultural identity, and the collective pursuit of rejuvenation form the cornerstone of China's shared destiny, binding its people across borders and generations. Xi further called for unity as a driving force for national progress, stating, "*We must strengthen the great unity of the Chinese people of all ethnic groups and the great unity of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation at home and abroad, thus mobilizing all positive factors to give shape to a mighty joint*

force for building a great country and advancing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (2023). Here, Xi highlights the need for domestic and global solidarity, suggesting that the collective efforts of all Chinese people—united in identity, culture, and purpose—are essential for achieving the country’s ambitious national goals.

This emphasis on the unity of all Chinese people is often related to the recurring themes of the “Chinese Dream” and national rejuvenation,” a China-centric narrative that reflects strong nationalist undertones (Zhang, 2023). Xi asserts, “*To realize the Chinese Dream, we must foster the Chinese spirit,*” highlighting patriotism as a crucial unifying force within the nation (2013). This statement underscores that strong national identity and spirit are essential for achieving collective goals and fostering unity among the Chinese people. Xi articulates that “*the Chinese Dream of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation means that we will make China prosperous and strong, rejuvenate the nation, and bring happiness to the Chinese people*” (2013). This definition portrays the *Chinese Dream* as both a vision for national strength and a commitment to enhancing the well-being of all citizens, seamlessly linking national pride with personal fulfillment. Moreover, the *Chinese Dream* aims to unify all Chinese people under the CPC’s and Xi Jinping’s leadership, combining nationalism with universal values such as pursuing happiness (Zhang, 2023).

Xi further urges every citizen to contribute actively toward the realization of national goals, reinforcing the idea that progress requires shared effort: “*There is still much to do and a long way to go before we can realize the Chinese Dream and create a better life for all our people, so every one of us should continue working towards this goal as hard as possible*” (2013). Xi further asserts that “*to ensure that the dreams of families come true, we must realize the Chinese Dream. Chinese people have always thought highly of loyalty to the nation*” (2016). This connection between family aspirations and national goals illustrates the belief that personal and national achievements are interconnected, promoting loyalty and commitment to the country. Xi also positions the Chinese Dream as a collective aspiration: “*The Chinese Dream is a dream of the country, the nation, and all Chinese individuals. (···) As long as all Chinese both at home and abroad unite as one and contribute whatever they can, be it strength or intelligence, they can marshal great power for realizing this dream*” (2014). This statement highlights the importance of inclusivity and collective effort, stressing that domestic and overseas Chinese must unite to harness their strengths for the greater good, reinforcing the idea that the Chinese Dream is a shared endeavor that transcends borders. It is framed as a shared ideal for the entire Chinese nation, aiming to evoke patriotism, national belonging, and identity among the populace—all of which are tied to a sense of “Chineseness” (Zhang, 2023).

The themes of history and Chinese culture are also frequent, conveying a solid nationalist tone that promotes a sense of collective identity among the Chinese people. Xi asserts, “*The Chinese nation has an unbroken history of more than 5,000 years of civilization,*” framing this legacy as a unique inheritance that underscores China’s continuity

and resilience (2013). By connecting the achievements of ancient civilization to modern progress, Xi cultivates a narrative that instills pride and a sense of destiny among citizens. He further states, “History will continue to prove that the road we are taking is correct,” highlighting that China’s development is firmly rooted in its cultural and historical heritage (2017). This focus on cultural identity is reinforced when he declares, “*No matter where a Chinese is, he always bears the distinctive brand of the Chinese culture, which is the common heritage of all the sons and daughters of China*” (2014). Such assertions elevate cultural pride, suggesting that national rejuvenation is intertwined with preserving and promoting Chinese culture. Overall, Xi’s emphasis on history and culture celebrates past achievements and unites citizens in a shared aspiration for the future, reinforcing a collective national identity.

The concept of the “motherland” is recurrent, serving as an emotional anchor for nationalist sentiment. References to the “motherland” often arise in contexts emphasizing loyalty, sacrifice, and unity. For instance, Xi declared, “*The great motherland will always be the strong backing for the Chinese people,*” highlighting the protective and nurturing role of the state (2021). This personification of China as a “motherland” evokes deep emotional connections, encouraging citizens to perceive their relationship with the nation as familial, demanding love and loyalty. Xi’s rhetoric also extends to the Chinese diaspora: “*The tens of millions of overseas Chinese across the world are all members of the Chinese family.*” (2014). This statement underscores the Chinese diaspora’s familial bond with the motherland, emphasizing their enduring connection to their roots. He acknowledged their contributions to “*the peaceful reunification of the motherland*” and promoting friendly cooperation between China and other nations. In 2019, he emphasized, “*Whoever does not love their country—or even worse, deceives and betrays their motherland—is a disgrace and has no place anywhere in the world.*” This assertion frames love for the motherland as a fundamental duty for every Chinese citizen.

Xi Jinping’s invocation of the “motherland” is closely tied to the issue of territorial integrity, particularly regarding Taiwan. He frames the question of Taiwan not merely as a political or strategic concern but as a matter of reuniting the family. In 2021, he stated, “*Taiwan’s independence forces are the biggest obstacle to national reunification,*” positioning Taiwan’s reintegration as essential for achieving the historical and cultural unity of the motherland. In discussions on Taiwan and cross-strait relations, Xi adopts a nationalist tone that combines assertiveness to some extent with a commitment to dialogue: “*Resolving the Taiwan question and realizing China’s complete reunification is a historic mission*” (2021). This emphasizes a firm stance on sovereignty and the importance of national unity; “*We must take resolute action to utterly defeat any attempt toward ‘Taiwan independence’*” (2021), highlighting his determination to protect national sovereignty. However, Xi also advocates for “*peaceful national reunification,*” suggesting an openness to negotiation rather than military aggression. Xi further reinforces this stance by stating, “*Our compatriots in Taiwan and on the mainland should join hands*

in supporting, maintaining and promoting the peaceful growth of cross-Straits relations, improving the people's lives on both sides of the Taiwan Straits, and creating a new future for the Chinese nation" (2013). This call for cooperation emphasizes the shared heritage of all Chinese people. Looking ahead, Xi states that *"we should implement the Party's overall policy for resolving the Taiwan question in the new era, uphold the one-China principle and the 1992 Consensus, actively promote the peaceful development of cross-strait relations"* (2023). This reinforces his commitment to dialogue and peaceful coexistence while firmly advocating national unity.

The nationalist tone strengthens his domestic audience's resolve to strive for the *Chinese dream of national rejuvenation* and collectively protect national unity. However, by identifying and analyzing frequent words or expressions relating to foreign policy stance, this study finds that Xi often balances his nationalist rhetoric with calls for global cooperation and mutual respect. Some common expressions, such as "open/opening up," "peace/peaceful," and "cooperation, attempt to reflect China's stance on foreign policy and its position in the world. Xi Jinping consistently emphasizes a commitment to peaceful development and international cooperation, presenting China as a responsible global actor. He made this clear in his speech at the Boao Forum, stating, *"We will uphold the principle of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit"* (2013), highlighting his preference for dialogue and collaboration over confrontation. This is reinforced by his assertion that *"We Chinese people should stand on our own and take a unique path"* (2017), signaling a confident, distinctly nationalist approach to China's development. However, Xi balances this nationalist pride with the reassurance that *"China will never seek hegemony or expansion"* (2017), emphasizing that China's rise is not intended to disrupt or dominate the international order but to contribute to global peace and stability. While the call for national rejuvenation is powerful in domestic contexts, it does not manifest as aggressive nationalism in foreign policy. Instead, Xi portrays China as a nation committed to peaceful coexistence, reiterating that China is a "peace-loving people" and emphasizing the importance of stability and collaboration. His declaration that *"We will uphold the principle of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit"* (2013) positions China as a constructive partner on the global stage, favoring diplomacy over conflict. This framing reflects a conscious effort to present China's rise as non-threatening, focused on shared global development rather than competition. Xi also leverages the role of the Chinese diaspora, stating that *"Overseas Chinese should serve as a bridge for wide-ranging exchanges and cooperation between China and their new home countries"* (2014), encouraging them to contribute to both China's development and global peace. This demonstrates an outward-facing vision of China's global role, where collaboration is central. Xi underscored this philosophy, calling for the *"building of a human community with a shared future"* and affirming that China will pursue *"an independent foreign policy of peace and the path of peaceful development"* (2021).

The notion of “opening up” is also frequently mentioned, with Xi arguing that *“China cannot develop itself in isolation from the world,”* indicating an understanding that national progress is interconnected with global dynamics (2023). This perspective frames China’s development as beneficial for its citizens and a catalyst for global prosperity. The emphasis on mutual benefit reinforces a diplomatic stance that seeks collaboration rather than domination. Similarly, cooperation is emphasized: *“We will continue to champion cooperation over confrontation, to open up rather than closing our doors”* (2021). This reflects a vision for international relations that favors partnerships and collective progress. By promoting cooperation, Xi aims to position China as a leader in global governance, one that values multilateralism and shared benefits over zero-sum dynamics.

The presence of a nationalist tone in Xi’s speeches/writings through the frequent invocation of unity, historical and cultural legacy, and national pride is undeniable. However, this nationalism does not inherently translate into an assertive or aggressive foreign policy stance; thus, the two are not contradictory. Instead, Xi’s rhetoric promotes a narrative of peaceful development and international cooperation, positioning China as a proactive global actor dedicated to fostering harmonious relationships. Xi’s 2023 statement, *“We must hold high the banner of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit,”* further reinforces this commitment.

5.2. International Speeches/Writings

Xi Jinping’s international speeches, delivered at significant events and high-level multilateral forums, reflect China’s active participation in global governance. These speeches are made at key platforms such as the G20, UN, BRI, BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Boao Forum, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the World Economic Forum (WEF), all of which are central to China’s foreign policy. China’s involvement in these international organizations and its role in establishing new ones underscores the necessity for a distinct Chinese global discourse. This discourse facilitates the development of vital connections with member states through these platforms (Costa, 2020). Xi consistently emphasizes cooperation and peaceful engagement in his communications, portraying China as a collaborative rather than an assertive global actor.

Before analyzing the international speeches, it is essential to recognize that they, on their own, already present a commitment to cooperation, as they predominantly occur within multilateral forums. As Santos et al. (2023) noted, the increasing number of Chinese forums, characterized by their inclusive and multilateral approaches, allows members to communicate directly with representatives of the world’s second-largest economy by passing formal diplomatic protocols. Furthermore, these forums can catalyze China’s foreign affairs agenda by acting as subnational agents that support its foreign policies while softening China’s image of might and promoting peaceful diplomacy. Additionally, they promote intercultural understanding, provide insights into China’s business practices, and

facilitate charitable contributions, enabling smaller projects to be financed and initiatives to be implemented more swiftly than traditional diplomatic channels.

Xi's tone frames China as a cooperative actor that seeks to advance its interests and ensure mutual benefits for all parties involved. Xi's emphasis on cooperation is evident in his statements about China's relationship with its neighbors and China's relationship with more distant countries. Regionally, at the Boao Forum for Asia, Xi emphasizes "building on past success and promoting cooperation in Asia," reaffirming that "*China will continue to promote friendship and partnership with its neighbors, strengthen ties, intensify mutually beneficial cooperation, and ensure its development brings greater gains to its neighbors*" (2013). This highlights a foreign policy focused on regional stability and shared prosperity. Similarly, at the APEC Leaders Meeting, Xi calls for deeper understanding, knowledge sharing, and coordinated efforts to "*boost regional cooperation through mutual assistance*" (2014). Beyond its immediate neighborhood, at a summit of the FOCAC, Xi extends this cooperative rhetoric to China's engagement with the developing world: "We will work with our African friends to embrace a new era of mutually beneficial cooperation and common development" (2015); positioning China as a partner committed to helping Africa develop through mutual gains, and contributing to its broader strategy of creating alliances with the Global South, reinforcing a South-South cooperation narrative. At the same time, Xi's offers of financial assistance and investment, as seen in his pledge to provide RMB360 billion yuan in support for Africa, reinforce China's practical commitment to long-term partnerships that yield tangible benefits (2024). His statement that "mutually beneficial cooperation is the sunny road" to achieving all nations' interests reflects his foreign policy's guiding philosophy, where collaboration leads to shared gains (2024). Xi consistently promotes partnership, stating that: "*China will continue to promote friendship and partnership with its neighbors*" (2013) and that "*the partnership spirit is the most precious asset of the G20,*" emphasizing China's belief in collective action to address global challenges (2016). Xi positions China as a responsible global power that cherishes multilateralism, which contrasts with a more nationalist policy that would prioritize unilateral action and self-interest.

One of the goals of this cooperation is the concept of "common/global development," which is also frequently mentioned and is central to China's cooperative foreign policy, emphasizing equitable progress and shared prosperity between developed and developing nations. Xi Jinping articulated this vision at the Summit of the FOCAC, stating, "We will work with our African friends to embrace a new era of mutually beneficial cooperation and common development" (2015). This highlights China's focus on partnerships, particularly in regions like Africa, where development needs are pressing. At the G20 Hangzhou Summit, he further stressed, "*Realizing common development is the hope of the people of all countries, particularly the developing countries*" (2016), underscoring China's commitment to inclusive, sustainable growth and global development, especially in the Global South. These concepts and related concepts, such as win-win scenarios,

shared interests, and viewing the international community as a collective with a shared destiny, present an alternative to the Western status quo, offering a fresh perspective on globalization and international relations (Costa, 2020).

This commitment to common development is closely intertwined with Xi's vision of a "community of a shared future for mankind," a central theme in his approach to global cooperation and international relations. Xi's promotion of the vision for a "community of a shared future" aligns with its long-standing foreign policy, which dates to the Cold War era. During that time, China championed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, advocating for international equality and cooperation and rejecting hegemonic power (Xi-aochun, 2018). At the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, Xi stressed that all countries should "*work together to build a community with a shared future for mankind and a better world for all*" (2021). His call for a shared future reflects a commitment to multilateralism and inclusivity, urging countries to "*join hands*" in overcoming difficulties and creating a better future together, which he further highlighted at the 17th G20 Summit (2022). By framing international relations through the lens of a shared future, Xi reinforces the notion that the progress of one nation is intrinsically linked to the well-being of others, thereby emphasizing the importance of cooperation and mutual benefits in achieving sustainable development.

Therefore, multilateralism naturally appears: China has increasingly adopted multilateralism, and it has developed sophisticated multilateral institutions, such as the SCO, FOCAC, and the Boao Forum for Asia, all of which facilitate dialogue and cooperation among member states (Duarte et al., 2024). As an important frequent term, playing a central role in Xi's approach to global governance, as seen in his defense of multilateral institutions at the WEF at Davos: "*We should adhere to multilateralism to uphold the authority and efficacy of multilateral institutions*" (2017). This is visible in Xi's support for the UN, where he calls for "*true multilateralism*" and sees the UN as the "*central platform for countries to jointly safeguard universal security and share development achievements*" (2021).

Launched in 2013, the BRI represents one of China's most important multilateral platforms to enhance economic, social, political, and military cooperation among its expanding member states (Duarte et al., 2024). Within China, the BRI serves as a crucial instrument for achieving the Chinese Dream; thus, promoting a peaceful and harmonious policy discourse is essential for effectively presenting the BRI project to the global community (Costa, 2020). This initiative exemplifies Xi Jinping's commitment to a cooperative foreign policy, as he frames it as a tool "*designed to integrate more countries and regions into economic globalization and achieving shared prosperity through mutually beneficial cooperation*" in a speech on global economy and international trade at the G20 Summit (2019). Xi portrays the initiative as a global public good designed to promote economic interconnectivity: "*We need to open up further to embrace development opportunities and seek win-win outcomes through closer cooperation. We need to work together to steer*

economic globalization in the right direction” (2019). Similarly, “dialogue” is central to Xi’s foreign policy rhetoric, particularly in conflict resolution. Xi stresses that countries should resolve differences through “*dialogue, consultation, and peaceful negotiation,*” showing China’s preference for diplomacy over confrontation (2013). This commitment to dialogue suggests a diplomatic strategy that seeks to reduce tensions and foster understanding, particularly in sensitive geopolitical contexts, as Xi reiterates that “*differences and problems among countries... need to be handled through dialogue and cooperation*”, reflecting his continued emphasis on peaceful means of conflict resolution (2021).

Confucian ideals, which continue to shape Chinese discourse, promote balance in both bilateral and multilateral relationships, reinforcing the country’s focus on peaceful conflict resolution and respect for domestic policies (Costa, 2020). This leads to another crucial frequent theme: “peace/peaceful”. This focus on peace is linked to China’s foreign policy stance, projecting an image of a nation dedicated to maintaining international order and preventing conflict. In a speech at the BRICS Xiamen Summit, Xi stated, “*The international community expects us to make our contribution to world peace and common development*” (2017), highlighting China’s, and in this case, the BRICS’ responsibility as important global actors in shaping a peaceful global order. Xi also emphasized the need to “*strengthen the foundation for shared peace and security*” in his speech at the 18th meeting of the Council of Heads of Member States of the SCO (2018). Here, the use of “*shared*”, signals that China is looking beyond unilateral gains and is interested in creating security frameworks that benefit all countries. By stating that “*We need to advocate peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom, which are the common values of humanity, and reject the practice of forming small circles or zero-sum games*” (2021), Xi emphasizes the idea that peace is not just a national priority for China but a universal ideal that should guide global governance. His rejection of “*small circles or zero-sum games*” emphasizes China’s opposition to exclusive alliances or geopolitical blocs, which can lead to competition or conflict. Instead, China advocates for multilateralism, where international relations are based on inclusivity, fairness, and mutual respect. This reflects China’s vision of a cooperative international order that emphasizes win-win outcomes, where countries work together to achieve common development goals rather than engage in rivalries that can destabilize global peace. Xi also stressed China’s historical and ongoing commitment to peace: “*The Chinese people have always celebrated and striven to pursue the vision of peace, amity, and harmony. China has never and will never invade or bully others, or seek hegemony*” (2021). This assertion is central to China’s self-portrayal as a peaceful power, distancing itself from aggressive or expansionist policies that might characterize other global actors. By affirming that “*China is always a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, defender of the international order, and provider of public goods*” (2021), Xi seeks to position China as a force for good in the world. The idea of China providing “*public goods*”—from infrastructure to development

aid through initiatives like the BRI—reflects its proactive role in fostering global stability and prosperity, which it sees as integral to achieving long-term peace.

Finally, Xi Jinping’s foreign policy rhetoric frequently emphasizes openness, economic globalization, and the rejection of protectionism, portraying China as a global actor committed to fostering an interconnected world economy. His statements suggest that China’s growth and foreign relations are rooted in cooperation, integration, and mutual benefit, contrasting with the notion of isolationism or protectionism often associated with nationalist policies. Xi’s pledge that China is “*absolutely committed to reform and opening up*” (2013) highlights the country’s enduring focus on integrating into the global economic system, a trend crucial to China’s economic rise since the late 20th century. This statement reflects China’s determination to sustain its engagement with the world through modernization and embracing global opportunities. It also signals that China’s economic reforms are not only about domestic growth but are deeply intertwined with the global economy, particularly since, in most cases, the projects China needs to develop for its domestic growth have international projections (Costa, 2020). This interconnectedness contributes to the country’s evolving position as a key player in international trade and finance. Xi’s declaration that “*China will keep its door wide open and not close it*” (2017) reinforces its long-term commitment to global integration, positioning it as a staunch advocate of international openness. By acknowledging that “*China has not only benefited from economic globalization but also contributed to it*” (2017), Xi emphasizes China’s dual role as both a beneficiary and a contributor to the global system, highlighting the mutual gains of economic globalization, particularly for China’s development and international standing. As a result, Xi consistently criticizes protectionism, aligning it with harmful economic practices. At the G20 Hangzhou Summit, Xi called for strengthening global cooperation to promote trade growth, arguing that “*protectionism is like treating an ailment with poison*” (2016). This analogy conveys the belief that protectionist measures may seem beneficial in the short term but ultimately harm both the domestic economy and the global system, expressing that protectionism damages international relations and stifles global economic development. Xi’s critique of “*unilateralism, trade protectionism and backlash against globalization*” and calls to “*reject self-centered, short-sighted and closed-door policies*” (2018) further reflect his belief that isolationist policies are out of step with the realities of a deeply interconnected global economy. He stresses the importance of open cooperation and adherence to international trade norms, such as those outlined by the WTO (2018). This argument for pursuing cooperation for mutual benefit is exemplified in Xi’s advocacy for deeper international partnerships, particularly with developing regions like Africa. At the Beijing Summit of the FOCAC, he asserted that “*we get stronger and more resilient together by riding the tide of economic globalization*” (2024), which reflects his long-standing view that global cooperation, not protectionism, is the path to collective success.

The only time “national rejuvenation” is mentioned in Xi Jinping’s selected international speeches is at the 17th G20 Summit, and it is to emphasize that this nationalist term is intrinsically linked to China’s modernization and its role in global progress. Xi articulates that “*China will stay committed to the path of peaceful development, stay committed to deepening reform and opening up, and stay committed to promoting national rejuvenation on all fronts through a Chinese path to modernization. A China marching toward modernization will bring more opportunities to the world, inject stronger momentum for international cooperation, and contribute more to human progress!*” (2022). By framing national rejuvenation, he suggests that China’s development is geared towards peaceful engagement rather than aggressive expansion. He further underscores this point by asserting that such modernization will foster international cooperation, conveying that China’s national rejuvenation is a peaceful pathway to human progress. This approach coincides with China’s broader belief that, as it continues to rise, it must contribute more to global governance, economic growth, and problem-solving efforts—mainly through initiatives like the BRI (Xiaochun, 2018). By promoting national rejuvenation in this context, Xi reinforces that China’s rise is not a threat but an opportunity for shared growth and global stability.

As articulated in Xi Jinping’s international speeches at these global events and multilateral forums, China’s foreign policy is fundamentally rooted in cooperation and peace while strongly opposing isolationism and protectionism. The Chinese discourse positions China as a significant international power committed to peaceful development and global engagement without undermining existing norms while promoting new approaches to international relations based on win-win cooperation, respect for sovereignty, and a shared future (Costa, 2023). The analyzed speeches consistently reflect China’s commitment to engaging with the international community and promoting collaborative solutions to global challenges. Analysis of Xi’s remarks indicates that nationalism does not drive China’s foreign policy toward a more assertive or aggressive stance. On the contrary, they emphasize a vision of shared development and mutual benefit, reinforcing China’s intention to position itself as a responsible global actor dedicated to fostering stability and prosperity through multilateral cooperation.

5.3. Comparison Between Domestic and International Speeches/Writings

In domestic speeches, the frequent use of words such as “national rejuvenation,” “Chinese people,” and “motherland” signifies a strong focus on nationalism. The prominence of “Taiwan/cross-Strait” reflects the emphasis on sovereignty, territorial integrity, and nationalism, particularly concerning China’s position on Taiwan, and the lack of these terms in international speeches signifies China’s portrayal of Taiwan as a domestic national issue. This nationalist framing is deliberate and intended to resonate with domestic audiences by appealing to collective identity, history, and pride in China’s rise as a powerful and unified nation. Words such as “ethnic groups” and “Chinese culture” emphasize the importance of internal unity and the consolidation of diverse ethnicities, reflecting

the state’s priority on maintaining national cohesion and stability. Conversely, international speeches focus on foreign policy and global cooperation. The overwhelming use of “cooperation/cooperative,” alongside “multilateralism” and “partnership,” underscores China’s efforts to portray itself as a constructive and responsible actor in international relations. These terms suggest China’s positioning as a multilateral diplomacy and global governance proponent. The frequent invocation of “economic globalization” further illustrates China’s interest in promoting global economic integration and open markets, which matches its broader international strategy of fostering partnerships and mutual economic growth. The language in international speeches is tailored to appeal to global stakeholders, including governments, international organizations, and multinational corporations, positioning China as a central player in addressing global challenges through diplomacy and economic cooperation.

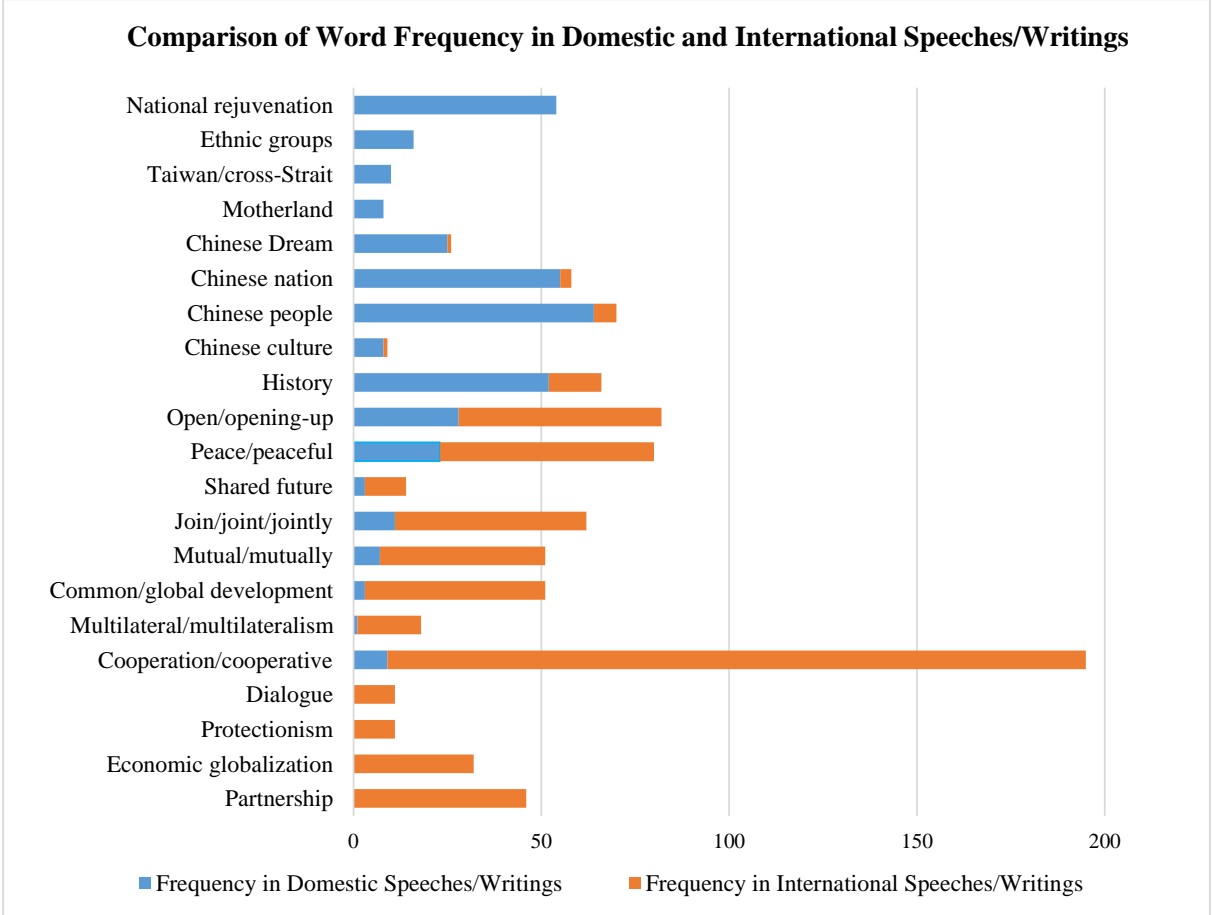


FIGURE 5.1. Comparison of Words and Expressions Frequency in Domestic and International Speeches/Writings

As seen in Fig. 5.1, the most significant difference between domestic and international speeches is the contrast in the emphasis on specific key terms, with “cooperation/cooperative” being overwhelmingly present in international discourse while almost absent in domestic speeches. International communications are dominated by terms such

as “multilateralism,” “partnership,” “common/global development,” and “economic globalization,” which collectively highlight China’s emphasis on foreign policy and global cooperation. In contrast, domestic rhetoric focuses heavily on terms like “National rejuvenation,” “motherland,” “Chinese people,” and “Taiwan/cross-Strait,” indicating a nationalist tone oriented toward internal cohesion, territorial integrity, and the reinforcement of national pride. This divergence in word usage is only natural due to different targeted audiences, hence the different priorities of the audiences being addressed. Domestically, the rhetoric aims to bolster internal unity, pride, and national sovereignty, reinforcing the CCP’s long-term vision of national rejuvenation. In contrast, the international discourse is geared toward enhancing China’s global image, highlighting its role as a promoter of multilateralism, economic development, and global stability. The absence of nationalist rhetoric in international communications allows China to focus on projecting itself as a cooperative and peace-oriented global power, while domestically, the focus remains on reinforcing national identity and unity.

Despite these differences, some common themes run through both domestic and international contexts, particularly the recurring use of terms like “peace/peaceful,” “open/opening-up,” and, to a lesser extent, “history.” These terms serve as points of continuity between China’s internal and external narratives, demonstrating that even when addressing domestic concerns, elements of foreign policy and international relations are ever-present. Domestically, the emphasis on peace reflects the government’s focus on promoting a foreign policy that emphasizes stability and cooperation, reassuring citizens that China’s rise will not compromise its peaceful development. Simultaneously, the term “open/opening-up” underlines China’s ongoing commitment to economic reform and modernization, signaling that China’s domestic achievements, particularly in economic development and reform, are intricately linked to its global role and aspirations, resonating with both domestic audiences and international partners.

Despite highlighting two different narratives that serve distinct target audiences, the overall message of Xi’s domestic and international speeches is consistent. Domestic speeches often carry a strong nationalist tone, emphasizing terms like “National rejuvenation,” “Chinese people,” and “motherland,” which aim to promote internal unity and pride. However, alongside this nationalist rhetoric, there is also a commitment to world peace, global cooperation, and economic globalization, which resonates strongly in international addresses. This dual emphasis suggests that while the focus may shift depending on the audience, the fundamental principles remain aligned. This strategic differentiation in messaging illustrates the Chinese government’s dual objectives: reinforcing national pride and cohesion internally while projecting an image of cooperation and global responsibility externally.

CHAPTER 6

Results

Although the speeches and writings were sourced from four platforms—*The Governance of China* (first three volumes), *Xinhua News Agency*, *Qiushi Journal*, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China website—no discrepancies were found in the content or messages analyzed. The only differences noted were some added complexity in the retrieval process due to occasional variations in format among the sources.

In domestic speeches, terms such as “Chinese Dream,” “national rejuvenation,” “motherland,” “Chinese nation,” and “Chinese people” highlight a strong emphasis on nationalism. This language triggers a sense of pride and reinforces a collective identity among all Chinese, particularly regarding issues of territorial integrity, as seen in references to “Taiwan/cross-Strait.” These terms reflect the CCP’s goals of maintaining internal unity and cultural cohesion among Chinese of all ethnic groups, overseas Chinese, and people in Taiwan, resonating with domestic audiences and appealing to their sense of national pride and the historical narrative of China’s rise as a powerful nation. Despite being delivered on various occasions, there is a consistency in domestic discourse: these speeches and writings consistently revolve around themes of the Chinese nation, the Chinese people, the CCP’s and China’s achievements, China’s historical struggles, Chinese culture, and the realization of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. Additionally, Xi occasionally speaks on China’s role in the world as a nation that advocates for peace and openness and contributes to global development.

Xi’s international speeches focus exclusively on cooperation, peace, multilateralism, and global engagement. Words such as “cooperation/cooperative,” “peace/peaceful,” “multilateralism,” and “partnership” dominate the discourse, positioning China as a peaceful, responsible global actor committed to promoting stability and constructive relationships on the international stage. The frequent invocation of “economic globalization” further emphasizes China’s advocating for open markets and deeper integration into the global economy. This rhetoric aims to promote China’s active role in addressing global challenges and highlights its commitment to mutual benefits through diplomacy and economic collaboration. Hence, although delivered on different occasions, such as diverse forums and various international and multilateral organizations, the international discourse remains coherent: Xi consistently presents China as a peaceful, cooperative, and responsible global actor, advocating for these principles while critiquing hegemonic, isolationist, and protectionist attitudes.

When comparing the domestic and international speeches/writings, the main divergence between them is a distinction in thematic focus between domestic and international

addresses due to the different target audiences. Domestic speeches focus on issues relevant to Chinese citizens while occasionally addressing China's position in the world, while international speeches exclusively emphasize China's global standing. Despite these differences, the overarching messages in both contexts are not contradictory. The strong emphasis on nationalism in domestic rhetoric does not translate into an assertive or aggressive foreign policy stance. Instead, a consistent commitment to peace and stability permeates both domestic and international messaging. In both contexts, China portrays itself as a peaceful nation and a proponent of peace and cooperation, emphasizing its role as a contributor to global stability. Common terms for both domestic and international speeches/writings, such as "peace/peaceful" and "open/opening-up," illustrate that while the messages may differ in focus due to different audiences, they share an underlying commitment to global cooperation and economic integration. Additionally, Xi links China's national rejuvenation to the country's modernization, suggesting that this will create greater opportunities for the world, inject stronger momentum into international cooperation, and contribute significantly to human progress. This perspective demonstrates that China's national aspirations are not a threat to the world or an obstacle to its foreign policy; instead, they are beneficial for all. This connection illustrates how national aspirations align with global development and cooperation, reinforcing that nationalism does not necessarily lead to an assertive foreign policy.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

Chinese nationalism has undergone significant political and cultural transformations, shaping the nation's identity and policies that reflect both top-down directives and grassroots sentiments. Historically, nationalism has been a key factor in Chinese foreign policy, mirroring the country's evolving priorities. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, nationalism has become even more central to the narrative, with differing scholarly perspectives emerging. Some argue that this nationalism strongly influences China's international stance, while others contend that nationalism alone does not directly dictate foreign policy decisions, and instead, the CCP often adopts a pragmatic approach that balances these sentiments with the necessity of sustaining international relations.

Based exclusively on a discourse analysis of Xi Jinping's selected domestic and international speeches, this study concludes that nationalism does not necessarily lead to an assertive foreign policy. Xi's domestic rhetoric consistently reflects a strong nationalist tone, emphasizing the *Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation* and pride in Chinese identity. This narrative aims to promote internal cohesion and legitimize the CCP's governance by invoking shared historical narratives and aspirations. On the international stage, Xi's speeches focus on cooperation, multilateralism, and positioning China as a peaceful global actor. While these domestic and international narratives appear distinct, they are not contradictory. Instead, they are interwoven, with Xi portraying China's national ambitions as complementary to global development and opportunities, creating a vision in which the country's rise mutually benefits China and the world.

Xi carefully manages China's foreign policy, recognizing that in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, China cannot achieve its national ambitions—embodied in the *Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation*—in isolation. Xi understands that international cooperation is essential for China to progress as a superpower and reach its national objectives. Hence, his rhetoric emphasizes a cooperative, peaceful, and open stance toward globalization and the creation and active participation in multilateral and international forums. These multilateral engagements serve China's national interests and position the country as an indispensable player in global economic and security issues. While fostering national pride, Xi rejects a purely nationalist, isolationist, or aggressive approach, knowing that such a path would hinder China's growth and standing. Instead, he advocates for a balanced strategy that intertwines international collaboration with national pride, which is crucial for maintaining domestic legitimacy and support. This approach allows China to project itself as a responsible global power while advancing its goals.

In conducting this study, the main challenge faced was not being able to rely solely on *The Governance of China*, as it did not cover the final date of the study. As a result, additional sources had to be explored; although these additional sources were credible and official, there was added complexity in the retrieval process, along with some occasional small variations in format among the sources. While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between nationalism and Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping based on Xi's discourse analysis, it has limitations. First, there may be a rhetoric versus action gap; the study relies on qualitative assessments of Xi's speeches, which may not fully capture how these statements translate into actual policy decisions. This gap suggests that while Xi's rhetoric emphasizes cooperation and peaceful engagement, the corresponding actions taken by the state may not always be compatible with these proclaimed ideals. Additionally, the evolving nature of international relations and the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape means that the findings may reflect a snapshot in time rather than a broad analysis of future trends. As global dynamics shift, the role of nationalism in shaping foreign policy could also change, warranting further investigation to keep pace with these developments. Future studies could investigate the gap between Xi Jinping's rhetoric and actual policy implementation, focusing on cases where ideals diverge from actions. Additionally, researchers might examine how the evolving international relations landscape and shifting geopolitical dynamics influence the role of nationalism in China's foreign policy over time.

In conclusion, this study addresses the research question by asserting that nationalism does not inherently drive Chinese foreign policy towards a more aggressive or assertive stance, as might be expected from a nationalist leader. Instead, Xi Jinping's approach reflects a strategy in which nationalist sentiment bolsters domestic legitimacy while promoting an internationally cooperative and peace-oriented image. By doing so, Xi not only reinforces national pride but also positions China as a constructive and responsible actor in global affairs. This dual strategy is essential for China's ambitions as an emerging power, as it ensures that national aspirations and global responsibilities are balanced within an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. Ultimately, this approach facilitates China's integration into the global community while preserving and promoting its long-term national interests.

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ANNEX A

Selected Domestic and International Speeches/writings

TABLE A.1. Selected Domestic Speeches/Writings

Domestic speeches/writings
Address to the First Session of the 12th National People’s Congress (March 17, 2013)
The Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation is a Dream Shared by All Chinese (June 6, 2014)
When the People are Firm in Their Convictions, the Nation will Flourish (February 20, 2015)
Confidence in Chinese Culture (November 30, 2016)
Family Values, Family Education and Family Tradition (December 12, 2016)
Complete a Moderately Prosperous Society and Realize de Chinese Dream (July 26, 2017)
A Nation Must Have a Soul (March 4, 2019)
Carry On the Legacy of the May 4th Movement, and Be Worthy of the New Era (April 20, 2019)
Speech at a Ceremony Marking the Centenary of the Communist Party of China (July 1, 2021)
Forging Ahead on the Journey to National Rejuvenation (September 20, 2022)
Xi Jinping’s Speech at First Session of 14th National People’s Congress (March 14, 2023)
Mobilizing Hundreds of Millions of Workers to Build a Great Country and Advance National Rejuvenation (October 23, 2023)

TABLE A.2. Selected International Speeches/Writings

International Speeches/writings
A Better Future for Asia and the World (April 7, 2013: Speech at the Boao Forum for Asia)
Asia-Pacific Partnership of Mutual Trust, Inclusiveness, Cooperation, and Win-Win Progress (November 11, 2014: APEC Leaders Meeting)
A New Era of China-Africa Cooperation (December 4, 2015: Part of the speech at the opening ceremony of the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and Development)
Build an Innovative, Invigorated, Interconnected, and Inclusive World Economy (September 4, 2016: Opening speech at the G20 Hangzhou Summit)
Shoulder the Responsibilities of Our Time and Promote Global Growth Together (January 17, 2017: Keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland)
Usher in the Second Golden Decade of BRICS Cooperation (September 4, 2017: Part of speech at the BRICS Xiamen Summit)
Carry Forward the Shanghai Spirit; Build a Community of Shared Future (June 10, 2018: Speech at the 18th meeting of the Council of Heads of Member States of the SCO)
Work Together for a High-Quality World Economy (June 28, 2019: Part of the speech on global economy and international trade at the G20 Summit)
Bolstering Confidence and Jointly Overcoming Difficulties to Build a Better World (September 21, 2021: Statement at the General Debate of the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly)
Working Together to Meet the Challenges of Our Times and Build a Better Future (November 15, 2022: Remarks at Session I of the 17th G20 Summit)
Seeking Development Through Solidarity and Cooperation and Shouldering Our Responsibility for Peace (August 23, 2023: Remarks at the 15th BRICS Summit)
Joining Hands to Advance Modernization and Build a Community with a Shared Future (September 5, 2024: Keynote address at the opening ceremony of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation)

ANNEX B

Frequent Words/Expressions in Xi Jinping's Domestic and International Speeches/Writings (2013–2024)

TABLE B.1. Frequent Words/Expressions in Xi Jinping's Domestic Speeches/Writings

Domestic Speeches	Frequency
Chinese People	64
Chinese nation	55
National rejuvenation/rejuvenation	54
History	52
Open/opening-up	28
Chinese Dream	25
Peace/peaceful	23
Ethnic groups	16
Taiwan/cross-Strait	10
Cooperation/cooperative	9
Motherland	8
Chinese culture	8

TABLE B.2. Frequent Words/Expressions in Xi Jinping's International Speeches/Writings

International Speeches	Frequency
Cooperation/cooperative	186
Peace/peaceful	57
Open/opening-up	54
Join/joint/jointly	51
Common/global development	48
Partnership	46
Mutual/mutually	44
Economic globalization	32
Multilateral/multilateralism	17
Protectionism	11
Dialogue	11
Shared future	11