DIVERSION OR REASSURANCE?
DOMESTIC INSECURITY AND ANTI-FOREIGN PROPAGANDA IN CHINA

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Abstract

Do domestic problems motivate leaders to adopt hostile actions against foreign countries to divert the attention of the public? According to the diversionary war literature, leaders might initiate a military conflict during times of domestic difficulties. I argue that provoking a conflict might oftentimes be too risky and that leaders can instead rely on alternative diversionary measures. My dissertation studies whether Chinese leaders intensified anti-foreign propaganda when they had to deal with serious unrest at home. I offer an original dataset that measures how positively or negatively the People’s Daily covered the United States, Japan, Taiwan and the West and examine the relationship between propaganda sentiment and major unrest events in China. In addition, I analyze in detail the propaganda strategies adopted in the aftermath of seven protests in China to understand the domestic circumstances that motivate antagonistic and accusatory propaganda against external actors.

The dissertation finds that the government did not rely on anti-foreign rhetoric indiscriminately whenever it faced protests at home. Anti-foreign propaganda is more likely to be used when the government needs to co-opt the social groups that participated in the protest, and when there is no alternative domestic threat to shift the blame for the protest on. I find scant evidence of diversionary propaganda after the Democracy Wall movement of 1978/1979 and the Falun Gong protest in 1999. The government used both diversion attacking various external actors as well as reassurances towards foreign investors after the student demonstrations of 1986 and 1989. Finally, a high level of diversionary propaganda targeting ethnic exiles and Western countries was adopted after the riots in Tibet and Xinjiang. Additionally, the media used convenient events, such as American military interventions abroad and war commemoration days to intensify anti-foreign sentiments. I find that the use of anti-foreign rhetoric to bolster domestic legitimacy is more complex and multi-dimensional than what the logic of the diversionary war literature suggests.
Acknowledgements

During my sophomore year at Smith College, I took a class on Chinese politics taught by Professor Steven Goldstein. At that time, I had intended to major in Economics and perhaps in Mathematics, but I thought that, as a Vietnamese student, it can be very practical to learn about China – our gigantic, at times fascinating and at times frightening neighbor to the north. Over time, I discovered that the study of China’s history, society and culture was something intrinsically valuable, not because it might be useful given its proximity to my home country, or advantageous because of the many business opportunities there, or pertinent due to its rising military power. I am greatly indebted to Steve Goldstein for introducing me to this fascinating country and academic field.

My passion for the study of China has motivated me to learn the difficult language, to digest the theoretical literature necessary to pass the general examination, to jump into the unknown conducting field work in Beijing and Shanghai, and to pierce together a somewhat coherent story (or rather, dissertation) from the various fragments of readings and analyses. In the end, the excitement and fulfillment from studying China’s politics and society helped me to stay happy and productive during graduate school and not break under the immense pressure.

My deepest appreciation goes to Tom Christensen, Rory Truex and Aaron Friedberg. Tom Christensen has been my adviser from day 1 and I am grateful for his patience and support at every step during the graduate school journey. I benefitted immensely from his wisdom and insights and my dissertation is modeled after his framework of using domestic factors to explain Chinese foreign relations. I was lucky that Rory Truex joined the Princeton faculty when I was in my third year. Rory encouraged me to explore innovative quantitative methods for my dissertation. He was always approachable, and I can bring my questions and concerns to him whenever needed. I am also grateful for the chance to teach undergraduate discussion classes under Tom and Rory. They modeled what it means to be committed teachers and passed on many teaching skills to me. Aaron Friedberg always gave me sharp and insightful feedback on my drafts. He can spot the weakest arguments in my dissertation and encouraged me to think deeply about my work. I am humbled by his high standards and brilliant insights.

My advisers have given me tremendous support and guidance during the process of writing this dissertation – providing me with constructive feedback at every iteration, writing recommendation letters, helping me to secure funding for field research and travels, attending meetings and seminars to listen to my presentations numerous times, etc. Yet, more than the specifics, it is their commitment to the field of Chinese politics and foreign relations that motivated me to carry on when I cannot “figure out” my theory or when the narrative sounds a bit off.
I am thankful for the support of several other Princeton professors and classmates and academics and colleagues in the China field, who gave me valuable comments on my work. I learned a lot from studying the works of Yinan He on nationalism in China and I am deeply grateful that she can serve as an examiner on my dissertation defense committee. Joanne Gowa motivated me in my third year to find a question that I can answer with quantitative data in order to demonstrate my point. Her advice led me to explore quantitative text analysis methods. Enze Han’s works on Tibet and Xinjiang were extremely helpful for my chapter on ethnic protests and I am thankful for his feedback on my quantitative chapter. I also benefitted from insightful comments and feedback by Meir Alkon, Song-Ha Joo, James Lee, Tyler Pratt, Molly Roberts, Gilbert Rozman, and Jack Zhang during my conference and seminar presentations.

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At Princeton, I had a place to call home at John and Aruna Desai’s, who treated me with much love like their own child. At their weekly bible studies, I also got to know and became close friends with Maggie Lau, Chris Lau, Rosita Zhang and Brenda Bertrand. My appreciation also goes to Nate and Val Johnson from Nassau Christian Center and David and Christina Keddie from the Princeton Evangelical Fellowship for their mentorship and encouragement in Christ.

My parents, my sister and my husband were always there for me. The times going back to Vietnam and being surrounded by my family allowed me to recharge and gave me the energy to carry on. While I was writing my dissertation, my parents were working to develop a barren hillside into a beautiful garden resort with lots of trees, flowers, and a lake. As I finish my draft, they are also about to open the resort to guests for the first time. Their strong work ethic and dedication to a multi-year project serve as a model for me. My sister, even though eight years younger than me, always gave me the best life advice and the conversations with her are always the most relaxing. My husband did much more for me than I ever expected. He helped me to stay on schedule so I could deliver my drafts on time, taught me how to code in an efficient way, and supported me during my stressful job search process. I am grateful to have him by my side during this long process.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Research motivation

In recent years, seasoned observers have noted a surge in state-directed anti-American and anti-Western propaganda in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Edward Wong, former Beijing bureau chief of the *New York Times*, noted in an article in 2014 that Chinese government officials “have voiced conspiracy theories with relish, accusing foreigners, their companies, government agencies and nongovernmental organizations of plotting to weaken or overthrow the party.”¹ In September 2014, large-scale pro-democracy demonstrations broke out in Hong Kong and lasted for several weeks. In response, the Chinese media attacked an American non-profit organization and accused the United States of hoping to foment a “Color Revolution” in China.²

Similarly, when stock prices fell abruptly in the summer of 2015 after a period of bearish growth fueled by optimistic propaganda, the media started to blame “rumor-spreading short sellers and foreign investors with a hidden agenda” for manipulating the stock market.³ There were also accusations made by officials, respectable research organizations and news outlets that outsiders were attacking the legitimacy of the government by inflating the number of victims of the Great Leap Forward, interfering with religious practices in China, and sponsoring violence in

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Xinjiang.\(^4\) According to Elizabeth Economy, “the current Chinese leadership has become addicted to the foreigner blame game. The phrase ‘hostile foreign forces’ has become a catch-all for Chinese officials, scholars, and media commentators who cannot acknowledge the reality of China’s current political and economic situation.”\(^5\)

While anti-foreigner rhetoric and accusations were adopted in many circumstances, leaders were also careful to keep xenophobic sentiments in check. In July 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague found that there was no legal foundation for the PRC’s claims of historic rights to the waters or resources within the “nine-dash line” in the South China Sea. To demonstrate their anger at this verdict, Chinese protesters gathered in front of KFC, McDonald’s and iPhones stores and called for a boycott of American goods. Even though these brands had nothing to do with the court decision, some saw the Court as a “puppet” of the United States.\(^6\) To limit the impact of these anti-American protests, official newspapers denounced “jingoism” and warned that those that “unlawfully harass others in the name of patriotism should be held accountable according to the law.”\(^7\)

How does the Chinese communist party use anti-foreign propaganda to bolster its domestic legitimacy? Are anti-foreign rhetoric and accusations used during times of instability to distract the public from the underlying social and economic problems? My dissertation seeks to understand whether and why diversionary anti-foreign propaganda is adopted, particularly when the government has to deal with internal protests and mobilization. It uses quantitative analyses

\(^5\) Economy.
of the *People’s Daily* content as well as in-depth case studies to analyze how propaganda strategies have evolved over time and how they have been applied to deal with different domestic circumstances.

The study of anti-foreign sentiments in China is timely and important for several reasons. Most of the time, domestic activism is driven by genuine concerns, such as income inequality, corruption, poor work conditions, or lack of political and religious freedom. When leaders refuse to acknowledge the deeper roots of the problems, use diversionary propaganda against foreign targets to distract the public or frame the activism as being manipulated by outsiders, they risk alienating the protest participants and the fundamental issues would not be addressed. Instead of stifling activism, delegitimizing rhetoric could even enlarge an issue, draw more participants and harden protesters’ demands.

Further, anti-foreign propaganda can damage China’s relations with foreign countries and hurt its image and reputation abroad. While perhaps the recent instances of foreigner bashing seem mild compared to the propaganda campaigns attacking the United States under Mao Zedong, what has changed is the international context. As Edward Wong argues, “unlike earlier campaigns targeting the West, the current wave of nationalism comes as China is ascendant.”

The country’s rising economic and military capabilities have already contributed to tensions with other powers like the United States and Japan. In such an environment, diversionary nationalist rhetoric can add further strains to existing bilateral relations problems.

If we can better understand the motivations of leaders and China’s behavior in the past, we might be able to discern what types of rhetoric might be expected, and which signal a more serious turn in perceptions. As the case studies on student protests in 1986 and 1989 will point out, criticisms of Western sympathy and support for the students were common in the media.

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8 Wong, “In New China, ‘Hostile’ West Is Still Derided.”
around this time, thus, it is no surprise to see such accusations repeated more than 15 years later during similar mobilizations in Hong Kong in 2014.

Theoretically, I draw from and seek to contribute to the literature on diversionary conflict. According to the diversionary war hypothesis, leaders who feel insecure domestically might initiate an international conflict to demonstrate their competence, reassert their power, and rally the citizens around the flag. According to Coser, conflict with an outsider can increase cohesion within a group under certain circumstances, for example, if the group is already relatively cohesive and if the outsider is perceived as threatening to one’s group as a whole. ⁹ Numerous works in the international relations literature have wrestled with this important question and diversionary motivations have been used to explain various conflicts and wars, ranging from the first Sino-Japanese war in 1894, Germany’s belligerence during World War I, the American expedition to the Utah territory in 1857, and the Argentinian invasion of the Falklands in 1982. ¹⁰ Jack Levy has argued that “the idea that political elites often embark on adventurous foreign policies or even resort to war” when feeling threatened at home “is an old theme in the literature on international politics.”¹¹

Theory chapter 2 argues that despite the progress in the literature in the last few decades, there are still certain gaps that can be addressed. First, most qualitative and quantitative works have focused on wars and military conflicts as the outcome variable and have asked whether domestic insecurity leads politicians to pursue military actions against foreign targets. However, leaders have a range of alternative options that do not rely on the use of force, such as

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threatening a target with economic sanctions, pulling out investments, bringing a territorial dispute to an international court, etc. In my dissertation, I focus specifically on the use of anti-foreign propaganda, which includes accusatory rhetoric, negative portrayal of another country’s society and political system, the recounting of historical tensions, etc.

The dissertation examines the conditions that might drive leaders to take up diversionary anti-foreign propaganda when they face serious protests at home. My proposed theory relies on two domestic variables: 1) whether the government has tried to co-opt protest participants beforehand and 2) whether there is an alternative domestic threat that leaders can scapegoat. First of all, if the protest participants come from a group whose cooperation is important for the regime and which has been actively co-opted with favorable propaganda and preferential policies, then the government would be hesitant to portray that group in an adversarial way. Under that circumstance, the government might be motivated to attack an alternative domestic scapegoat or to use diversionary propaganda against foreigners. If there is a suitable domestic scapegoat, there might be less need to rely on anti-foreign propaganda. Overall, motivations for diversionary anti-foreign propaganda are highest when the government needs to co-opt the protest participants and there is no alternative domestic scapegoat to blame for the unrest.

In contrast, if protesters come from a social group that the party sees as a threat that needs to be suppressed, leaders are more likely to use the occasion to crack down heavily on the protesters. In such a situation, the official propaganda would try to alienate the activists and depict them as a peril to social stability. Leaders would be less inclined to attack other domestic elements or foreign targets.

Additionally, it is hypothesized that leaders would not use diversionary propaganda indiscriminately, but that certain external actors might be more attractive targets than others. The
first likely targets are security rivals – states that have posed a security threat in the past or might present a challenge in the future. The official press can leverage the memory of past aggressions committed by another country, nationalist sentiments due to current territorial disputes or the fear of being encircled by another powerful state to drive attention away from current social problems. Another type of actor that can be attacked is what I call “legitimacy rivals,” referring to governments-in-exile, secessionist groups, dissident groups and opposition parties that operate from abroad and that seek to weaken or replace the present regime. The official press can frame the domestic mobilization as attempts by overseas rivals and enemies to destabilize the country. Lastly, the government might also use antagonistic rhetoric against “abstract threats.” Rather than naming a particular country, leaders can condemn foreign investors, multinational corporations, or the Western world for interference in their domestic affairs. For the case of China, I focus on the United States and Japan as security rivals, the Taiwanese government, pro-democracy dissident groups, and ethnic exile organizations as legitimacy rivals, and the West as an abstract threat.

A quantitative chapter analyzing a large collection of People’s Daily articles provides initial findings regarding the relationship between domestic insecurity and media sentiment. It is followed by three extensive chapters analyzing the government’s propaganda strategies in the aftermath of seven unrest cases. In the case study chapters, I seek to understand the political context and characteristics of the mobilizations to predict whether diversionary motivations would be high or low. Results from my qualitative reading of the People’s Daily will then be used to test whether the prediction materialized or not. A final discussion chapter addresses alternative explanations and what the research can tell us about more recent events.
1.2 Overview of the quantitative analysis

In Chapter 3 I leverage an original dataset of over 50,000 People’s Daily articles from 1986 to 2010 to examine whether a correlation exists between domestic insecurity events in China and the tone towards the United States, Japan, Taiwan and the West. Positive and negative sentiment words were identified and counted to calculate the tone of each article. I then identified six major cases of domestic unrest in China, during which regime insecurity was likely heightened. They include student protests in 1986 and the Tiananmen student movement of 1989, the Falun Gong sit-in protest in 1999, two cases of unrest in Tibet in 1989 and 2008 and riots in Xinjiang in 2009. I also added two major external events that might have intensified leaders’ concerns about internal stability, which are the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 and the 2008 financial crisis.

Using both regression analyses and plots of the People’s Daily tone over time, I found partial support for the diversionary propaganda hypothesis. First, one might think that given the intensity of Sino-Japanese tensions, Japan would be an attractive target for diversionary propaganda. However, the tone towards Japan only became less positive after the Tibet and Xinjiang riots in 2008 and 2009 respectively. The decrease in the tone after the riots in Tibet was minor, and the decrease after the Xinjiang riots was driven by Chinese criticisms when Japan issued a visa to Rebiya Kadeer, the leader of the World Uyghur Congress, who was accused of fomenting the unrest.

On the other hand, there were strong and visible increases in anti-American and anti-Western sentiments, particularly in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 and the Tibet and Xinjiang riots in 2008 and 2009. Crosschecking the content of the articles in the dataset suggests that the negative rhetoric was driven by criticisms of the Western political
system, denunciations of the American support for dissidents in China and outrage because of the Western press’ biased reporting of the ethnic riots.

The regressions suggest a weak relationship between the tone towards Taiwan and regime insecurity on mainland China. Perhaps the decrease in the tone was not strong enough or the number of articles was too low for the result to be significant in the quantitative regressions. I also found that convenient opportunities such as American deployment of force abroad, anti-Japanese resistance war commemoration days and elections in Taiwan were strong and consistent determinants of negative sentiments in the People’s Daily. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the 2008 financial crisis were largely not associated with a significant increase in anti-foreign sentiments.

Overall, these results indicate that the use of anti-foreign rhetoric to bolster domestic legitimacy is more nuanced than what the diversionary war hypothesis suggests. There seems to be an increase in anti-foreign propaganda during some cases of regime insecurity, but not all, and the government makes frequent use of convenient opportunities to intensify nationalist sentiments. While the quantitative analyses provide us with one angle from which to study the diversionary propaganda hypothesis, they cannot tell us what types of propaganda drive these findings and the political motivations behind them. Additionally, the analysis only considers Taiwan as the only legitimacy rival but there are other actors that could have been targeted. The case studies will further investigate these questions.

1.3 Overview of the case studies

To understand the government’s motivations and the reason why anti-foreign propaganda was adopted in some cases, the detailed case studies of seven unrest cases examine the political
context, the development of the incidents and the internal and external factors that shape leaders’ calculations. One type of anti-foreign rhetoric that I focus on in particular is accusations, for example, that hostile foreign forces have provided support for activists, that they intentionally intervened in order to destabilize China, etc. These accusations are particularly serious since they draw a direct connection between foreigners and domestic instability. Other types of rhetoric are studied depending on the cases. For example, there were articles denouncing the Western political and social system and criticizing Western “double standards” towards and bias against China in some circumstances. I also added the Democracy Wall movement of 1978/79, which was not covered in the quantitative chapter because the newspaper dataset that I collected only reached back to 1986.

Chapter 4 examines two cases that display low levels of diversionary anti-foreign propaganda – the Democracy Wall movement of 1978/79 and the Falun Gong protest of 1999. In both cases, I argue that the protest participants were either not critical to the government’s economic reform agenda or held beliefs that were threatening to the party’s monopoly on power. The government had, therefore, no qualms in crushing these movements’ leaders and active participants, and the propaganda focused on condemning their activism and beliefs. In the Democracy Wall case, leaders even used the movement as a convenient occasion to attack the remnant influences of the Cultural Revolution radicals. Given the heavy focus in the media on rebuking the protest leaders, there were few motivations to adopt diversionary propaganda against external targets. Further, criticisms of the United States or other Western countries were limited because of the Chinese need for cooperation from the United States during a critical phase of opening up and the border war against Vietnam in 1979 and during the World Trade Organization accession process in 1999/2000.
The second case study chapter, **Chapter 5**, finds that the government utilized a *mixed strategy combining both diversionary rhetoric criticizing the West and reassurances towards foreign economic partners* in the aftermath of student protests in 1986 and 1989. The protest participants – mainly elite university students – were important for the economic reform process and had been co-opted by leaders beforehand. Therefore, I argue that the government likely hesitated to cast the broad masses of students as opponents of the regime. The theory predicts that leaders would use diversionary propaganda to target either domestic scapegoats or foreign elements. Indeed, given the severity of the protests, leaders chose to blame a range of internal and external actors.

Domestically, leaders chose to shift the blame for the activism onto a group of liberal intellectuals, who had been subject to political persecution beforehand. At the same time, external actors including the radio station *Voice of America*, the Kuomintang government on Taiwan, supporters from Hong Kong, and Chinese dissidents abroad were accused of helping to fuel the protest. The Western political system was portrayed as a long-term threat to China and the media denounced American sanctions and protection of top dissidents. The anti-foreign rhetoric was especially severe after Tiananmen. After the smaller 1986 student protest, anti-Western rhetoric mostly focused on criticizing the “bourgeois” democratic political system.

However, pragmatic concerns still affected the propaganda strategy. Leaders sought to affirm the commitment to reforms and reassured foreign investors that their interests in China would be protected. We find in this case that the motivations are more complex, resulting in a mixed propaganda strategy.

**Chapter 6** studies three cases of unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang in 1987-1989, 2008 and 2009. I argue that the government has followed a consistent strategy of material co-optation and
social integration towards minorities during the reform period to maintain stability and reduce secessionist tendencies. The official press and leaders’ statements regularly emphasize ethnic harmony and the achievements of development policies in the region. When the unrest broke out, the government was unwilling to blame ordinary Tibetans and Uyghurs, because acknowledging ethnic grievances would cast doubt on the rhetoric of ethnic unity and raise questions about the government’s integrationist policies. The theory would predict a high level of diversion against external targets.

In fact, Beijing accused ethnic exile leaders and organizations of “masterminding” the domestic unrest. These accusations were also accompanied by antagonistic propaganda attacking Western countries. Several articles castigated the Western press for biased portrayal of the unrest and blamed Western politicians for using the occasion to split up China and sabotage the Beijing Olympics. Criticisms of the West were also found after the Xinjiang riots in 2009 and the Tibet riots in 1987-1989, although not as extensive as after the Tibet riots of 2008.

Table 1.1 summarizes the key variables and findings from the case studies. The two key variables are whether co-optation of protest participants was pursued beforehand and whether there were alternative domestic threats that can be blamed for the protests. No prior co-optation would predict a low level of anti-foreign propaganda. Prior co-optation but the presence of an alternative domestic threat would predict a medium level of anti-foreign propaganda. Finally, prior co-optation and the absence of an alternative domestic threat would predict a high level of diversionary rhetoric. While each case exhibits unique characteristics, I find that overall, the theory has strong predictive power and can account for the contours of the propaganda strategies. One case in which anti-foreign propaganda was stronger than predicted was after the Tiananmen movement, which is likely because the movement was the most destabilizing.
Table 1.1 Summary of the case studies

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<td>Alternative domestic enemy</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Predicted diversionary propaganda</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actual propaganda strategy</td>
<td>No diversion</td>
<td>No diversion</td>
<td>Medium level of diversion in the 1986 case, high in the 1989 case, targeted multiple actors</td>
<td>High level of diversion against ethnic exiles, medium/high against Western actors</td>
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In the final chapter, chapter 7, I discuss alternative measures of instability that could have been used, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates and inflation rates. I also address some of the alternative explanations, including leadership division and security concerns, and argue that these explanations are either not suitable for the cases considered or do not perform as well as my proposed theory. In addition, I also discuss some recent developments like the Occupy Central movement in Hong Kong in 2014.
2. Motivations for anti-foreign diversionary propaganda

2.1 Introduction

Do domestic challenges motivate leaders to adopt hostile actions against foreign countries to distract the population from internal problems? Numerous works in the International Relations literature have tried to test whether insecure leaders would initiate military conflicts to rally the citizens around the flag.\(^1\) In this chapter, I will first provide a survey of the literature on the effect of domestic instability on foreign policies. I argue that an important shortcoming of the diversionary conflict literature is the overwhelming focus on the use of force and the neglect of other low-intensity and low-risk diversionary strategies that do not necessarily involve engaging militarily with another country. These alternative diversionary measures might include political and economic sanctions, boycotts of international institutions, escalating a territorial dispute through legal means, or the use of anti-foreign propaganda. In most cases, starting a conflict is a risky choice and losing a war will likely lead to the loss of power for leaders.

To bridge the gap in the literature, this dissertation concentrates on anti-foreign propaganda as a potential low-cost diversionary strategy that leaders can rely on when they face instability at home. Since it is difficult to study propaganda strategies for multiple countries in detail, China in the reform period was selected as the country of focus. It is also a substantively important case given that its military and economic power can affect stability in the Asia-Pacific region. The main type of domestic instability that I examine is large-scale domestic protests since serious social unrest presents a particularly acute threat to the rule of the communist party.

This chapter will also discuss the various factors that have been proposed in the literature to explain what motivates diversionary behavior. Some of these factors include regime type (democratic vs. authoritarian regimes), elite competition, state capacity, ideology, etc. While these variables can explain variations in diversionary behavior in a cross-national context or across a longer time period, they might not be able to explain variations that occur within a short time frame. For the case of China, where regime type and ideology are slowly changing, we need a better explanation that takes into consideration short-term changes. In addition, the explanation also needs to account for the possibility that the government adopts different propaganda strategies towards protests that happen close to one another. In that situation, explanations relying on elite competition or state capacity that ignore the characteristics of the protest itself cannot account for the government’s propaganda decision.

I propose an explanation for diversionary behavior that is based on the government’s relationship with protest participants. When the government has an ambivalent attitude towards the protest participants or has tried to marginalize them beforehand, leaders are more likely to target these groups directly and there are fewer incentives to pursue diversionary actions against foreign governments and actors. On the other hand, when the government has to co-opt the social groups that took part in the mobilization, leaders would avoid attacking these groups and there are stronger motivations to adopt antagonistic propaganda against an alternative domestic threat or against foreign actors. If an alternative domestic threat is present and that threat can be blamed for the protest, the motivations to target external actors are moderated. Overall, the dissertation makes two contributions to the theoretical literature. The first is the focus on propaganda instead of the initiation of military conflict as a potential diversionary tool. Second, it advances an
explanation for diversion based on domestic state-society relations that accounts for the case of China and can be generalized to other authoritarian countries.

2.2 Diversionary strategies: Military conflicts versus low-risk options

A number of works in the International Relations literature have tried to test whether leaders initiate military conflicts when they are faced with instability at home. These works range from quantitative analyses of cross-national conflict data to case studies of the causes of particular conflicts. Quantitative tests of the correlation between indicators of domestic insecurity and the initiation of external conflict have found some evidence for diversion, but the findings are not undisputed. A study by Miller and Elgün reviewing the quantitative diversionary conflict literature from 1963 to 2006 found that out of 34 statistical models in those works, a quarter reported no or negative correlations between domestic problems and conflict initiation/reciprocation.

Case study works have spanned diverse conflicts ranging from the Argentinian invasion of the Falklands in 1982, the first Sino-Japanese war in 1894 to the American expedition to the Utah territory in 1857. However, there is no consensus even on cases considered archetypal. The challenge with qualitative case studies is that it is almost impossible to find smoking gun

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evidence for the diversionary war hypothesis since leaders would most likely try to hide their true intentions. For example, so far, scholars have not been able to uncover direct evidence supporting the argument that the Falklands invasion was a diversionary war.  

One shortcoming of the literature is the disproportionate focus on war and military conflicts and the neglect of alternative diversionary tools. The decision to initiate a full-scale war is oftentimes highly risky, and leaders that lose a war might have a hard time winning the next election or maintaining their hold on power. Even smaller military conflicts and operations could escalate beyond the control of leaders. The demands of an international conflict would add to the pressures facing the government and the need for resources to carry out the war would create further strains on the society. Instead of diversion, leaders might adopt reconciliatory measures abroad to strengthen their position at home. Chiozza and Goemans found that as the risk of losing office increases, leaders are less likely to initiate a conflict.  

Further, the outcome variables in most quantitative studies are the initiation and/or reciprocation of war and militarized conflict, usually taken from the Correlates of War or the International Crisis Behavior datasets. However, many of these incidents are local, small-scale clashes involving fishing boats or border defense units that were unlikely instigated for diversionary purposes.

External military actions are not the only choice that leaders have if they want to divert the attention of the public. There are alternative flexible and low-risk strategies, including escalating a territorial dispute verbally or legally, blaming foreign countries for economic problems, or bringing up contentious historical issues. Before the use of cross-national militarized conflict datasets, a few older works looked at diverse indicators of hostility, such as

5 Fravel, “The Limits of Diversion: Rethinking Internal and External Conflict.”
the severance of diplomatic relations or treaties, boycott of international organizations, closing of border, interference in another country’s internal affairs, expulsion and killing of foreigners, etc.7

A few recent works have also renewed interest in alternative diversionary actions. Kisangani and Pickering argue that leaders might adopt “benevolent” uses of force, for example, dispatching soldiers abroad for peaceful humanitarian relief, protecting groups and minorities at risk, or safeguarding economic assets. These missions can be used for diversion because they are cheaper and politically less burdensome to implement, will unlikely escalate into full-scale war, and are more likely to be supported by the public.8 Nicholls et al. study how domestic political pressure affected Japanese foreign policy behavior from 1890 to 1941 and found that leaders were less likely to make concessions in their negotiations with their rivals (Russia, China, United Kingdom, and the United States) when groups inside their coalition challenged the government’s policies.9 Tir and Jasinski propose a model of “domestic diversion,” in which leaders facing difficulties might use force against ethnic minority groups in their own country. They find evidence that slower economic growth and domestic unrest increase the likelihood of using force against minorities during the 1996-2002 period.10

In other instances, diversionary rhetoric can be used by leaders who do not have the means to launch a military conflict against a more powerful adversary. Li et al. argue that Taiwanese presidents would unlikely use military force against the much more militarily capable mainland China, but they can use rhetoric that promotes independence and Taiwanese identity

when their approval ratings are low. They coded various presidential statements from 1995 to 2004 and rated whether the statement was in favor of independence from the mainland and found that a decrease in the presidential approval rating increases the likelihood that the president would adopt pro-independence rhetoric.\footnote{Yitan Li, Patrick James, and A. Cooper Drury, “Diversionary Dragons, or ‘Talking Tough in Taipei’: Cross-Strait Relations in the New Millenium,” \textit{Journal of East Asian Studies} 9, no. 3 (2009): 369–98.}

This dissertation seeks to bridge the gap in the literature and add to existing works that study non-military diversionary strategies by focusing on anti-foreign rhetoric as a potential low-cost and low-risk tool that leaders facing domestic obstacles can use. If leaders seek to influence public opinion, they can use rhetorical strategies such as accusations against foreign countries or highlighting foreign threats that can, in the absence of a real conflict, induce anger or fear among the public and thereby increase national unity and cohesion. According to Van Evera, “other-maligning myths” can “bolster the authority of elites by supporting claims that the nation faces external threats, thus deflecting popular hostility away from national elites and toward outsiders.” In particular, the less legitimacy leaders have, the more likely they will engage in such mythmaking.\footnote{Stephen Van Evera, “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War,” \textit{International Security} 18, no. 4 (1994): 30–31.}

Following the literature, the first hypothesis being tested is the diversionary hypothesis, but the outcome of interest is not the use of force, but anti-foreign propaganda.

\textbf{Hypothesis 1 (Diversion)}: Leaders who are domestically insecure will use increased anti-foreign propaganda to divert attention away from internal problems.

Instead of pursuing hawkish rhetoric, leaders might try to maintain stable relations with foreign countries or even seek to strengthen these relationships. A favorable external environment would allow leaders to focus on their internal problems. Steven David argued in a
prominent work that Third World countries might even ally with an external threat so that they can better deal with a more concerning domestic problem.\textsuperscript{13} Taylor Fravel also found that the Chinese government was more willing to settle territorial disputes and make compromises during the negotiation process with its neighbors during times of domestic insecurity.\textsuperscript{14} This leads us to the second hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2 (No diversion/Reassurance):** Leaders who are domestically insecure will try to maintain friendly foreign relations to focus on domestic problems. We should not see an increase in anti-foreign propaganda or even more positive propaganda towards foreign countries.

### 2.3 Diversionary propaganda and the case of China

Because anti-foreign propaganda is difficult to code for a large cross-national sample, I focus on the case of the People’s Republic of China and how its leaders have used propaganda to bolster domestic legitimacy. According to scholars and observers, nationalism is an important ideology that has helped to legitimize the rule of the communist party, given the decline of faith in communism. In the nationalist narrative, the party is worthy of the loyalty of the citizens because it led the people in the fight against Japanese and American imperialism and continues today to stand up to foreign encroachments on the country’s territory and sovereignty.\textsuperscript{15} A prominent editor from the *Southern Weekly* that I interviewed holds the view that nationalist propaganda is an essential component that keeps the country together under the rule of the

\footnotesize
communist party. He argues that without the appeal to nationalism, the communist party would not have been able to sustain its rule for so long. If anti-foreign sentiments are used to prop up the legitimacy of the Communist Party, we should expect the government to lash out against foreign countries like the United States and Japan when it is experiencing governance shocks.

The case of the PRC is also substantively important because it is a rising power with growing military capabilities that has posed concerns for regional actors. Worse, contentious issues such as territorial disputes with Japan and the status of Taiwan can potentially escalate into military conflicts. In an international environment marked by rivalry and tensions, anti-foreign propaganda and accusations can be perceived as signs of a more aggressive foreign policy posture and can have a destabilizing effect. Further, such propaganda, disseminated through newspapers, textbooks and even television shows, can intensify resentments against foreign countries and can, in some cases, constrain policy-makers, empower hawkish policy coalitions, and create an environment in which it is easier and more rewarding to pursue assertive foreign policies. If Beijing today experiences a serious popular protest, the United States, Japan, and other countries in the region have reasons to be concerned about the impact of domestic instability on foreign policies. Will leaders use nationalist rhetoric and a risky show of force to demonstrate the strength of the regime? Or will they be so preoccupied with domestic problems that they would be willing to strike compromises with other countries? How leaders will act in the future will depend on the particular issues at stake, but a study of past behavior can yield helpful insights.

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16 Interview conducted in Beijing, China, June 2015 with a prominent editor from the Southern Weekly.
A few studies have tried to systematically examine the link between the PRC’s domestic conditions and its foreign policy behavior; however, they are still few in numbers and mostly do not deal with how regime insecurity influences anti-foreign propaganda. The work by Peter Van Ness shows how China’s endorsement of foreign insurgencies was first guided by pragmatic criteria, but the radical ideology adopted during the Cultural Revolution led to wholesale support for insurgencies.\footnote{Peter Van Ness, \textit{Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970).} Thomas Christensen argues that Mao Zedong initiated the Second Taiwan Strait crisis in 1958 to create an atmosphere of urgency that would motivate peasants to work harder and make sacrifices for the Great Leap Forward, an overly ambitious economic construction and social transformation program.\footnote{Thomas J. Christensen, \textit{Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).} According to Yinan He, Deng Xiaoping played up the Japanese history textbook controversy in 1982 to unite various groups behind his economic reform agenda.\footnote{Yinan He, “Remembering and Forgetting the War: Elite Mythmaking, Mass Reaction, and Sino-Japanese Relations, 1950–2006,” \textit{History & Memory} 19, no. 2 (2007): 43–74; Yinan He, \textit{The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations since World War II} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).}

However, as mentioned, Taylor Fravel has argued that domestic instability after the uprising in Tibet in 1959, the failure of the Great Leap Forward, and the Tiananmen crisis motivated the party to settle its territorial disputes with neighboring countries, frequently giving up more than half of the contested area.\footnote{M. Taylor Fravel, “Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China’s Compromises in Territorial Disputes,” \textit{International Security} 30, no. 2 (2005): 46–83.} The findings from the literature thus do not provide us with strong expectations either way. Chinese leaders at times seemed to have intensified international tensions for domestic political purposes, but at other times, carefully avoided conflicts to focus on domestic problems.

Two recent works by Alastair Iain Johnston and Yinan He find some correlation between domestic insecurity and anti-foreign rhetoric in the media. Johnston uses the number of articles
in the *People’s Daily* that refer to external or Western hostile forces to show that the biggest spikes in anti-foreigner rhetoric occurred after the Tiananmen demonstration in 1989 and between 1999 and 2001 during the suppression of the Falun Gong sect. Smaller increases in anti-foreign propaganda occurred around the 1995/96 Taiwan Strait crisis and the 2008 and 2009 ethnic riots.\(^{22}\) Yinan He relies on discourse analysis and *People’s Daily* article counts to argue that anti-Western rhetoric intensified in China around 2008 and 2009, when the party was facing challenges from ethnic riots in Tibet and Xinjiang and demands for political reform from outspoken intellectuals and political dissidents. Finding it politically difficult to suppress liberal intellectuals at home and target ethnic minorities, Western and other foreign "hostile forces" became convenient targets.\(^{23}\)

While the works by Johnston and He provide valuable insights, this dissertation hopes to extend their analysis by offering more detailed measures of anti-foreign propaganda and a more elaborate theory explaining the conditions that motivate diversionary rhetoric based on state-society relations, which will be presented in the next section.

### 2.4 Identifying periods of regime insecurity in China

Regime insecurity refers to periods during which leaders are more worried or feel more threatened by domestic political challenges. Even though one could argue that Chinese leaders feel constantly insecure, times when the economy is performing poorly or when large demonstrations arise present particularly acute problems for the leadership. The removals of Hu


Yaobang in 1987 and Zhao Ziyang in 1989 for their poor handling of the economy and student protests demonstrate that even though leaders in the authoritarian setting do not face election cycles, they can be punished by regime insiders with whom they share power. Further, the fact that the party used harsh measures to crack down on participants of the Tiananmen protest and followers of Falun Gong also indicates that leaders feel threatened by movements that can unite various social groups, draw sympathy from party members and officials, and have some degree of organization. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that even in an authoritarian system, there are periods during which leaders face greater internal instability.

Previous studies in the diversionary war literature relied on aggregate counts of protests to proxy for regime insecurity, but an aggregate measure would be problematic for the case of China since we have a steep rise in the number of protests over time. According to the Ministry of Public Security, the number of “collective incidents” has risen from 10,000 in 1994 to 58,000 in 2003 and even 87,000 in 2005. This would assume that leaders now are more insecure than in 1989, when the Tiananmen demonstration occurred. In addition, even though mass incidents are frequent and rising, they are mostly small-scale and with limited demands. As Xi Chen, an expert on social protests in China, pointed out, even though the count of mass incidents can be trustworthy, “it offers too little information for us to properly analyze the trend of social protest.”

Given that an aggregate measure is not informative, for my analysis, I selected the most serious movements and protests that the regime has faced in the post-Mao period. They include the 1978/79 Democracy Wall movement, the 1986 student protest, unrest in Tibet between 1987

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24 Oakes, Diversionary War: Domestic Unrest and International Conflict.
26 Chen, 27.
and 1989, the 1989 Tiananmen movement, the 1999 Falun Gong protest, and the riots in Tibet in 2008 and Xinjiang in 2009. These cases were selected because of their substantive importance as the most serious cases of mobilization in post-Mao China. Their causes were not immediately evident but the protests were severe enough that they needed an explanation; they were only loosely and informally organized and spontaneity played an important role. Out of these events, the Tiananmen movement of 1989 was clearly the most protracted and destabilizing. These “regime insecurity events” will be the focus of the quantitative analysis and the case study chapters, where I will discuss in detail their background and development. The Democracy Wall movement of 1978-1979 is not included in the quantitative analysis because the collection of People’s Daily articles that I was able to gather reached back only to 1986, but it is covered in the case studies.

One challenge to my choice of these events is that the list might not be comprehensive enough and one could include additional events. For example, Yinan He argued that leaders’ insecurity was heightened in 2008-2009 due to multiple factors besides the ethnic riots, including heavy snowstorm in January 2008, the Sichuan earthquake in May 2008 and the publication of Charter 08 calling for democratic reforms in December 2008.27 While it is possible to add more events to the analysis, I argue that we should focus on the most destabilizing protests. If we do not see signs of anti-foreign propaganda even in the aftermath of the most serious mobilizations, we would be unlikely to see diversionary rhetoric in less serious ones. Further, I am interested in studying the dynamics of these events and how they lead to anti-foreign propaganda. If we include other categories like natural disasters or accidents, we would need multiple theoretical explanations that are outside of the scope of the dissertation.

27 He, “Domestic Troubles, National Identity Discourse, and China’s Attitude towards the West, 2003-2012.”
2.5 The role of domestic factors in driving diversionary propaganda

While the previous sections argued for the need to focus on non-military diversionary strategies and explained the focus on China, this section will hypothesize about the conditions that make diversionary propaganda more likely. I survey some of the most important explanations in the literature and examine the shortcomings of these approaches if applied to China. After that, I will propose an alternative explanation based on domestic state-society relations. While this theory shares similarity with some previous approaches, it is novel in the way it is applied to explaining propaganda strategies in China in the aftermath of domestic protests.

Several theoretical approaches in the literature have tried to explain variations in diversionary behavior across states using variables such as regime type, elite competition, support from regime insiders, state capacity, ideology, etc. For instance, several works have studied whether democratic or authoritarian states are more likely to divert. According to Levy and Vakili, authoritarian regimes might resort to diversion to a greater extent because they do not have the democratic institutions with inherent legitimacy that can help to resolve internal unrest. However, others argued that since authoritarian regimes can directly suppress domestic unrest, they have less need to rely on diversion. On the other hand, democratic governments accountable to the public cannot violently suppress unrest at home and, thus, should be more likely to divert. Nevertheless, the difference between authoritarian and democratic regimes

29 Gelpi, “Democratic Diversions Governmental Structure and the Externalization of Domestic Conflict.”
might have been overstated; a recent study has found no difference in diversionary behavior between these two regime types.\textsuperscript{30}

Ideology and culture might also encourage leaders to pursue anti-foreign rhetoric if certain ideological or cultural traits make the public more receptive to such propaganda. Religious and cultural differences, for instance, partially explain why the image of the United States in predominantly Muslim countries has rather been negative. Analyzing various waves of the Pew Global Attitudes survey in 42 countries, Chiozza found that a large Muslim population “is the single most powerful predictor of the presence of anti-American sentiment” and is even more important than economic or strategic factors.\textsuperscript{31} In Latin America, McPhearson shows that anti-Americanism was stronger when it overlapped with other preexisting ideologies, especially nationalism, but also socialism, communism and populism.\textsuperscript{32}

Another explanation focuses on extractive capacity, which affects what policies can be realistically pursued and which are out of the question. Extractive capacity is proxied by how much tax revenue the government can extract given the size of the economy. Indicators of low extractive capacity include low tax revenues, high public debt, the need to seek out alternative sources of income, etc. Oakes argues that governments with low extractive capabilities cannot easily implement reform measures or repress their opposition, and therefore, are more likely to engage in limited diversions, such as making threats or using force against a symbolic, but weak,

target. On the other hand, states with high extractive capabilities can repress or reform and would be less likely to divert.\textsuperscript{33}

However, the limitation of approaches relying on regime type, ideology or state capacity is that they focus on slowly changing factors that work well in explaining cross-national variations but cannot be used to study short-term and within-country variations.

Another prominent explanation focuses on elite competition. Mansfield and Snyder argue that in democratizing countries, elites from the old regime and elites representing the democratizing force might compete against each other for power. In the process of competition, they might use nationalist appeals to mobilize the masses and these types of propaganda might entrap them in costly foreign conflicts.\textsuperscript{34} In another work, Blaydes and Linzer hypothesize that elites in predominantly Islamic countries would rely more heavily on anti-American propaganda when the competition between the Islamist faction and the secular-nationalist faction is intensified. They find through three case studies (Turkey, Senegal, and Morocco) that media reporting on the United States in 2007 was the most negative in the country with the highest level of secular-Islamist competition (Turkey).\textsuperscript{35}

Other works emphasize the relationship between leaders and their constituents. Nicholls and coauthors argue that in the case of Japan from 1890 to 1941, leaders were more concerned with maintaining support from groups within the ruling coalition than from outside groups. When leaders faced policy demands from insiders that they were not willing to concede to, they were motivated to adopt diversionary actions, such as making threats, escalating military conflicts, or adopting a tougher stance in international negotiations. However, when leaders were

\textsuperscript{33} Oakes, “Diversionary War and Argentina’s Invasion of the Falkland Islands.”
willing to meet insiders’ policy demands, diversion would be unnecessary.36 In the case of the
United States from 1953 to 1976, Morgan and Bickers find that presidents were more sensitive to
the level of approval from members of their own parties, and when the level of approval declined,
they were more likely to make military threats or to use force.37

Another perspective considers whether leaders belong to the majority or the minority
groups. To explain why states in the Arab world have actively promoted or tolerated conspiracies
targeting foreign countries, Gray argues that when leaders belong to minority groups (eg. the
Sunni Muslim minority in Iraq under Saddam Hussein), they might feel genuinely threatened and
this insecurity can motivate anti-American and anti-Israeli propaganda.38

While arguments relying on leaders’ backgrounds, leader-constituent relationships and
elite competition are appealing, I argue that they have two shortcomings. First, these variables,
especially elite competition, would be very difficult to code in the Chinese case because the
communist party has tried to downplay divisions within the leadership. While we could infer
from high-profile purges that tensions within the leadership had occurred, it is difficult to
determine the level of elite competition prior to such purges or in their absence.

Second, these variables can explain medium-term changes, but might have difficulty
explaining fluctuations that happen within a short timeframe. For example, we might have two
cases of domestic unrest that break out within weeks of one another, and the government might
pursue diversionary anti-foreign propaganda after one case but not the other. The level of
leadership division might not change as quickly.

Theory and Japanese Foreign Policy, 1890–1941.”
38 Matthew Gray, Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World: Sources and Politics (New York: Routledge, 2010).
I argue that we would benefit from taking into account the nature of the domestic unrest. This is valuable information that has typically been neglected in the literature. More specifically, my proposed explanation focuses on the state’s relationship towards the social groups that participated in the unrest and the presence of other domestic threats that might be used as targets for propaganda. The disadvantage of this proposed explanation is that it can only study propaganda strategies in the aftermath of domestic protests and it cannot deal with other types of instability such as an economic downturn or high inflation. These factors can also be destabilizing, but they are outside of the scope of the dissertation. There might be different mechanisms at work in cases of economic anxiety.

2.6 Proposed explanation

Defining “diversionary propaganda” and types of diversionary propaganda:

Before presenting the proposed explanation, I will briefly discuss what is meant by diversionary propaganda. Diversion refers to the intended effect of the action and, thus, might not be directly observable from the action itself. In other words, the fact that we observe a hawkish foreign policy action during a time of domestic instability might not tell us whether the action was intended for diversion. Short of direct access to leaders’ policy deliberation, researchers can only infer that the action was “diversionary” because it was unnecessarily risky or because it diverged from seasoned analysts’ expectations. Another possibility is that the way the action was carried out suggests that it was intended for diversion (perhaps it was accompanied by an unusual propaganda campaign or heavily covered military exercise). Therefore, there is no specific criteria for what constitutes diversionary propaganda and we need to consider the particular circumstances and leaders’ likely calculations.
At the same time, certain types of rhetoric are more indicative of diversionary intentions than others and an analysis of the propaganda material can look out for these signs. First, the government could launch accusations against foreign actors and blame them for instigating or supporting domestic unrest. In some cases, such accusations might be warranted if there is evidence of foreign meddling, but in other cases, leaders might be exaggerating the role of foreigners or the evidence provided by officials is not conclusive. *Accusations against outsiders that are exaggerated or that are extensively covered in the media are indicative of diversionary intentions.*

Second, the government might intensify negative portrayal of foreign countries and actors, perhaps highlighting security threats posed by foreign countries, criticizing foreign countries’ political and social systems, tapping into historical memories and grievances, etc. Again, ongoing events might explain the presence of anti-foreign propaganda, but in cases *when there is a sharp increase in negative portrayal of foreign countries and actors without a good reason, we might suspect that such rhetoric was meant for diversion.*

*Proposed theory:*

My explanation combines insights from Amy Oakes’ “policy menu options” model[^39] and Steven David’s theory of “omnibalancing.”[^40] The first insight from Oakes’ work is that leaders have multiple strategies to deal with domestic unrest and that diversionary action would only be used when it is superior to alternative strategies. For example, the state could accommodate the demands of protesters and acknowledge the domestic reasons that gave rise to the protest. Alternatively, it can crackdown on the mobilization and put all the blame for the instability on

[^39]: Oakes, “Diversionary War and Argentina’s Invasion of the Falkland Islands.”
[^40]: David, “Explaining Third World Alignment.”
the “ringleaders” of the protest. Another strategy is to excuse the protesters but shift all the responsibility onto another domestic enemy, such as a rival political faction or an ousted leader. In all these cases, there are fewer incentives to pursue diversionary propaganda attacking outsiders.

The second insight, adapted from David’s “omnibalancing” theory, is that autocrats have to deal with multiple threats at the same time, but typically their ability to handle several threats simultaneously is limited, and so they would usually choose to focus on the more dangerous issue first. Sometimes the state needs to appease foreign threats in order to focus on domestic dangers. I develop two arguments based on these insights, and the case studies of diverse protests in China show that they do in fact account relatively well for the government’s propaganda strategies.

**Variable 1: The presence of prior co-optation policies towards protest participants**

First, it is hypothesized that the state’s relationship towards the social groups that participated in the protest affects diversionary motivations. “Social groups” are understood as large segments of the society distinguished by their occupations, class, age, gender, ethnic backgrounds, religious backgrounds, income, etc. Authoritarian states might pursue different strategies towards different social groups. If cooperation from a social group is important for the regime’s stability or if cooperation will neutralize potential threats from that social group, the state might try to co-opt that group. As Wintrobe argues, even authoritarian regimes cannot rely exclusively on repression; they also have to exchange security, goods and services to the citizenry for political support.\(^{41}\) According to Gandhi and Przeworski, there are two primary co-

optation measures: the direct distribution of benefits to members of a group and the implementation of policies in favor of a group. Authoritarian leaders might in some cases use political parties and nominally democratic institutions to “buy” support from opposition groups and create a group of loyal supporters with a vested interest in the stability of the regime. The fact that quasi-democratic institutions and strong political parties exist in many authoritarian contexts, including China, suggests that authoritarian leaders indeed pursue extensive co-optation strategies to bolster their rule. On the opposite spectrum, the state could pursue a marginalization strategy towards groups deemed as a threat to the regime. Political repression and socio-economic marginalization is a classic strategy that autocrats pursue against a variety of enemies.

While the particular policies adopted can vary, several criteria can be used to measure the state’s position towards specific social groups. Co-optation measures might include (1) legislation or propaganda that emphasize the importance of the group to the state, (2) the attempt to recruit that group into the governing party, congresses, government agencies, public universities, state-owned enterprises, etc., and (3) the implementation of special policies and financial transfers for the sake of economic development, social welfare, public infrastructure, education, etc. that would benefit that group. On the opposite spectrum, the government can marginalize a group using legislation or propaganda that highlight the threat the group poses to the state, measures such as re-education, hard labor or confiscation of property, and policies making it difficult for members of that group to join the ruling party and public institutions.

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Instead of straightforward co-optation or marginalization, the party can also hold ambivalent attitudes towards groups that are neither regarded as serious threats nor as important allies.

It is important to note that these strategies are “ideal types” and not all groups fit comfortably into one or the other policy extremes. Some groups occupy a middle-ground; they are of no special political or economic value to the party and are not actively co-opted, but they also do not represent a threat either. In addition, co-optation in the authoritarian context does not mean that a group will receive its desired rights and benefits, but rather, that the state would continue to grant this group with certain special privileges as long as they show obedience and loyalty. The state might oftentimes co-opt a group on one dimension (eg. economics) but control that group on another dimension (eg. political/religious). The receipt of economic benefits can be conditional on political obedience and loyalty.

I argue that the first factor that explains diversionary motivations is whether leaders have pursued prior co-optation policies towards the protest participants. If prior co-optation strategies were adopted, leaders would hesitate to publicly alienate and condemn the protesters and they would be more likely to find an alternative target to blame for the unrest. Diversionary propaganda would be more likely in this case. On the other hand, if the government holds an ambivalent attitude towards the protesters or has sought to marginalize them beforehand, the protest might present an opportunity to crack down on this group. There is less need to divert the public’s attention.

**Hypothesis 3 (Presence of prior co-optation):** Diversionary propaganda is more likely when leaders have pursued a prior co-optation strategy towards the protest participants.
**Variable 2: The presence of an alternative domestic threat**

Even when the protest participants have been co-opted beforehand, it does not necessarily mean that the only option for leaders is to target external actors. I hypothesize that if there is another group or target that is considered a domestic threat and that can be associated with the mobilization in some ways, the government might be pursuing propaganda to target that domestic enemy first. That enemy might be an opposition political force, a rival leader that needs to be ousted or a religious/cultural figure that the government wants to eliminate. I argue that the presence of a prior domestic threat that can be associated with the protest would moderate diversionary motivations.

**Hypothesis 4 (Presence of prior domestic threat):** If there is a prior domestic threat and if that threat can be associated with the protest, the motivation to pursue diversionary propaganda against external actors would be moderated.

Overall, we would have the following predictions:
- Prior co-optation of protesters + no alternative domestic threat => high level of diversion
- Prior co-optation of protesters + alternative domestic threat present => medium level of diversion
- No prior co-optation of protesters => low level of diversion

**Variations in co-opted groups over time**

We can see strong variations in terms of which groups were co-opted by the Chinese government. At different periods during the communist party’s rule, leaders embraced different priorities which in turn affected the fate of various groups. When the party had not yet consolidated its power, it had to mobilize as many classes as possible, even intellectuals and capitalists, besides the core peasant-worker coalition. Once it had solidified its control and the
political goal had shifted towards building a socialist society, it began to persecute and eliminate social classes and other “bad elements” that could not coexist within the socialist society, including groups with links to the feudal and nationalist regimes, landlords, “rightist” intellectuals, industrialists, and religious followers. They were heavily persecuted for their backgrounds, professions, and beliefs; many were subjected to “struggle sessions”, were executed, imprisoned or sent to labor camps. The treatment of these groups is a very clear and arguably also extreme case of exclusion and marginalization. On the other hand, cadres, workers, urban residents, soldiers and professionals from “good” class backgrounds were relatively favored under the state-controlled economy.

The reform and opening up program launched under Deng Xiaoping in 1978 again changed the state’s calculus. Deng’s pragmatism, as opposed to Mao's ideological hardline approach, prompted a reduction in class struggle rhetoric to stabilize the society. Even though conservative officials within the party still viewed entrepreneurs and intellectuals with suspicion, the economic reform program necessitated the inclusion and co-optation of “productive” social groups, without whom it would be difficult to advance in business, science, and technology. Under Jiang Zemin’s leadership, these changes were confirmed when the concept “Three Represents” was introduced, which stipulates that the party would represent “the development trend of China's advanced productive forces.” Entrepreneurs, previously dubbed “bourgeois elements,” were welcomed to join the party and intellectuals also no longer faced extreme uncertainty and waves of persecutions.

The state’s position towards workers, farmers and rural residents during the reform period was rather ambivalent. They did not occupy a strategically important position as the elite,

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educated and entrepreneurial groups, but the state has tried to manage their grievances while assisting impoverished provinces and building social safety nets to help those left behind by the process of modernization and development. In the periphery, the state has pursued a two-pronged strategy towards ethnic minorities, emphasizing the equality of and harmony among ethnic groups and trying to co-opt common people through development assistance and various preferential policies, while at the same time, trying to limit the influence of religion and secessionist tendencies.

Diverse social groups have participated in the seven cases of protests I will study (eg. students, intellectuals, workers, religious adherents, ethnic minorities) and since the state’s co-optation and marginalization policies have varied significantly across these groups, the cases provide us with rich variations in the key independent variable. In addition, diversionary propaganda targeting foreign countries would be a plausible option for the government to pursue in most of these cases. Foreign countries have at times demonstrated concerns for political liberalization, human rights, and religious freedom in China, and protest leaders and participants have oftentimes found inspirations abroad or have appealed to foreign governments and organizations for support.

2.7 The targets of diversions

While leaders could hypothetically attack foreign countries and actors indiscriminately in their propaganda, we can be more specific about the types of actors that they might target. I argue that the likely targets include “security rivals”, “legitimacy rivals” and “abstract threats.”
Security rivals

First, one possibility is that leaders will use antagonistic rhetoric against past or present security threats to tap into pre-existing fear and resentment among the population. Mitchell and Prins argue that states are more likely to use diversionary force when they are entangled in “enduring rivalries” with other states, with an enduring rivalry defined as a situation in which two states have been involved in at least six militarized disputes in the last 20 years. Countries that are engaged in long-term security rivalries have a more “opportunity-rich” environment and therefore are more likely to use diversionary conflict than those without rivals.45

Others have emphasized the current security environment and expectation of future conflicts. Jung argues that domestically unstable countries are more likely to initiate conflicts against targets that can provoke either fear or greed among the public. “Fear-producing foreign targets” include countries with rising military capabilities or countries that have nuclear weapons programs but have not yet acquired nuclear weapons. “Greed-producing targets” refer to countries with whom one has territorial disputes or countries that used to be strong but now are declining in power. The public would be more likely to support diversionary actions against those targets rather than targets that are either too powerful or too benign.46 Similarly, Tir also found that leaders tend to engage in conflicts over disputed territories as a diversionary tool because territorial disputes can more easily capture the public’s attention.47

Given these prior findings, some criteria can be established to select security rivals against whom leaders might launch a diversionary propaganda campaign. These include (1) past wars or military conflicts that can still ignite popular resentment, (2) the presence of salient

47 Tir, “Territorial Diversion: Diversionary Theory of War and Territorial Conflict.”
territorial disputes, (3) and the anticipation of future conflicts. While China has had contentious security relations and territorial disputes with a host of countries (Soviet Union, India, Vietnam, the Philippines, etc.), I focus in particular on the United States and Japan as the most important rivals. China’s military confrontations with these two countries go back to the Japanese invasion of China during World War II, the Chinese civil war during which America supported the Kuomintang government, and the Korean War during which the PRC came to the aid of North Korea and defended its ally against a counterattack by US-led forces. These wars are significant because they mark the rise of the communist party and its consolidation of power. The US and Japan, thus, can be considered China’s major past enemies. On the other hand, tensions with the Soviet Union did not escalate into war, and the military conflicts along the border with Vietnam and India were short.

Second, contentious relations with the United States and Japan concern a range of issues of major importance to China. The United States as a promoter of democracy poses a threat to the stability and legitimacy of the communist party’s rule. America also supports Taiwan militarily, which from Beijing’s perspective is a serious violation of its sovereignty. China and Japan have sovereignty disputes over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands and tensions at times still flare up over the treatment of the World War II history. Finally, there is much uncertainty regarding China’s future relationship with these two countries, especially given the steady rise in China’s economic and military power which could be threatening to Japan and the United States.

**Legitimacy rivals**

Even though the literature has mostly restricted itself to states as potential targets in a diversionary conflict, I argue that we should look beyond state actors. It is possible for leaders to
target non-state actors that reside outside of the government’s current jurisdiction and that might challenge the government’s control and legitimacy. These include anti-government rebels that operate in another country, governments-in-exile established abroad by previous regimes, groups leading secessionist movements abroad, and various other organizations established by exiles and diaspora communities that question the government’s rule and present themselves as alternative options to the government. These actors will be referred to as “legitimacy rivals.”

The Chinese communist party’s “legitimacy rivals” would include diverse actors such as the government and political parties on Taiwan, the Tibetan government-in-exile and its spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, exile/émigré Uyghur organizations, pro-democracy groups formed by Chinese abroad, etc. These actors are threatening because different from other countries that might interfere in China’s domestic affairs on an ad-hoc and temporary basis, they challenge the communist party’s sovereignty from afar and in the case of regime collapse, they could return to participate in a new government. I focus on the case of Taiwan for the quantitative analysis in Chapter 3. While Taiwan does not pose a national security threat to the much more powerful mainland government, it could take advantage of divisions and turmoil on the mainland to stage a return or declare independence, both of which are seen as severe threats.

Abstract threats

Another type refers to abstract, vague or aggregated actors and concepts, for example, the West/the East, the developed/developing world, communism/capitalism, Islam/Christianity, international terrorists, foreign investors, foreign hostile forces, etc. Anti-foreign propaganda aiming at these actors can be convenient for several reasons. Leaders can avoid mentioning particular countries or groups, thereby reducing the risk of offending countries with whom they conduct business. The threat can also be magnified when leaders position “the West” or “the
“communist world” against their own country, rather than when they name a specific country or group. In addition, these abstract and aggregated terms usually refer to aspects of identity and characteristics that stand in contrast to one’s culture and values, so they can heighten common people’s insecurity about their identity. I select “the West” as an abstract actor that the Chinese government could target. There is a long history of Western aggression against China going back to the Opium Wars and unequal treaties that reinforces the perceptions that the West wants to keep China divided, weak and backward. In addition, the West also presents an alternative political model marked by democratic government, free market economy and strong protection of individual rights that challenges China’s authoritarian rule and socialist economic model.

Overall, there is a broad range of external actors that the communist party can target. Propaganda attacking the United States, Japan and the West are likely more consequential in terms of their potential impact on foreign relations, but that does not mean that we should neglect other actors like ethnic exiles and dissident groups that operate from abroad. As the case study chapters will point out, in some cases, those “legitimacy rivals” have been the main focus of diversionary propaganda.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I surveyed some of the key arguments and findings in the diversionary conflict literature and identified gaps that can be addressed. First, I argued that most works have focused on military diversionary strategies and have neglected low-risk options. The dissertation adds to a wave of new works that examine non-military diversionary tools by studying anti-foreign propaganda in the case of China. I also proposed an explanation that seeks to account for the conditions that make diversionary rhetoric more likely when the government faces domestic
unrest. I argued that two factors might be of particular importance: the presence of prior co-optation strategies towards protest participants and the presence of an alternative domestic threat that can be blamed for the instability. The explanation predicts that anti-foreign diversionary motivations would be the highest when the government has tried to co-opt the protest participants and when there is no domestic opposition to scapegoat. Different from existing explanations in the literature, this approach can explain short-term, within-country fluctuations and co-optation/marginalization strategies are easier to code compared to alternative variables like leadership division.

There are limitations on this theory. First, it is more applicable to the authoritarian context, where the government has broad-ranging influence over media outlets and where citizens are not permitted or encouraged to question official narratives and propaganda. In a mature democracy, where citizen activism, investigative journalism, and a strong judicial system can help to locate the sources of social tensions and protests, citizens would unlikely buy the government’s attempt to blame foreigners for domestic unrest and a simplistic strategy of blame-shifting would damage the government’s credibility. The hypotheses are, therefore, best tested in authoritarian settings with controlled media, censorship, and strong government repressive capacities.

Second, the extent to which the government can bend the official propaganda also depends on the particular circumstances of the protest. For example, for protests that are small-scale, where the leaders and participants can be easily identified, and where demands are clear (eg. land disputes, labor protests about wages), there is usually less need to initiate a diversionary propaganda campaign and it would be difficult to shift the blame for the protests onto other targets. However, when the protest is severe enough that it requires an official explanation, when
the causes are not immediately evident and demands are scattered, the government has more room to interpret the evidence in different ways, or to attack other domestic and foreign targets.

The following quantitative chapter will test whether there is a correlation between domestic protest events and the *People’s Daily* tone towards the United States, Japan, Taiwan and the West. The next three case study chapters will discuss the seven protest cases in detail. In each case, I examine the government’s prior policies towards the relevant social groups (eg. policies towards elite university students in the student protest cases, ethnic minority policies in Tibet and Xinjiang) and the causes and development of the protest as discussed in contemporary sources and scholarly works. I then study the government’s propaganda strategies to understand whether domestic actors were blamed or whether foreign countries and external actors were targeted, and if so, what types of rhetoric were used.
3. Analyzing the *People’s Daily* sentiments from 1986 to 2010

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to test the diversionary propaganda hypothesis using a quantitative analysis of the *People’s Daily*. The hypothesis presented in the last chapter predicted that we would see more negative propaganda targeting external actors during times of regime insecurity, and the likely targets are security rivals, legitimacy rivals or abstract threats. I selected the United States and Japan as major security rivals, Taiwan as a legitimacy rival of the ruling communist party and “the West” as an abstract threat. The analyses rely on a collection of over 50,000 *People’s Daily* articles from 1986 to 2010 and the main outcome variables that proxy for anti-foreign propaganda are the average tone scores in the articles that mention the United States, the West, Japan and Taiwan.

I will first discuss my choice of the *People’s Daily* and why it can be used to broadly capture official propaganda. After that, I will show how the tone in the *People’s Daily* towards these four actors fluctuated over time and explain the major drivers of changes in the tone. From a visual inspection, some domestic shocks did seem to be correlated with a more negative/less positive tone towards external actors. However, some of the most important factors affecting the tone are shifts in bilateral and cross-strait relations, American use of force abroad and anti-Japanese resistance war commemoration days. Finally, I discuss results from regression analyses that try to test these relationships more formally. This chapter only deals with whether we see a correlation between domestic insecurity and *People’s Daily* sentiments. The case studies in the
following chapters will provide a more detailed analysis of official propaganda and discuss the
domestic conditions which influence anti-foreign rhetoric.

3.2 The *People’s Daily* as an important official propaganda channel

Since we are interested in the Chinese government’s official propaganda strategy, the
*People’s Daily* would be the most important source to consider. The newspaper was established
in 1948 and is the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee.

According to official information on its website, the *People’s Daily* is “the most authoritative
and the most influential national newspaper;” it “represents the voice of the party and the people,”
helps Chinese understand the world and serves as a window into China for foreigners.¹

Interviews that I have conducted with journalists, editors and academics in China confirm the
important status of the *People’s Daily*.² Several experts in the media sphere mentioned that even
though the paper has a limited readership, it still sets the tone for other newspapers, defines the
boundary within which other media outlets operate, and signals important policy directions.

Journalists from different ideological backgrounds, whether from the more nationalistic *Global
Times* or the relatively liberal *Southern Weekly*, shared that on foreign policy issues, which are
generally considered more sensitive, they need to follow the policy direction and official
interpretation offered by the *People’s Daily* and work within these boundaries.

¹ “Basic Facts about the People’s Daily [人民日报基本情况],” May 14, 2003,
² Over 30 interviews were conducted with editors and journalists at major official news outlets, including the
*People’s Daily, Global Times, Southern Weekly*, and academics in journalism schools in Beijing and Shanghai,
China.
Various works on the media environment and my interviews suggest that the government still micromanages important news outlets through the Propaganda Ministry, despite the trend towards greater media commercialization. One journalist from the *People’s Daily* who took me on a tour of the newspaper compound in 2015 said that the paper works like a government agency, with classified information and instructions flowing from the top to direct its work. Besides disseminating important policy directions and leaders’ statements and producing news, an important task of the paper is to collect information about the society, which are then submitted to top leaders. Sensitive reports are even hand-written, instead of typed up. Many working in the news media believe that the government takes its “propaganda and thought work” seriously. According to a well-connected Chinese scholar, the propaganda machine cares little about what foreign observers think; all propaganda is first and foremost for domestic consumption. Official propaganda thus is highly controlled and purposeful.

Occasional statements by officials also give us a glimpse of the scope and intentionality of the government’s control over the media. For example, in October 2004, the head of the State Council Information Office told Japanese reporters that “there will be no anti-Japan reporting by major news organizations.” The article went on to say that “it is unusual for the Chinese authorities to openly admit their intervention in news reporting. This indicates they have no hesitation in twisting arms to show that they are making efforts to improve ties with Japan.” Obviously, the reverse in the form of an anti-Japanese media campaign is not unthinkable; it might just not be acknowledged publicly. Given the important status of the *People’s Daily* as an

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4 Interviews conducted in Beijing, China, June-July 2015. The information about the hand-written reports was provided by an academic at the Communication University of China, Beijing.

5 Interview conducted in Princeton, New Jersey, USA, April 2015.

official mouthpiece of the party, I will focus on the newspaper and how it covers the United States, Japan, Taiwan and the West.

3.3 Measuring official propaganda towards external actors

To construct an original dataset of the tone in the People’s Daily, I first collected all the articles from 1986 to 2010 that mentioned the United States (美国), Japan (日本), Taiwan (台湾) or the West (西方) at least once. These are examples of the communist party’s security rivals, legitimacy rivals and abstract threats. After collecting the articles, the text is segmented to separate the strings of characters without spaces into individual Chinese words, phrases and names. After the segmentation process, I then searched and recorded all the words in each article that denote a positive or a negative sentiment. The dictionary used for the positive and negative sentiment words was constructed by researchers at the National Taiwan University and has been used in prior works by Johnston, Stockmann, and Hassid.7

I only retained articles that have at least three positive and three negative sentiment words and at least three references to at least one of the four actors. The resulting dataset contains 32,363 articles that referred to the United States, 13,558 articles referring to Japan, 7,646 articles referencing Taiwan and 4,333 articles on the West. There is some overlap since some articles contain references to more than one actor. In total, the dataset contains more than 50,000 unique articles. It also includes information about the date, page, article length, the first 20 characters starting with the title, a count of the keywords, and a count of all the positive and negative sentiment words.

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sentiment words in that article. The tone of each article is calculated, following the standard approach in the literature, as:

\[
Tone = \frac{Positive \text{ words} - Negative \text{ words}}{Article \ length} \times 1000
\]

This index basically measures how many more positive than negative words we have in the article per 1,000 words.

Several issue areas can be leveraged to intensify nationalist resentments against the United States, Japan, and the West, including historical aggressions against China, current territorial disputes, and the security threat that they might pose currently and in the future. In addition, the media can criticize the Western society and political system and point out its shortcomings and problems. In the case of Taiwan, mainland leaders can use diversionary rhetoric hinting at military preparations or actions near the Taiwan Strait, portraying Taiwanese leaders and political parties in a negative light or highlighting social or economic problems in Taiwan as compared to the situation on the mainland.

Legitimacy rivals also include exile ethnic leaders and organizations that strive for independence and dissident groups; however, for the quantitative analysis, I restrict myself to the case of Taiwan because there are more articles on Taiwan generally than on any of the exile ethnic leaders and organizations. Media coverage of exile ethnic leaders would be typically negative and would only appear when contentious issues flare up. On the other hand, we would expect media coverage on Taiwan to be relatively neutral and we can test whether there is an increase in negative sentiments when the mainland is experiencing instability.

**United States:** Figure 3.1 plots the monthly average of the tone across all articles that mentioned the United States in that month. Overall, there is a small upward trend in the People’s
Daily sentiments. This improvement in the tone towards the United States might seem surprising, but another work by Liu and Yang hand-coding over 2,700 People’s Daily articles on the United States from 2000 to 2010 also found that the image of the U.S. improved in the paper over time. They argued that this improvement can be attributed to positive news coverage on issues of economics and trade.\(^8\)

**Figure 3.1 People's Daily tone towards the United States (1986-2010)**

![Graph showing the tone of People's Daily towards the United States from 1986 to 2010. The graph indicates peaks and troughs in tone, with notable events labeled along the timeline.](image)

Based on the observation of the data as well as crosschecking of the actual articles, I found that some of the more negative media coverage of the United States occurred around the start of American-led wars and use of force abroad. This included the American bombing of Libya in April 1986, the invasion of Panama in December 1989, the First Gulf War in January 1991, the war in Afghanistan in October 2001, and the Iraq War in March 2003. Other

downward spikes were driven by crises between China and the United States. On May 7, 1999, the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was hit by five American bombs, leading to the death of three reporters and damages to the building. The American side claimed that they bombed the embassy by accident, mistaking it for a Yugoslav government agency warehouse. The mission was part of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia that started that March. The crisis led to an outburst of nationalist sentiments against the United States and many ordinary Chinese citizens believed that the bombing was intentional.⁹

Spikes in positive sentiments are usually driven by high-level visits and meetings, including Jiang Zemin’s meeting with Bill Clinton in November 1993, Jiang Zemin’s visit to the United States in late October/early November 1997, and Bill Clinton’s visit to China in June/July 1998. More recent meetings included those between Hu Jintao and George W. Bush in November 2005 and April 2006. The tone towards the United States did become more negative in June 1989 after the Tiananmen crackdown, but it is not clear from the plot whether changes in the sentiment occurred after the Tibet and Xinjiang riots in 2008 and 2009. The overall average tone was still positive. The Falun Gong protest and crackdown in 1999 coincided with the Belgrade embassy bombing, and thus, from the plot, it is not clear whether there is a relationship between insecurity and the tone.

**Japan:** Figure 3.2 shows the average monthly tone in articles containing references to Japan. In the case of Japan, some of the most important drivers of negative sentiments are major anti-Japanese resistance war commemorations and sensitive bilateral relations issues, including textbook revisions and Yasukuni Shrine visits.

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⁹ For more details on this episode, see Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy.*
The first dip in the time series plot is associated with the 50th anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident on July 7, 1987. Another occurred around mid-1995, which was driven by both the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II and by China’s nuclear test on August 17, 1995, which prompted the Japanese government to freeze the grant portion of the aid program to China for the rest of the year. Anti-Japanese sentiments were strong in July 1996, when the Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone visited the Yasukuni Shrine. Numerous articles in the People’s Daily in early 2000 and early 2001 protested comments by Japanese conservative officials denying the Nanjing Massacre and plans to push for history textbook revisions that would whitewash Japan’s war crimes. In April 2001, the Japanese Ministry of Education approved a conservative history textbook version. In August 2001, Prime Minister Koizumi visited the Yasukuni Shrine on August 13, two days before the anniversary of Japan’s surrender.
These events all drew strong criticisms from China and the tone in the *People's Daily* became visibly more negative.

Further downward spikes in sentiments occurred in 2005, marked by contentious events in April 2005, when Japan approved a controversial history textbook and applied for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. Both actions sparked large-scale protests in China. Further, August 2005 also marked the 60th anniversary of Japan’s World War II surrender. Similar to the media portrayal of the United States, positive sentiments accompanied high-level visits, such as Jiang Zemin’s official visit to Japan in April 1992, which followed Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Tour. The tone towards Japan was also strongly positive during Premier Zhu Rongji’s visit to Japan in October 2000, and Shinzo Abe’s visit to China in October 2006.

The temporal plots do not suggest a strong connection between domestic protests in China and the media tone towards Japan. The Tiananmen movement, the most serious protest considered, did not seem to have any impact on the tone towards Japan. The tone did not change visibly in March 2008 (during the Tibet riots) but was more negative in July 2009 (after the Xinjiang riots). Cross-checking the articles shows that this was driven by criticisms in the Chinese media in response to Japan granting a visa to Rebiya Kadeer, the leader of the World Uyghur Congress, who was blamed for instigating the riots.

**Taiwan:** Since there are fewer articles on Taiwan as compared to those on the United States and Japan, I plotted in Figure 3.3 the quarterly average tone in the *People’s Daily* towards Taiwan to reduce the amount of fluctuation. Overall, the tone towards Taiwan was fairly positive, especially in the late 2000s.
An inspection of the sentiment plot as well as checking the articles in the dataset show that the tone became less positive or even negative during cross-strait crises and pro-independence activities on Taiwan. For example, there was a deep decline in the tone around mid-May 1995 when the United States granted Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui a visa to visit his alma mater Cornell University, despite assurances given to the Chinese side beforehand by the State Department that the United States would not support the visit. To signal its opposition, the Chinese leaders also conducted missile tests in July 1995. The tone also decreased significantly when Lee Teng-hui proposed the concept of “special state-to-state relations” in July 1999, and when Chen Shui-bian introduced the “one country on each side” concept in August 2002. Even though the tone towards Taiwan was still positive, there was a dip in late 1989 after

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the Tiananmen crackdown and in mid-2009 around the time of the Xinjiang riots. There was an overlap between the Falun Gong crackdown and Lee Tenghui’s “special state-to-state relations” comment (both happening in July 1999), thus, we cannot determine whether the negative tone towards Taiwan was diversionary or not. It was likely not, given the severity of Lee’s comment.

_The West:_ The quarterly average tone towards the West is presented in Figure 3.4. It is more difficult to identify what events drive the fluctuations in the tone, because there are fewer articles. For example, a single article about some worrying economic news can drive the average tone down for that quarter. The lowest sentiment level towards the West was in late 1987, driven by the stock market crash of October 19, 1987 (also called “black Monday”). The tone towards the West did not register an obvious decrease after the Tiananmen incident. The case study will delve further into this finding. I find through a more detailed qualitative analysis that the government followed a mixed propaganda strategy after the Tiananmen crisis. On the one hand, the Western democratic system and Western interference in China were heavily criticized, but the government also sought to reassure Western investors and affirm the commitment to economic reform. Perhaps the aggregate tone measure “cancels out” these two opposite effects.

It was not clear whether the Falun Gong crackdown was associated with anti-Western sentiments, but a very clear dip in the tone can be noted in the first quarter of 2008, when the Tibetan riots happened. The tone also decreased in mid-2009, around the time of the Xinjiang riots, but the decrease was smaller compared to that after the Tibet riots. The case studies will show that anti-Western rhetoric was extensive in the Chinese media after these two incidents, especially the Tibet case.
3.4 Regression analysis

Overall, the plots of the People’s Daily tone suggest that domestic insecurity events in mainland China are associated in some cases with more negative/less positive sentiments towards external actors. However, the more important drivers are ups and downs in bilateral and cross-strait relations. In this section, I rely on regression analyses to test the relationship more formally and coded additional control variables that will likely affect news reporting. They include American use of force abroad, anti-Japanese resistance war commemoration days, and presidential elections on Taiwan. I also collected a number of positive, negative and neutral events associated with bilateral Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations and mainland-Taiwan relations. These events do not affect the main results, as long as they do not occur at the
same time as a regime insecurity event but adding them to the regressions can help us determine how well the sentiment measure performs and how reliable the results are. For example, we should doubt the measure and the regression models if positive bilateral relations events have a negative effect on sentiments.

*Regime insecurity events*

As discussed in the previous chapter, I am focusing on major protest cases in China. Table 3.1 lists the events that are associated with the 1986 and 1989 student movements, the Falun Gong protest of 1999, riots in Tibet in 1987-1989 and 2008, and unrest in Xinjiang in 2009. In addition, I included external events that might have intensified leaders’ concerns about domestic legitimacy and the performance of the economy. These are events associated with the collapse of communist rule in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 and the 2008 global financial crisis. While these events are not the focus of the study and the theoretical explanation, I decided to include them because of their extensive international impact.

The breakup of the Soviet Union and the bankruptcy of communism there put the legitimacy of Marxism-Leninism, the guiding ideological principle of the Chinese communist party, in jeopardy. Furthermore, Chinese leaders were concerned that “having been victorious in the Soviet Union, the West would now spare no effort to overthrow socialism in China through ‘peaceful evolution.’” Another fear was geostrategic. According to John Garver, Beijing was afraid that the collapse of the Soviet Union would elevate the power and influence of the United States. Leaders were even concerned about the possibility of an alignment between Russia and

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the United States. If the United States became dominant, China might be pressured on issues such as the South China Sea, the reunification of North and South Korea, and Taiwan.\(^\text{12}\)

The global financial crisis in 2008 was another cause for concern. While the Chinese economy eventually only suffered mildly, during the first few months, economic indicators were not optimistic. Companies and factories operating in export industries were badly hit. Monthly export orders fell from about $120 billion in early 2008 to less than $70 billion in late 2008/early 2009. The GDP growth rate also fell from 10% in the second quarter of 2008 to about 6% during the first quarter of 2009. The National Bureau of Statistics of China estimated that 23 million migrant workers lost their jobs. Another quantitative study by independent researchers suggested that between October 2008 and April 2009, as many as 49 million workers might have been laid off.\(^\text{13}\) Overholt argues that strikes and protests by workers “were sufficiently numerous and vehement to raise strong central government concern about the risk of even wider unemployment and even deeper mass disaffection.”\(^\text{14}\) Given that an important pillar of the legitimacy of the communist party is economic growth, we should expect leaders to feel more insecure during this time. Indeed, the government responded by unleashing a large fiscal stimulus package worth 4 trillion RMB (about 586 billion USD), pushed local governments to accelerate the implementation of construction projects, lowered interest rates and relaxed requirements for bank reserves in order to cope with the crisis.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{12}\) Garver, 19.


\(^{15}\) Overholt, “China in the Global Financial Crisis: Rising Influence, Rising Challenges.”
Table 3.1 Regime insecurity variables and events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dummy variables</th>
<th>Coded as 1 the 30 days following an event:</th>
<th>Event description:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student protest 1986</td>
<td>12/09/86</td>
<td>Minor student demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12/20/86</td>
<td>Escalation of student demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet riot 1989</td>
<td>03/05/89</td>
<td>Unrest in Tibet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During Tiananmen 1989</td>
<td>04/18/89</td>
<td>Spread of Tiananmen student demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>05/13/89</td>
<td>Students begin hunger strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Tiananmen</td>
<td>06/04/89 (45 days)</td>
<td>Crackdown on Tiananmen demonstrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist collapse in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union</td>
<td>10/09/89</td>
<td>Protests spread in East Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/09/89</td>
<td>Fall of Berlin Wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11/24/89</td>
<td>Velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12/25/89</td>
<td>Romanian president and wife executed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12/26/91</td>
<td>Soviet Union dissolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10/27/97</td>
<td>Dow Jones fall 554 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falun Gong</td>
<td>04/25/99 (until May 7)</td>
<td>Sit-in protest of more than 10,000 Falun Gong followers outside Zhongnanhai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>07/22/99</td>
<td>Falun Gong crackdown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tibet riot 2008</td>
<td>03/14/08</td>
<td>Tibetan riots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 financial crisis</td>
<td>09/07/08</td>
<td>Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac taken over by the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>09/15/08</td>
<td>Lehman Brothers file for bankruptcy-court protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>09/29/08</td>
<td>Dow Jones dropped 778 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang riot 2009</td>
<td>07/05/09</td>
<td>Major unrest in Urumqi, Xinjiang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 records the regime insecurity variables and the time periods they cover. Each variable corresponding to a regime insecurity event is coded as a dummy variable taking the value of 1 for the 30 days following the dates of an event. For example, the dummy variable “Tibet riot 1989” is coded as 1 for the 30-day time frame from March 6 to April 4, 1989 after the unrest broke out on March 5, 1989. For the post-Tiananmen crackdown period, I coded as 1 the following 45 days, since the crisis was particularly severe. For the Falun Gong sit-in protest, I coded as 1 the days from April 25, 1999 to May 6, 1999, since on May 7, the Belgrade bombing
on the Chinese embassy by NATO forces occurred, leading to a major crisis in US-China relations. The tone towards the United States from May 7th on would be very negative because of the crisis and not necessarily because of diversionary propaganda in the aftermath of the Falun Gong protest.

One might be concerned about the choice of the 30-day window and wonder why a shorter or longer time window was not picked. First, the regression analysis is only one part of the dissertation and in the case studies, I rely more heavily on the knowledge of the case in order to identify time windows during which we should expect to see anti-foreign propaganda. For example, in the Falun Gong case, we do not see anti-American rhetoric right away, but only several months later when Chinese officials and the media responded to American actions that were perceived as interference. In other cases, such as the 1989 Tianamen movement, we see heightened anti-American sentiments shortly after the crackdown in June 1989. Second, the appendix includes plots of the People’s Daily tone for several months after each event, so we can use the plots to double check the results from the regression analysis and detect dips in the tone that occur after the 30-day window.

The regression analyses include additional control variables such as bilateral and cross-strait relations events, instances of American use of force abroad, anti-Japanese resistance war commemoration days, and presidential elections in Taiwan. All bilateral relations events and instances of American use of force are coded as dummy variables that take the value of 1 for the 10 days following the occurrence of an event. War commemoration days are coded as 1 on the day as well as for two days before and after, producing a five-day window. Presidential election days in Taiwan are coded as 1 on the day and for the 15 days before and after, resulting in a 31-day window.
Major Sino-American relations events (74 events in total): Positive events include state visits, important meetings between leaders, and major milestones in bilateral relations such as the normalization of trade relations. Negative events include American presidents’ meetings with the Dalai Lama, major arms sales to Taiwan, and significant diplomatic crises. Events coded as neutral include releases of prominent dissidents.

Major Sino-Japanese relations events (96 events in total): Positive events include state visits, visits and meetings between important leaders, and important agreements. Negative events include visits by Japanese prime ministers to the Yasukuni shrine, major textbook controversies, Senkaku/Diaoyu islands controversies, economic sanctions, etc. Neutral events include instances of apologies made by officials regarding history issues and investigations into Japanese war crimes.

Major mainland-Taiwan relations events (39 events in total): Positive events include talks between representatives (mostly informal), opening of transportation links and agreements marking closer trade ties, China’s proposal for reunification, etc. Negative events include Taiwanese arms purchases from the US, visit to the United States by Lee Teng-hui, Taiwanese leaders’ provocative statements advocating for Taiwanese independence, activities related to a referendum on independence, China’s passing of Anti-secession law, etc. A number of events that cannot be safely categorized as clearly negative or positive were listed as neutral events, for example, the releases of white papers on both sides, and political changes on Taiwan (end of martial law, founding of the DPP).

American use of force abroad (73 instances in total): I coded all new deployments of force by the United States from 1986-2010, based on a Congressional Research Service report by

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16 Arms sales to Taiwan were coded based on: Shirley A. Kan, “Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales since 1990,” Congressional Research Service, August 29, 2014.
Barbara Torreon. I made minor adjustments to the list provided in the report, for example, using the actual date of the use of force rather than the date that the action was reported to Congress by the president, and eliminating instances where the president provides an update of a prior deployment of force, unless the update outlines a substantive increase in the deployment.

Anti-Japanese resistance war commemoration days: I assembled a list of major annual war commemoration days, including the Marco Polo Bridge incident (July 7), attack on Shanghai (August 13), Japanese surrender to the Allies (August 15), Japanese surrender in China (August 21), Victory Day (September 3), Mukden incident (September 18), fall of Wuhan (October 27), anti-Japanese student demonstration (December 9), Xi’an incident (December 12), and the Nanjing Massacre (December 13).

Presidential elections in Taiwan: Four presidential elections occurred between 1986 and 2010, and the dates are March 23, 1996; March 18, 2000; March 20, 2004; and March 22, 2008.

The unit of analysis is the article, and the prediction of the tone of an article on a given day is modeled as a linear combination of events on the previous day. The models that I am using are ordinary least squares regressions since there can be multiple articles written at the same time or none at all. In addition, articles can be about different topics, and an article on foreign affairs on one day does not necessarily affect the tone of an article on the economy on the next day. However, since long-term trends and shifts in domestic and foreign policies influence the tone of an article (an article written in 2010 about American foreign policy would be affected by different circumstances than one written in 1986) I use year indicators (dummies) to control for these broader effects.

The general regression model is the following:

\[
Tone \text{ of article } i \text{ on day } t = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Particular regime insecurity events}_{t-1} + \beta_2 \text{Positive event}_{t-1} + \beta_3 \text{Negative event}_{t-1} + \beta_4 \text{Neutral event}_{t-1} + \beta_5 \text{Specific events (use of force, commemoration, election)}_{t-1} + \text{Year dummies} + \text{error } \omega_i
\]

Table 3.2 reports the regression results. The coefficient can be interpreted as the change in the tone for articles written within a particular period of time (e.g. during the Tiananmen protest) as compared to all other articles written in that year, holding all other factors constant. For example, column 1 of Table 3.2 shows that the average tone in articles referencing the U.S. during the Tiananmen protest was 4.35 points more positive than other articles in 1989, but the tone during the 45-day period after the June 4th crackdown was 11 points more negative than other articles in that same year. The regression results need to be read in conjunction with the tone plots because the tone might have shifted, but the overall level might still be positive.

Overall, the results show some support for the diversionary propaganda hypothesis. Anti-American sentiments were intensified after the Tiananmen movement crackdown (but not during the protest itself), and during the 2008 Tibet and 2009 Xinjiang riots. Articles referencing the United States were on average more negative after the Tiananmen crackdown than other articles in that same year. The tone towards the United States declined by 9.57 and 8 points after Tibet and Xinjiang respectively.
### Table 3.2 Regression results for the People’s Daily tone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>(1) Tone towards the U.S.</th>
<th>(2) Tone towards Japan</th>
<th>(3) Tone towards Taiwan</th>
<th>(4) Tone towards the West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student protest 1986</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>10.60**</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet riots 1989</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>-2.53</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>-2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During Tiananmen 1989</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>-8.02*</td>
<td>6.80</td>
<td>-5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Tiananmen 1989</td>
<td><strong>11.00</strong>*</td>
<td>-5.01</td>
<td>-2.11</td>
<td>-5.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe/USSR</td>
<td>-3.86**</td>
<td>-4.50</td>
<td>-15.20***</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist collapse</td>
<td>(1.87)</td>
<td>(3.07)</td>
<td>(5.19)</td>
<td>(3.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falun Gong 1999</td>
<td>-2.67</td>
<td>-3.98</td>
<td>-26.80***</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet riots 2008</td>
<td><strong>-9.57</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>-16.80</strong>*</td>
<td>-5.85</td>
<td><strong>-25.40</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial crisis 2008</td>
<td>24.30***</td>
<td>11.80</td>
<td>34.60***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang riots 2009</td>
<td><strong>-8.00</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>-11.10</strong></td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td><strong>-24.50</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US use of force</td>
<td><strong>-5.64</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War commemorations</td>
<td></td>
<td>-4.10***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative events</td>
<td>-4.83***</td>
<td>-7.89***</td>
<td>-22.00***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral events</td>
<td>-2.75</td>
<td>-1.13</td>
<td>-1.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year dummies</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>19.00***</td>
<td>7.74***</td>
<td>6.91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>32,362</td>
<td>13,558</td>
<td>7,646</td>
<td>4,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.055</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01, Some significant results were not highlighted (Japan and Tiananmen protest, Taiwan and Eastern Europe and Falun Gong) because they were driven by overlapping events.
The tone towards Japan became less positive during the Tiananmen movement, and the Tibet and Xinjiang riots in 2008 and 2009 as well. The tone towards Taiwan also decreased during events associated with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and with the Falun Gong crackdown. Anti-Western sentiments were intensified after the Tibet and Xinjiang unrest in the late 2000s. Articles referencing the West written during the four-week period after the 2008 Tibet riots were 25.40 points and after the 2009 Xinjiang riots about 24.50 points less positive than other articles also referencing the West in the same year.

*Cases of overlapping events*

Before drawing a conclusion, we need to check whether the change in the tone can be attributed to other events that overlapped with the regime insecurity events. In those cases, the negative propaganda might have little to do with regime insecurity. I find that four instances might have been driven by overlapping events. First, the regression results show that the *People’s Daily* tone towards Japan was more negative during the Tiananmen protest (late April to early June 1989). Nevertheless, examining the articles in the dataset reveals that the decrease in the tone was caused by media coverage of the Recruit scandal in Japan. Senior politicians from the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party were accused of taking bribes from the Recruit Corporation. The scandal reportedly led to the resignation of forty-four individuals and the arrest of seventeen.18

Second, the tone towards Taiwan registered a decline around the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It turns out that the negative articles reporting on

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Taiwan in late 1989 were about the elections in Taiwan in December 1989. Several hundred candidates competed for seats at the county and city levels and at the Legislative Yuan. This election was regarded as a challenge from the mainland’s perspective because it sought to advance democracy in Taiwan. Moreover, candidates from the Democratic Progressive Party advocated for independence from the mainland and the creation of a republic on the island.\textsuperscript{19} Articles denouncing pro-independence tendencies and denigrating the elections in Taiwan were frequent in the \textit{People’s Daily} around this time.

Third, as mentioned, the Falun Gong crackdown, which began on July 22, 1999 overlapped with a media campaign in the \textit{People’s Daily} denouncing the “two-state theory” proposed by the then-Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui. In an interview with \textit{Deutsche Welle} on July 7, 1999 Lee Teng-hui described cross-strait relations as a “special state-to-state relationship, rather than an internal relationship between a legitimate government and a renegade group, or between a central government and a local government,” which, from the mainland’s perspective, was a highly provocative statement.\textsuperscript{20}

Fourth, the decline in the tone towards the United States around the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe was most likely driven by negative media coverage on the American invasion of Panama in December 1989 to overthrow the military dictator there.

\textbf{Results:} After accounting for the overlapping events, we are left with a decrease in the tone towards the United States after the Tiananmen crackdown, and decreases in the tone towards the United States, Japan, and the West after the Tibet and Xinjiang riots in 2008 and


2009. Other cases of regime insecurity, including the 1986 student protest, the 1989 Tibet riots, and the Falun Gong protest and crackdown were largely not associated with anti-foreign sentiments. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union might have driven anti-American and anti-Taiwanese sentiments, but the decline in the tone could have also been explained by overlapping events. The 2008 global financial crisis, at least in the first few weeks, did not lead to more negative/less positive sentiments.

The results also confirm that certain events are consistent drivers of negative sentiments in the People’s Daily, including American military interventions abroad, anti-Japanese resistance war commemoration days, and election periods in Taiwan. The plots of the tone towards the United States, Japan and Taiwan in the previous section indicated that these types of events have in the past led to significant changes in how these actors were portrayed in the Peoples’ Daily. What this suggests is that the official media have regularly used convenient opportunities to discredit foreign rivals and Taiwan. Media coverage of American military interventions, for example, can highlight the threat that the United States poses to sovereign countries and its violations of international principles. Annual commemoration days that remember Japanese aggressions against China serve to further perpetuate popular resentments against Japan and bolster the legitimacy of the communist party, which fought against Japanese invaders. The official media have also consistently tried to discredit or point out shortcomings with the democratic elections in Taiwan.

What explains the negative sentiments after the Tiananmen crisis and Tibet and Xinjiang unrest? As will be argued in the next chapters, the negative reactions from the Chinese media were driven both by perceived foreign interference in domestic affairs and diversionary
intentions. After the Tiananmen crackdown, the official media condemned the fact that the United States allowed Fang Lizhi and his wife, top dissidents, to seek shelter in the American embassy. Others criticized sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies and blamed Voice of America for spreading false rumors. There were also general accusations that the West was seeking to destabilize the communist system in China.21

The riots in Tibet in March 2008 occurred just a few months before China was scheduled to host the Olympic Games in August. The harsh suppression of the riots drew strong criticisms by foreign leaders and anti-China protests during the Olympics torch relay. The Chinese media accused the Western press of biased reporting of the riots and criticized foreign politicians that offered support to the Dalai Lama. They questioned whether the West genuinely cared about human rights or simply used the unrest to damage China’s image and disrupt the preparations for the Olympic Games. Some articles demanded a formal apology by CNN and opposed the anti-China protests during the Olympic torch relay. These events happened at a time when China was seeking to assert its global status and was eager for international recognition before the Olympics. Therefore, both Chinese leaders and the public tended to be even more sensitive to foreign criticisms.22

Similarly, several articles in the aftermath of the unrest in Xinjiang in July 2009 again accused Western press of misportraying the riots. Anti-Japanese sentiments also intensified in the aftermath of the Xinjiang riots, and the reason was that the Japanese government issued a visa to Rebiya Kadeer, the leader of the World Uyghur Congress, permitting her to visit Japan. She was accused by the Chinese government of having plotted the riots in Urumqi from abroad.

The Foreign Ministry protested the Japanese decision that allegedly allowed Kadeer to “continue anti-China splittist activities.”

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter sought to test whether a correlation exists between regime insecurity events in China and media sentiments towards the United States, Japan, Taiwan and the West. These actors were chosen as examples of security rivals, legitimacy rivals and abstract threats. I constructed a dataset based on over 50,000 People’s Daily articles and used both temporal plots and regression analyses to examine whether domestic problems were associated with less positive/more negative sentiments towards outside actors. I find that the People’s Daily tone declined in the aftermath of several, but not all cases of domestic unrest. The sentiment towards the United States was more negative after the Tiananmen crackdown and the sentiments towards the United States, Japan and the West were less positive/more negative after the Tibet and Xinjiang riots in 2008 and 2009. At the same time, there is strong evidence that the official media relied on convenient opportunities to intensify nationalist sentiments and bolster the government’s legitimacy, such as American deployment of force abroad, anti-Japanese war commemoration days, and elections on Taiwan. This chapter then, shows some support for the diversionary propaganda hypothesis. Additional quantitative results can be found in the Appendix, where I provide more detailed plots of the tone towards external actors, additional regression results and findings from a topic classification analysis of the news coverage of the United States.

4. Preoccupation with domestic affairs: The Democracy Wall and the Falun Gong movements

4.1 Introduction

The Democracy Wall movement of 1978-1979 constituted the first serious challenge to social stability in the post-Mao era. The pro-democracy activists tapped into the grievances that had built up during the repressive Maoist period and called for political reforms and human rights. Their activism posed a challenge to the legitimacy of the party and threatened to put Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform program at risk through potential social instability. Even though the movement was easily suppressed, it informed student pro-democracy protests in the late 1980s.

Two decades later, a religious sect called the Falun Gong dared to challenge the communist party by staging a peaceful protest that numbered over 10,000 people outside the leadership compound in Beijing. The sect was not only immensely popular among ordinary people, party members, and even officials, it also provided an alternative belief system that rejects the supremacy of the party and had a loose but extensive organization with millions of ardent adherents.

What do these two cases have in common? In this chapter, through a study of the official propaganda strategies in response to these movements, I argue that the government was primarily preoccupied with domestic threats and was hardly engaged in anti-foreign diversionary propaganda. The chapter makes the argument that the low levels of diversion were driven primarily by the state’s relationship towards the protest participants. In both cases, the groups that participated in the mobilization were of relatively low political and economic value to the party during the economic reform period. Neither group (former Red Guards turned pro-democracy activists, Falun Gong followers) was actively co-opted by the party at that time.
Furthermore, their agenda and their political potential posed a relatively clear threat to the communist party. Given that the state was not constrained by prior co-optation strategies and that protesting groups were seen as a threat, I argue that there was little motivation to target foreign countries or find alternative domestic scapegoats. Indeed, the official propaganda focused almost entirely on justifying the repression against pro-democracy activists and Falun Gong practitioners. In the Democracy Wall case, I also found that the occasion became a convenient opportunity for the party to further attack leftist radicals, who had nothing to do with the Democracy Wall activists but had already been singled out as a threat by the party beforehand.

While these domestic motivations played the more important role in explaining the relative absence of diversion, I also show that strategic considerations might have added further constraints. In both cases, cooperation from the United States was important to issues that Chinese leaders prioritized. In the Democracy Wall case, Deng Xiaoping was seeking American support for the open-door policy and punitive war against Vietnam. In the Falun Gong case, Sino-U.S. negotiations on the terms of China’s World Trade Organization entry have reached the final stages and Beijing needed the U.S. Congress to grant it Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status. Since these events were of considerable importance for China’s security and economic goals, the leadership likely refrained from offending the United States. In the Falun Gong case, there were defensive responses to perceived American interference, but I show through keyword tallies that these responses were highly scattered and limited. The following sections will discuss these two movements and the government’s propaganda strategies in detail and examine the factors that most likely explained the relative absence of diversion.
4.2 The Democracy Wall movement of 1978 and 1979

The Democracy Wall movement of 1978 and 1979 was a protracted protest during which activists posted large wall posters (dazibao) and circulated underground journals demanding political reforms, democracy, and human rights. Even though similar activism was witnessed in larger cities including Shanghai and Guangzhou, the Xidan Wall in Beijing was the most important site. Deng Xiaoping at first found the movement’s criticisms of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution useful for his political struggles at the top but the calls for political reforms eventually posed a threat to the legitimacy of the party and the movement was suppressed. In this section, I argue that the main participants of the Democracy Wall movement, mostly a small group of former Red Guards turned pro-democracy activists and peasants who had come to Beijing to present petitions, were not of special political or economic value to the government in the reform period and, therefore, leaders did not hesitate to target some of the more radical activists. Furthermore, the propaganda evidence also suggests that leaders likely exploited this opportunity to step up their campaign against the Cultural Revolution leftist radicals. State propaganda linked the Democracy Wall activists to leftist influences, blurred the difference between these two groups and accused both of the tendency to “make trouble” and sabotage social order. I could not find propaganda evidence that indicated that the state sought to link the movement to active Western interference, even though the activists tried to reach out to the United States for support and foreigners frequently visited the Xidan Wall.

The relative absence of diversionary propaganda can be explained by three factors. First and most importantly, leaders did not face constraints against attacking the pro-democracy activists given that these activists held little political and economic value and were not co-opted beforehand. Second, because leaders were seeking to undermine remnant leftist influences
beforehand, they could use the occasion to further marginalize a domestic political rival. Third, from a strategic perspective, the support from the United States was crucial to China’s economic reform and its border war against Vietnam. Therefore, even though leaders could have made accusations against the United States, they probably tried to avoid needless tensions.

**Key developments during the Democracy Wall movement**

In September 1978, the Communist Youth League journal *Zhongguo Qingnian* published its first issue after being suspended for years during the Cultural Revolution. The issue contained controversial content, raising questions regarding Mao’s personality cult and his responsibility for the Cultural Revolution. An article from the issue even reads:

“Without Mao’s support could Lin Biao have achieved power? Just ask yourself: Didn’t Chairman Mao know that Jiang Qing was a traitor? If Chairman Mao had not agreed, could the Gang of Four have achieved their aim of striking down Deng Xiaoping?”

The journal irritated Wang Dongxing, a Mao loyalist and Vice Chairman of the Communist Party at that time and he ordered the issue to be withdrawn from circulation. In November 1978, copies of this edition appeared on the Xidan Wall and attracted broad attention. Other big posters were soon put up on the wall by activists and underground journals soon began circulating. Their content had three emphases: (1) criticizing Mao and his supporters, denouncing the Cultural Revolution and demanding the rehabilitation of leaders purged unjustly, (2) condemning cases of political persecutions and injustice, and (3) calling for political reforms and

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the protection of individual rights. According to Merle Goldman, the Democracy Wall movement “not only began the public critique of the Cultural Revolution and Mao’s policies and demanded a reversal of the unjust verdicts of the Mao period (1949-76), it also – for the first time in the People’s Republic – called publicly for political reform and human rights.”

The primary participants in the movement were a small section of workers that were former Red Guards and farmers who came to the city to present their complaints. They used many of the tactics that they were familiar with during the Cultural Revolution, including “forming unofficial groups, putting up large-character posters, writing and printing pamphlets, and setting up their own networks – to achieve political goals.” The movement was divided between a moderate and a radical group. The moderates did not aim to challenge the current socialist system or the communist party but advocated for reforms and improvements in the rule of law and political rights within the system. The more radical group championed for a transformation of the society and demanded multi-party democracy, which directly attacked the communist party’s position and power.

On December 5, 1978, Wei Jingsheng, one of the most prominent activists, wrote a poster that called for the “Fifth Modernization” (democracy) and argued that “a democratic social system is the major premise or the prerequisite for all developments - or modernizations.” The poster denounced the dictatorship of the party and Mao Zedong, saying “we want to be masters of the world and not instruments used by autocrats to carry out their wild ambitions.” Wei Jingsheng would in the next few months serve as the editor of the underground journal

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4 Goldman.
Exploration (tansuo), in which the essay was republished. Other underground journals discussing political reforms were Beijing Spring (Beijing zhichun), April Fifth Forum (siwu luntan), and Enlightenment (qimeng). For example, a “futuristic” story published in the Beijing Spring in May 1979 by the pen name Su Ming warned that after Deng’s death, a new group of leftist radicals might arise who would purge Deng’s followers, bring an end to the reform program, and reinstate Mao’s cult of personality. To prevent such power usurpation, the author proposed measures such as voting rights and freedom of speech to ensure that the people had independent power “to be the masters of the state.” Another activist, Chen Erjin, published a book-length essay in the April Fifth Forum in June 1979 in which he called for the initiation of a “proletarian democratic revolution” that “would challenge the party’s monopoly of power and the cronyism, conservatism, slavish mentality, and bureaucratism that grew from that monopoly.”

The movement was initially supported by Deng Xiaoping because the public criticism of Mao would undermine Hua Guofeng and other Mao loyalists, including Wang Dongxing. These groups were opposed to Deng’s reform plans, as reforms would diminish the importance of Maoism and weaken their political power. In December 1978, during the most active phase of the movement, Deng even advocated for the return to the policy of “letting a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend.” In a speech to party officials, he urged them to allow the people to voice their criticisms and stressed that the party needed to have faith in the judgment of the masses.

Nevertheless, his tolerance ran out as soon as activists demanded Western-style multiparty democracy and an end to the communist party’s dictatorship. The first wave of the

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crackdown was launched at the end of March 1979, when several leaders of the radical group, including Wei Jingsheng, were arrested. More moderate participants continued to be active. However, in December 1979, the Xidan Wall was closed, and activists were only permitted to put up posters at the Yuetan (Temple of the Moon), where they had to register with the authorities beforehand and were held responsible for the content, which effectively shut down on the freedom of expression.  

Deng’s suppression of the Democracy Wall was motivated by multiple factors. One was the realistic fear, based on the recent experience of the Cultural Revolution, that the movement would again lead Chinese society to descend into turmoil. For the economic reform program to work, it was critical to maintain a stable domestic environment. Another concern, according to Richard Baum, was that Deng needed to secure his position against those factions that were opposed to the reform program. Tolerance towards the movement would have left him vulnerable to criticisms from those circles.

The political context: Ambivalence towards protest participants and the ongoing campaign against the Gang of Four

Ambivalence towards the activists: I argue that leaders held an ambivalent attitude towards the movement participants. While the participants’ individual backgrounds varied, many of them were former Red Guards. During the Cultural Revolution, many urban middle and high school students joined, with Mao’s blessings, the Red Guard movement. They followed Mao’s call to destroy feudal and bourgeois customs and to attack the party bureaucracy and various persons of authority, even their own teachers and family members. Deng Xiaoping himself was

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a victim of the Red Guard movement. His son Deng Pufang became permanently crippled when Red Guards threw him from the fourth floor of a Beijing University building, and Deng’s younger brother was driven to commit suicide. These teenagers were sent to the countryside in the late 1960s to be re-educated by peasants, and after spending several years in the countryside, many of them returned to the cities to seek employment in the late 1970s. Their return created problems for the cities; in 1979, urban unemployment increased to 15.38 million with the return of 8 million former “sent-down youths,” now in their late 20s and early 30s. In March 1979, an employment test was instituted to vet job candidates, but most of them failed because they did not have the proper education. Most ended up taking low-paid manual jobs in factories and textile mills. According to one account, these workers were “poorly suited to the goals of the new pragmatic leaders, which stressed science and technology.”

Other activists during the Democracy Wall movement were peasants who had come to Beijing to present their petitions and demand that the government right the wrongdoings committed against them at their localities. They created trouble for the authorities and were mistreated. According to a wall poster by an agricultural worker from Shanxi, “these people were harassed, beaten, and occasionally rounded up and interned by the city authorities.”

Theoretical implication: Overall, the activists in the Democracy Wall movement came from the farming and working classes that did not possess the technical skills or entrepreneurial knowledge desirable in the economic reform period. Some of them were politically active as Red

16 Benton and Hunter, 22–23.
Guards before and others were seen as a nuisance to the party. They were also a relatively small group of maybe a few hundred activists. Therefore, it is predicted that leaders would not hesitate to condemn the movement and its most outspoken voices and there would be little motivation to use diversionary propaganda against external targets or foreign countries.

_The presence of a convenient domestic scapegoat:_ Another influential factor was the campaign against the Cultural Revolution leftists that the government had been carrying out prior to the movement. The presence of a domestic political enemy, in this case, the leftist radicals, meant that leaders could use the Democracy Wall movement as a convenient occasion to further marginalize their enemy, which further reduced diversionary motivations against foreign targets.

Both Deng Xiaoping and Hua Guofeng were opposed to the Gang of Four for good reasons. In April 1976, prior to the traditional Qingming festival, hundreds of thousands gathered at Tiananmen Square to remember the late Premier Zhou Enlai, who had passed away that January, and to express grievances against Mao, the Cultural Revolution that he had unleashed, and the radical leftist faction that rose to power thanks to the social and political upheaval. The protest was declared a “counter-revolutionary incident” and suppressed quickly. In the aftermath, the radicals, led by Mao’s wife Jiang Qing, accused Deng Xiaoping of fomenting the protest. They had been waging a campaign against Deng since he had advocated for economic reform in 1975, calling him an “unrepentant capitalist-roader.” The Tiananmen incident was a convenient political opportunity that they used, most likely with Mao’s consent, to bring Deng down for the second time.17 After Mao’s death in September 1976, Hua Guofeng, chosen by Mao to be his successor, arrested Jiang Qing and her associates (dubbed the “Gang of Four”) – and held them

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and Lin Biao responsible for the turmoil during the Cultural Revolution. Deng was brought back to power, a move facilitated by his extensive ties to senior party and military officials, and formally promoted to the Politburo Standing Committee at the 11th Party Congress in August 1977.18

The conduct of politics and propaganda shortly after Deng’s return to power was still heavily imbued with “class struggle” rhetoric and the Gang of Four was among the chief targets. In addition to continued vigilance against reactionary elements and bourgeois capitalist tendencies, the party regarded the elimination of the influence of the Gang of Four as one of the highest priorities. At the very top, both Deng Xiaoping and his rival Hua Guofeng embraced the condemnation of the leftist radicals. Especially Hua Guofeng, lacking the personal connections and influence that Deng had, relied on his arrest of Jiang Qing and her allies to bolster his personal credentials. At the 11th Party Congress, Hua’s speech stressed that “the smashing of the ‘gang of four’ marks the triumphant conclusion of our first Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” and he encouraged the party to continue Chairman Mao’s continuous revolution and class struggle.19 In another speech in early 1978, he again emphasized that “the primary task for the people of our country at present and for some time to come is still to expose and criticize the ‘Gang of Four’ and carry this struggle through to the end.”20

A joint editorial of the People’s Daily, Red Flag, and People’s Liberation Army Daily published on the one-year anniversary of the arrest “called for a ‘greater effort in criticizing the ‘gang of four’,’ and for a ‘complete destruction’ of its ‘bourgeois factional network.’”21 Officials with connections to the radicals at different levels were purged. It was reported that provincial

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18 Baum, Burying Mao, 48.
party leaders were replaced in 13 provinces between October 1976 and July 1977, and many of the newly appointed leaders were those rehabilitated after being condemned during the Cultural Revolution. An official with the Ministry of Education shared in an interview with a researcher in 1977 that “of all the things the ‘gang of four’ did, what they did in education was the worst. We must hate and criticize them for it. They have spoiled two generations.” The tendency to blame the leftist radicals for all types of problems was also popular at the local levels. For instance, labor unrest, attacks on the railway system, strikes, and damages to the rural economy reported across the country in 1976 and 1977 were attributed to “sabotage by the class enemy” and “followers of the ‘gang of four.’” Provincial radio stations reported that remnant supporters of the left and other saboteurs and counter-revolutionary elements had caused various problems and were punished in many cases even with executions.

*The propaganda campaign attacking pro-democracy activists and leftist radicals*

This section suggests that in seeking to undermine the Democracy Wall movement and to justify the crackdown against activists, the official propaganda attacked the pro-democracy activists and, at the same time, sought to associate the movement with leftist influences, even though the activists’ call for human rights and democracy was completely opposed to what the leftists stood for. While we have no direct evidence of leaders’ internal deliberation, a problem facing works in the diversionary war literature generally, propaganda evidence lends support to this claim. Since the movement was spread out over more than a year, I used three keywords (Xidan, Democracy Wall, and Wei Jingsheng) to search for relevant articles. In addition, close

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22 Domes.
24 Domes, “China in 1977.”
attention was paid to articles written around the first wave of the crackdown (March and April 1979) and around the Wei Jingsheng trial (October and November 1979).

The propaganda portrayed the activists as reactionary elements influenced by leftist ideology and bent on overthrowing the party. Shortly before the first arrests in March 1979, a first-page editorial (shelun) warned that there were still some groups in the society that deliberately made unreasonable demands to incite the people, spread rumors, and damage social order. In a speech on March 30, a day after the arrests, Deng adopted a tougher approach towards the movement, reversing his encouragement for popular criticism against the government in December 1978. The speech introduced the Four Cardinal Principles and criticized those harmful elements in the society that spread ideas countering these principles and even called on the United States to intervene in China. A commentary by the People’s Daily occupying half of the first page of the newspaper on April 2nd condemned the “bourgeois” and “individualistic” democracy that the activists, portrayed at selfish opportunists, advocated for. It warned that “abstract and empty talk of democracy” would lead to anarchy and the complete failure of the Four Modernizations. The article used the Cultural Revolution experience as a reminder, stating that if the country would permit such individualistic, bourgeois democracy, then the lessons of ten years of “struggling against” the Gang of Four and Lin Biao would come to waste.

Various articles stressed that the pernicious influences of the Gang of Four were far from over and that some people had taken advantage of the party’s goal of promoting democracy to

26 Deng Xiaoping, “Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles,” March 30, 1979, http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol2/text/b1290.html. In the speech, Deng stressed that the Four Cardinals Principles are: 1. We must keep to the socialist road. 2. We must uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat. 3. We must uphold the leadership of the Communist Party. 4. We must uphold Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.”
damage the socialist system. One *People’s Daily* article, for example, stated that Wei Jingsheng “openly uses the language of the ‘Gang of Four’ to seize power and to overthrow the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism,” further adding that he “carries out counter-revolution and continues what Lin Biao and the Gang of Four had done, and wants to create new turmoil, in order to seize power in the midst of turmoil.” Over the summer of 1979, the official media continued with warnings that class struggle had not yet ended and that there were still class enemies, dissidents, bourgeois plotters and opportunists who might try to infiltrate the party. Periodic editorials reminded readers that the party would severely punish all types of counter-revolutionary crimes, in order to prevent a repeat of the havoc that the Gang of Four created. This “official verdict” was also confirmed in a conversation between Deng and foreign guests on November 26, 1979, during which he said that the Xidan Wall “has for some time been a place where those people, who do not work, often create disturbances. They are perniciously influenced by the ideology of the Gang of Four and gather to make trouble and even to engage in espionage. Although a few of them are well-intentioned, actually they are imbued with the ideology of the Gang of Four. They practice ultra-individualism and anarchy.”

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29 “The People’s Final Ruling - The Beijing Higher People’s Court’s Trial on Counter-Revolutionary Criminal Wei Jingsheng’s Appeal [人民的最终裁决-北京市高级人民法院审判反革命犯魏京生上诉案],” *People’s Daily*, November 8, 1979.
After the Xidan Wall was closed for good, a speech by Deng Xiaoping highlighted that to carry out the Four Modernizations, it was necessary to protect stability and unity, and the leadership of the communist party was the basic guarantee for that. When referring to the Democracy Wall movement, he stated that the country could not tolerate turmoil any longer; some people that participated in the activities were good, but some had wrong ideas.33 Following that, several articles in February 1980 praised the leadership’s tough stance on the Democracy Wall movement, criticized the “so-called ‘democracy faction’ [民主派] that were opposed to socialism and the leadership of the communist party” and continued to warn against those that want to create chaos similar to Lin Biao and the Gang of Four.34 In general, the propaganda evidence shows that the party did not hesitate to condemn the Democracy Wall activists and associate them with leftist radicals.

The relative absence of anti-foreign diversionary propaganda

While the official propaganda occasionally attacked “bourgeois democracy,” I could not find specific instances in which the Democracy Wall activists were accused of working with foreigners or that foreign forces were influencing the movement. Even though it would have been possible to associate the activists with external or Western forces, the government did not follow such strategy. Besides the domestic political factors that motivate a focus on the activists themselves and the leftist radicals, I argue that an additional reason is that China needed the support from the United States for strategic and economic reasons.

33 “Comrade Deng Xiaoping in the New Year Tea Meeting with the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference Noted That the 1980s Is the Important Decade of Realizing the Four Modernizations; the Party’s Leadership Is the Most Basic Principle in the Four Cardinal Principles [邓小平同志在全国政协举行的新年茶会上指出 八十年代是实现四化的重要年代 党的领导是四项基本原则中根本一条],” People’s Daily, January 2, 1980.

34 “Stability and Unity to Ensure the Progress of the Four Modernizations [安定团结保证四化建设顺利进行],” People’s Daily, February 8, 1980.
First, accusations against foreign or American involvement would have been conceivable. Based on reports from foreign journalists and visitors, Westerners frequently visited the Xidan Wall and spread words about the posters and the demands of the activists. Participants also tried to reach out to the Western world for support. One group, called the Human Rights League, famously urged U.S. President Jimmy Carter to press for the cause of human rights in China. A poster of that group reads:

“The Chinese people do not want to repeat the tragic life of the Soviet people in the Gulag Archipelago. This will be a real test for your [President Carter’s] promise on human rights, about which you as representative of America have said so much in praise. Lastly we appeal to the United States Congress to pass a bill making the cause of human rights opened up by President Carter and America an American national policy.”

Agence France-Presse reported that the poster was seen by two Western diplomats before it was taken down. Another poster put up on January 1979 defended the activists’ rights to meet with foreigners and expressed gratitude to diplomats, reporters and visitors from Western countries for their sympathy towards the movement and appreciation of their willingness to face the risk of expulsion from China because of their concern for the cause. While these actions could have been used as evidence that Western forces were meddling in Chinese affairs, I could not find statements that would suggest that the government pursued such a strategy.

On the other hand, the one prominent connection made between the activists and foreigners was with regards to Vietnam and the Soviet Union. A number of articles in October and November 1979 focusing on the results of the Wei Jingsheng trial reported that he was

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accused of providing military intelligence (e.g., names of the commanders, the number of troops deployed and casualty numbers) regarding China’s border war with Vietnam to foreigners. Even though it was not clear which country he provided this intelligence to, it can be inferred that the countries that would have benefited from such intelligence would be either Vietnam or the Soviet Union, Vietnam’s ally. One article summed up the crimes that Wei was supposedly guilty of:

“Wei Jingsheng, in order to overthrow the dictatorship of the proletariat, spread slander and defamation in his essays and journals against Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and the Chinese communist party, cursing the socialist system as an ‘evil system,’ and instigating the masses to ‘carry out a reform of the social system’ and to ‘win back power.’ This is a blatant counter-revolutionary crime. In a frenzy, he also passed along intelligence regarding China’s self-defense war against Vietnam to foreigners, thereby committing the crime of betraying the fatherland.”

The decision to avoid blaming the West and the subtle reference to Vietnam was most likely driven by China’s security situation and the economic reform program. Before and during the Democracy Wall movement, China and the United States were important security partners in the containment strategy against the Soviet Union. Since the late 1960s, China had faced a growing threat from the USSR, which intensified in particular with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the border clashes in 1969. Common strategic interests finally brought Beijing and Washington together after decades of hostilities. Nixon visited China in 1972 and the two countries officially normalized their relations in December 1978, just when the Democracy Wall movement reached its most active phase. Several factors in the late 1970s paved the way for deeper cooperation and normalization. In the fall of 1977, China explored

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38 “Resolutely Punish Counter-Revolutionary Criminal [坚决惩办反革命犯],” People’s Daily, October 17, 1979.
options to reduce tensions with the Soviet Union, but the Soviets did not return these gestures with comparable measures, for example, they did not reduce the level of troops along the border with China and Mongolia, and did not agree to mutually withdraw from disputed territories.\(^{39}\)

Further complicating the matter, the USSR started to step up assistance to Vietnam, at the same time as Sino-Vietnamese relations worsened after Vietnam’s reunification in 1975. Vietnam signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union, entered the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance in 1978 and allowed the Soviets to use the Cam Ranh Bay base.\(^{40}\)

These factors made China feel even further encircled by the Soviet Union, this time on the southern flank.

After signing the normalization communiqué in December 1978, Deng Xiaoping toured the United States in late January and early February 1979. An important goal of the trip was to solicit American support for China’s planned attack against Vietnam in response to the latter’s invasion of Cambodia in December 1978. During talks with President Carter, Deng emphasized the Vietnamese threat to Southeast Asia and China, saying that “the Soviet Union will make use of Vietnam to harass China.”\(^{41}\)

Deng was afraid that the punitive attack against Vietnam would result in counteractions by the Soviet Union along the northern Chinese border. In that case, he would need the United States to maintain a strong position in Europe to make it difficult for the Soviets to transfer troops from the European theater to the Chinese border. While Carter refused

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to support a Chinese attack against Vietnam, he agreed that Vietnam needed to be condemned internationally and indicated that the US can share military intelligence with China.\textsuperscript{42}

Cooperation with the United States and its allies was not only necessary in the face of the Soviet encirclement, but foreign trade, investment, and technology would be integral to China’s economic reform. To modernize the country’s agriculture and industry, China would require access to capital, machinery, technology and managerial experience, and to pay for these imports, it needed to export its energy and raw materials and sell the finished products to foreign markets. The country was extremely isolated from the world in the early 1970s. After leaning towards the Soviet side in 1950, the economy was oriented towards trade with the Soviet bloc, but such economic exchanges were low to start out with and were hampered by China’s difficulties after the Great Leap Forward and the Sino-Soviet split. Trade in 1970-1971 accounted for only 5% of GDP and it was monopolized and centrally controlled, while the renminbi was not convertible.\textsuperscript{43}

Various actions taken showed how desperate Beijing was for foreign economic assistance. For example, Deng Xiaoping pushed forward the process of normalization with Japan, which had stalled since 1972. The effort resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China in August 1978.\textsuperscript{44} He visited Japan in October 1978 and in his talks with Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda expressed that he had come to learn from the Japanese the secret of how to modernize, and to bring Japanese modern technology and modern management to China.\textsuperscript{45} In February 1978, China and Japan signed an eight-year trade agreement, in the hope


\textsuperscript{44} Vogel, Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China, 295–97.

\textsuperscript{45} Vogel, 301.
that trade each way would reach $10 billion between 1978 and 1985. This trade agreement was leveraged by Deng when he visited Washington in 1979, where he told President Carter that China wished to sign a long-term trade agreement with the United States with at least the same volume of trade as the one signed with Japan. Deng was anxious to solve the issue of American assets seized in China (in response to American freezing of Chinese assets in the United States following Chinese entry into the Korean War) in order to remove the remaining obstacles to a trade agreement. Technology transfer and help from the American side for the training of Chinese agricultural scientists were some of the other points pressed by Deng.

To summarize, given the strong security and economic incentives to preserve cooperation with the United States, leaders would be hesitant to criticize the United States or other US-allied countries, explaining why there was hardly any association made between the Democracy Wall activists and Westerners. Instead, Wei Jingsheng was accused of leaking military intelligence regarding the Vietnam War and, thus, implicitly linked to China’s enemies Vietnam and the USSR.

To conclude, in this case study, I argued that prior domestic political conditions motivated leaders to focus their propaganda attacks on pro-democracy activists and to link them to the radical leftists. Leaders’ ambivalent attitudes towards these Red Guards-turned-activists and petitioning peasants meant that they did not have to find alternative scapegoats. The ongoing domestic campaign against the leftist radicals as well as the reliance on American cooperation further discouraged anti-Western diversionary propaganda. The case study suggests how these

strategic calculations might have led to \textit{two inconsistencies} in the propaganda campaign. First, even though the activists called for political reforms that would ensure basic rights, freedom of speech and prevent power abuses, the leaders claimed that they were influenced by the leftist ideology of the Gang of Four, which stood for just the opposite (the cult of personality of Mao, carrying out socialist revolution using radical means). Second, while the activists communicated with Western observers and tried to reach out to the United States for support, the government charged Wei Jingsheng, the most prominent activist, with providing military intelligence about the Sino-Vietnamese border war to foreigners. These inconsistencies can be taken as evidence that strategic political motivations influenced how the Democracy Wall movement was portrayed in official statements and the media.

4.3 The Falun Gong movement and crackdown

The Falun Gong movement presented one of the most serious challenges to the Chinese government in the post-Tiananmen period, but the propaganda evidence suggests that anti-foreign diversionary tactics were hardly pursued. I argue that because the Falun Gong movement was seen as a direct threat, leaders adopted a heavy-handed approach to deal with the sect. They relentlessly attacked its founder Li Hongzhi, arrested sect leaders, forced followers to abandon their practices, and persecuted those who refused to renounce their faith. The propaganda campaign denounced Falun Gong as an “evil sect,” portrayed its beliefs and practices as antithetical to Marxism, science and social progress, and accused its leadership of misleading the masses and trying to topple the government. Given the need to denigrate the sect in the media in order to convince a large portion of the population to abandon their faith and to justify the
crackdown against the movement, I argue that there were few motivations for Chinese leaders to initiate verbal attacks against foreign governments or find alternative scapegoats.

The following section demonstrates how the party was concerned about Falun Gong for both ideological and organizational reasons. First, Falun Gong followers are committed to an alternative belief system that prioritizes spiritual development and that rejects the pursuit of material well-being. Practitioners deify Li Hongzhi and see his person and teachings as the only true path to salvation. These beliefs challenge the party’s supremacy and stand in contrast to Marxist materialism and the party’s goal of developing the society and the economy. Second, Falun Gong poses an organizational threat to the party. While at that time it did not have a firm organization, it had several million followers, including many officials and party members in the military and security branches. Its believers are strongly loyal to Li Hongzhi and its organization was effective enough to organize a large-scale sit-in protest in April 1999. Falun Gong operates outside of the reach of the state, in contrast to churches, mosques and temples that are heavily controlled by “patriotic” organizations and that are therefore unable to reach a similar mobilizing capability. These two factors – ideology and organization – together explain why high-level Chinese leaders saw the Falun Gong as a direct threat and decided to initiate a far-reaching campaign to suppress it in July 1999.

Falun Gong remained a domestic issue during the first several months of the campaign, suggesting that leaders were not inclined to internationalize the problem. However, when the United States Congress criticized China in November 1999 and the U.S. government sponsored a resolution condemning the suppression of the Falun Gong at the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights in March 2000, the Chinese propaganda predictably responded by attacking these actions as interference in Chinese domestic affairs. I argue, however, that such
rhetoric was unlikely used for diversionary purposes. First, such rhetoric did not appear until the United States took actions to criticize China, and second, the content was limited to the congressional action and the resolution sponsored at the UN commission.

The Falun Gong movement’s background and protest

Falun Gong grew out of qigong, which uses various traditional breathing, meditation and gymnastic techniques for the purpose of exercise and healing. Qigong was revived in the 1970s, quickly became popular among ordinary citizens, and was at first even endorsed by many government officials and party members, who took up qigong and helped qigong masters register with the government. It was seen by some proudly as a new kind of science with roots in Chinese culture and tradition that could potentially prove even more effective than Western medicine.48

Several masters emerged from the qigong movement and through the sales of workshops, tapes, and books, built a large following and made enormous profits. One master, Zhang Hongbao, founded a qigong branch called Zhonggong in 1987 and gradually built it into “a commercial-bureaucratic organization modeled on the CCP that managed a vast commercial enterprise” and that had several million members.49 While most were drawn to practicing qigong because of its health benefits, particular at a time when health care in China was inadequate and expensive, many were also attracted by qigong masters’ assertions that they had supernatural abilities, could use their inner energy to heal followers and teach them to develop these capabilities. In the late 1980s, some charismatic masters even incorporated moral and religious teachings into qigong, turning it into “an all-encompassing discourse which touches on

“everything in the universe” and uniting “the cosmological tendencies of both science and religion.”

In the post-Tiananmen period, the government became more concerned about qigong’s potential social and political impact and increased control over the movement. At the same time, respectable scientists and other critics began to attack the movement and questioned the abilities of qigong masters, and their criticisms were prominently covered in the media. Several masters were exposed as swindlers and their activities were compared with those of dangerous cults like the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo cult. The government accused Zhang Hongbao of committing economic crimes in 1994, after which he went into hiding. Another qigong master, Yan Xin, resettled in the United States in 1990 after he could not demonstrate that he had healing powers in a controlled setting and a follower died of a heart attack during one of his workshops. The government arrested another master, Zhang Xiangyu, because she used qigong methods for healing without authorization and illegally organized a large public meeting.

Falun Gong was founded in 1992 by Li Hongzhi and quickly replaced Zhonggong as the most influential branch at a time when the qigong movement encountered difficulties. Falun Gong has been described as “a cultivation system”, “a religious movement”, and “a heterodox cult.” While no single term can sufficiently capture the complex nature of Falun Gong, it combines meditation exercises with a religious doctrine drawn from elements of Buddhism and Daoism. Many started practicing Falun Gong because it was free of charge but over time Li Hongzhi developed teachings that moved Falun Gong away from the “mainstream” qigong movement.

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51 Palmer, 97.
Different from the other masters, Li Hongzhi encouraged his followers to use his writings as a type of religious scripture and urged them to develop one-on-one relationships with him through the study of scripture.\(^\text{55}\) His followers believed that he could use his power to place a rotating wheel in their body that can remove bad karma and that he could send “dharma bodies” to guard and heal them.\(^\text{56}\) Li Hongzhi rejected the commercialization of *qigong* teaching and the heavy bureaucratic structure that Zhonggong adopted, and emphasized that the purpose of practicing Falun Gong was to “purify one’s heart and attain spiritual salvation” rather than maintaining good health or developing supernatural abilities.\(^\text{57}\) His work, *Zhuan Falun* (meaning “turning the law wheel”), was seen as superior to all other teachings and philosophies and he insisted that it offered the only true path to salvation. He encouraged his followers to endure illnesses and persecutions by their family, colleagues and the authorities as a way to develop their virtue and “pay back” their bad karma.\(^\text{58}\) Palmer argues that, for followers, Falun Gong “offers a clear and simple path of liberation from the sufferings of this world: a single master, a single book, and a single practice.”\(^\text{59}\) These beliefs made Falun Gong practitioners intensely loyal to Li Hongzhi and gave them the motivation to withstand and resist the state’s crackdown and persecution of the sect.

At first, the Falun Dafa Research Society that Li Hongzhi founded was registered in 1993 with the official China Qigong Scientific Research Institute in Beijing and the movement had an extensive organizational structure that served to spread the teaching. However, as the state became more intolerant of the *qigong* movement, the Falun Dafa Research Society withdrew its membership in 1996 and was unsuccessful in trying to reregister as a cultural or academic

\(^{55}\) Ownby, 14.  
\(^{58}\) Palmer, 220.  
organization. From that time on, it claimed that the formal organizational structure had been
dissolved and that Falun Gong followers would only practice on their own. Li Hongzhi, fearing a
government crackdown, also announced in 1994 that he would no longer lead Falun Gong
training sessions, and in 1996, left for the United States where he applied for and received
residency.60

To counter against criticisms of Falun Gong that emerged more frequently in the mid-
1990s, believers started the practice of holding peaceful protests and sit-ins to express their
opposition. In June 1996, Guangming Ribao (Enlightenment Daily) ran an article that called Li
Hongzhi a “swindler” and said that his work Zhuan Falun was a “pseudo-scientific book
propagating feudal superstition.” Falun Gong practitioners responded by flooding the newspaper
with letters of complaint. In July 1996, the Propaganda Department officially prohibited the
publication of Li’s works and in 1997 and 1998, the Ministry of Public Security carried out
several investigations targeting Falun Gong but these investigations did not produce definite
evidence of illegal activities. When a renounced scientist, He Zuoxiu, condemned Falun Gong on
a Beijing Television program in 1998, practitioners organized an eight-day sit-in protest in front
of the television station.61

In April 1999, He Zuoxiu again wrote an article warning young people against practicing
Falun Gong and the article was published by a Tianjin Normal University magazine. An
estimated 6,000 practitioners in Tianjin responded by gathering outside of the university and
government offices to protest against the article. The police were called in to disperse the crowd
and some 45 participants were arrested. A few days later, on April 25, over 10,000 practitioners
from Beijing and nearby provinces staged a peaceful sit-in protest from dawn until the evening

outside of Zhongnanhai, the leadership compound. They demanded that the government release Falun Gong practitioners arrested in Tianjin, permit them to freely practice Falun Gong, and allow the publication of Falun Gong materials.\textsuperscript{62} The fact that so many gathered at the same time and place suggested that the protest appeared to have at least some organization. The \textit{Washington Post} reported that participants received phone calls by local Falun Gong leaders and arrived in Beijing early in the morning to take part in the protest.\textsuperscript{63} According to Ownby, Li Hongzhi was also present in Beijing on April 22, two days before the protest, and “undoubtedly gave at least tacit consent to the idea of bringing the protest to Beijing.”\textsuperscript{64} The fate of Falun Gong took a sharp turn in the aftermath of the April 25 incident.

\textit{The government’s campaign against Li Hongzhi and the Falun Gong movement}

The April 25 protest outside Zhongnanhai had the effect of further intensifying the government’s alarm at the movement, and Jiang Zemin personally ordered the suppression of Falun Gong. An agency was created on June 10 (named the 6-10 office) and tasked with investigating Falun Gong activities and directing the official crackdown. The goal was not limited to controlling or limiting the sect, but it was the complete eradication of the movement. After almost three months of preparation, the campaign was officially launched on July 22, 1999, when all television stations announced the ban on Falun Gong. Before that, on July 19, about 70 Falun Gong leaders were arrested and later in July an arrest warrant for Li Hongzhi was published. Common practitioners were interrogated and forced to renounce their faith; those that protested against the crackdown were detained. To threaten practitioners into submission, the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{62} Ownby, 168–71.  
\textsuperscript{63} John Pomfret and Michael Laris, “Silent Protest Draws Thousands to Beijing; Followers of Martial Arts Master Li Hongzhi Stir Political Waters with Apolitical Agenda,” \textit{The Washington Post}, April 26, 1999, sec. A.  
\textsuperscript{64} Ownby, \textit{Falun Gong and the Future of China}, 171.}
authorities warned that they could be fired from their jobs and their benefits and health care could be denied. According to Chang, the 6-10 office gave local officials “carte blanche authority to implement the central government’s directives. No questions would be asked about how this was achieved; success was all that mattered. If they failed to stem the flow of protesters to Beijing, however, local officials would be held personally responsible.”

Resistance by Falun Gong followers, encouraged by Li Hongzhi’s teaching that persecution was to be welcomed, was fierce. By July 25, it was reported that 30,000 people had staged rallies in various cities, but that was only a small fraction of the sect’s estimated 70 million members. According to Ian Buruma, “by cracking down so hard, the Government has made an enemy where there once was just a sect.” In late October, the National People’s Congress passed an Anti-Cult Law that, according to the Washington Post, stipulates that “leaders of religious cults may be prosecuted for murder and endangering national security.” In response, numerous die-hard Falun Gong practitioners held protests on Tiananmen Square.

Concurrent with various repressive measures, the government also relied extensively on the official propaganda to justify the suppression of Falun Gong and to encourage practitioners to renounce their faith. James Tong, who studied the government’s media campaign and coercive measures extensively, wrote that the campaign was “arguably the most forceful media assault on a domestic challenger in post-Mao China.” Within the first four weeks of the campaign, there were, according to his count, 1,650 Xinhua releases and articles, 780 People’s Daily articles and commentaries, and 1,722 news items by the China Central Television (CCTV).

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According to my qualitative reading of the *People’s Daily* during this period, on July 23, the paper contained several official statements and notices released by the Central Committee, the Ministry of Public Security, the Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Civil Affairs denouncing Falun Gong as an “evil cult” and exposing the true nature of Li Hongzhi and his organization. Statements by provincial leaders, authoritative editorials and commentaries and various news articles reiterated support for the government’s ban of Falun Gong, added evidence of the sect’s danger to social stability, and documented the impact of the campaign in rehabilitating Falun Gong practitioners. The party used multiple reasons to justify its crackdown. The ideology of Falun Gong was portrayed as superstitious and contradictory to Marxist materialism. Thus, party members who followed Falun Gong committed the mistake of betraying the Marxist ideological foundation of the communist party. Falun Gong leaders and their organizations were accused of spreading false teachings and superstitions, for example, proclaiming that no government can solve current social problems, that the end of the world was near, and that practicing Falun Gong was the only path to salvation.\(^69\)

In the official media, the party also portrayed Falun Gong as a tightly managed organization that was not registered with any government body and therefore illegal. Li Hongzhi was seen as a swindler who deceived his followers and enriched himself through the sales of books, tapes and workshops. Worse, Falun Gong leaders and practitioners organized numerous illegal gatherings targeting government agencies and media organizations that held a critical opinion of their practices, thereby seriously disrupting social order. Most importantly, they even dared to challenge the central government by staging a protest in front of Zhongnanhai, which was, according to the official propaganda, directly planned and directed by Li Hongzhi and his

\(^{69}\) See *People’s Daily* issues from July 23, 1999 on. My analysis of the party’s view of the Falun Gong relied on qualitative reading of the People’s Daily issues between July 23 to August 15, 1999.
associates at the Falun Dafa Research Society. The party also collected evidence to demonstrate the alleged consequences of following Falun Gong to practitioners, which included illnesses, death, self-inflicted injuries, suicides, and violent behavior against others. According to a first-page editorial (shelun) on July 23, the fight against the Falun Gong was “a serious ideological and political struggle concerning the basic belief of communist party members, the basic ideological foundation of the people’s united struggle, and the future and destiny of the party and the country.”

Overall, the propaganda strategy focused exclusively on Li Hongzhi and the Falun Gong leadership. The masses of the participants were portrayed as being misled by Falun Gong and themselves victims of its evil schemes. Even though in doing so, the government downplayed the agency of genuine practitioners, it was probably correct in identifying Li Hongzhi and the Falun Gong organization as the main force behind the large-scale April 25 sit-in protest. This chapter argues that the government’s propaganda strategies were shaped by the perception of Falun Gong as a direct threat to communist rule. While Falun Gong had not pursued political goals at that point yet, its ideology and organization could potentially pave the way for a transformation into an anti-government political force.

Falun Gong international activism and China’s response

The propaganda campaign during the first few months was exclusively focused on Li Hongzhi and the Falun Gong leadership. So far, I have not located authoritative statements in the People’s Daily during the first phase of the crackdown that accused any other international actor or any foreign government of being actively involved in supporting the Falun Gong movement.

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behind-the-scenes. The government arguably did not intend to use anti-foreign diversionary propaganda even though it was dealing with one of the most serious domestic threats in the post-Tiananmen period. However, the harsh repression resulted in international Falun Gong activism to draw attention to their cause and critical responses from foreign governments, especially the United States. This forced the Chinese side to react, but even then, I argue that the reaction was more restrained than what it could have been.

Faced with severe repression, Falun Gong practitioners inside and outside of the country sought to attract international attention to their sufferings. Practitioners in the United States lobbied the State Department and Congress legislators and organized news conferences to publicize their plight. However, it was not until November 2, 1999 that Congress members introduced resolutions criticizing China for the suppression of the Falun Gong and urging the US government to press China on freedom of religion. Two resolutions were passed in the House and the Senate respectively on November 18 and 19, 1999. The White House’ response did not come until that December, more than four months after the beginning of the anti-Falun Gong campaign in China. On December 6, 1999, President Bill Clinton made the first statement criticizing China on the Falun Gong issue, contending that the Chinese government had violated practitioners’ freedom of conscience and freedom of association. In January 2000, the U.S. State Department announced that it would sponsor a resolution critical of China at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights meeting during March-April 2000 in order “to shine an

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international spotlight directly on China’s human rights practices.”74 In February, in preparation for the UN resolution, the United States released an annual report on human rights that criticized China “using the toughest terms since the pro-democracy movement was crushed in Beijing more than a decade ago” and lobbied other countries to co-sponsor or support the resolution.75 Secretary of State Madeleine Albright even appeared before the commission in March to give a speech in support of the resolution, the first time for a secretary of state to do so. Nevertheless, more countries in the commission ended up supporting China’s motion for no action, which prevented the US resolution from being even discussed.76

Table 4.1 presents a count of the articles in the People’s Daily referring to “Li Hongzhi” in the main text, and articles referring to both “Li Hongzhi” and “anti-China” (反华) We can see that in the first few months, even though there were hundreds of articles on Li Hongzhi, there was rarely any mention of foreign hostile forces. I checked the content of the few articles that mentioned “anti-China” but they did not suggest that Li Hongzhi was colluding with foreign anti-China forces, even though some mentioned that what Li Hongzhi did was what these anti-China forces hoped for but could not achieve.77 Likely in response to the US Congress resolutions, a couple of articles in November and December started to introduce the view that Falun Gong crimes provided foreign hostile forces with a “cause for gossip” and a pretext for interference. Some argued that Li Hongzhi had taken advantage of these forces to find shelter

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and escape being wiped out. Articles referring to “anti-China” did not come up again until March and April 2000, when the US government sought to criticize China at the UN commission. This suggests that even though anti-foreign rhetoric was present in the media, it was adopted as a reaction to perceived American interference.

Table 4.1 Articles in the People’s Daily mentioning “Li Hongzhi” and “anti-China”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Articles mentioning “Li Hongzhi”</th>
<th>Articles mentioning “Li Hongzhi” and “anti-China”</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04/1999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>April 25 demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/1999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/1999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/1999</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>July 22: launch of anti-Falun Gong campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/1999</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/1999</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/1999</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/1999</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Resolutions passed by US Congress in November, statement by President Clinton in December.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/1999</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/2000</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/2000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/2000</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>US resolution criticizing China proposed at UN Commission on Human Rights meeting in March, Falun Gong lobbying activities in support of the resolution, vote on resolution in April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/2000</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/2000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/2000</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/2000</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/2000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the American perspective, criticizing China’s repressive campaign against Falun Gong practitioners, whatever their beliefs might be, was legitimate from the standpoint that human rights should be protected. However, considering the background of the Falun Gong and the perceived ideological and organizational threat that the sect posed for the Chinese government, the American defense of Falun Gong practitioners and strategy of naming-and-shaming China at a high-profile international venue were seen as nothing short of interference in China’s domestic affairs. American criticisms of China could undermine the domestic propaganda campaign that portrayed the Falun Gong as an “evil sect” and embolden die-hard practitioners to protest against the government. In such a situation, Chinese leaders arguably had no choice but to respond to the American criticism.

Several People’s Daily articles in April 2000 criticized the American interference and, in particular, the two congressional resolutions and the UN resolution. These articles condemned the United States for adopting “double standards” by criticizing China for suppressing the Falun Gong while it had cracked down on dangerous cults like the Branch Davidian itself. They criticized certain anti-China politicians in the US who were not interested in human rights at all but found in the anti-Falun Gong campaign a convenient opportunity to malign China and to misrepresent its domestic situation. According to an authoritative comment by a State Council Information Office representative, Li Hongzhi had become a tool for hostile foreign forces, who used him to interfere in China in exchange for providing him with political protection, and he

had colluded with Tibetan independence forces (zangdu) and pro-democracy dissidents (minyun) to arrange various anti-China lobbying activities abroad.\(^8^0\)

Nonetheless, China’s reaction was relatively restrained. First, all the activities referred to as acts of collusion between the Falun Gong and international forces were actions taken after the launch of the crackdown in July 1999. The media frequently brought up the lobbying activities pursued by Falun Gong members on the sidelines of the UN Commission on Human Rights meeting in March 2000, for example. I did not find accusations that anti-China hostile forces were involved beforehand, for instance, in the spread of Falun Gong in China or in the April 25 demonstration. Second, during the March-May 2000 period, only eight People’s Daily articles referred to foreign hostile forces themes out of a total of 55 articles mentioning “Li Hongzhi” (see Table 4.1). If the government’s purpose was to divert the attention of the public by condemning foreign interference, it could have publicized this contentious episode with the United States more heavily.

**Economic interests and China’s response to American interference**

In the previous section, I have argued that since the Falun Gong constituted a direct threat to the government from both ideological and organizational perspectives, the propaganda campaign focused on attacking the sect itself. There was hardly any indication that the government intended to use anti-foreign diversionary propaganda to distract the public. While there are reactions to U.S. government criticisms, which came several months after the start of the crackdown, I argued that these reactions were rather limited. In this section, I further argue that the limited anti-American propaganda could be driven in part by the politics of bilateral

\(^8^0\) “State Council Information Office Representative Interview with Wen Wei Po Reporter [国务院新闻办负责人答香港《文汇报》记者问],” People’s Daily, April 20, 2000.
relations. Even though Sino-U.S. relations had become more contentious than during the late Cold War period, in the short term, China needed the cooperation from the United States if it wanted to enter the World Trade Organization (WTO), a goal that Chinese leaders prioritized to push forward their domestic economic reforms and growth. The bilateral negotiations regarding China’s terms of accession reached the final phases during the anti-Falun Gong campaign. Even though we do not have direct evidence, the WTO negotiation process likely restrained anti-American propaganda as related to the Falun Gong issue.

China’s WTO accession negotiations began formally in 1986 when it officially submitted its application to rejoin the GATT and the United States was at that time supportive of its application. One of the core principles of the GATT/WTO is that member countries guarantee each other unconditional Most Favored Nation status (MFN); however, under the US Trade Act of 1974 and, in particular, the Jackson-Vanik amendment, communist countries that did not permit free emigration were not entitled to unconditional MFN and their MFN status had to be renewed by Congress every year. At that time, US negotiators indicated that they could persuade Congress to let Beijing bypass this requirement. China’s trade was still limited then and it was running a trade deficit with the United States, so trade liberalization would not constitute a major threat to the US economy. The negotiation process encountered multiple obstacles, particularly due to the Tiananmen interlude, but reached a critical stage in 1999.

However, several factors had changed by that time. Chinese trade had become more substantial and its exports could adversely affect American manufacturing jobs. Since the Tiananmen crackdown, Congress had paid more attention to the issue of human rights in China and the annual renewal of MFN status was seen as an opportunity for Congress to press the administration on human rights as well as other issues including Taiwan. Additionally, with the
mutual geostrategic interest in containing the Soviet Union gone, it was not clear whether China would replace the Soviet Union as America’s next strategic rival, and if so, whether supporting China’s WTO accession would end up disadvantaging the United States. 81

From Beijing’s perspective, WTO accession was desirable for multiple reasons. First, membership in the WTO would further help the country overcome the international isolation after the Tiananmen crisis and affirm its importance to the international community. Second, top leaders, especially Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji, saw WTO membership as a commitment device to pressure state-owned enterprises to reform to make the economy more dynamic and market-driven. Because top leaders made WTO accession one of their top priorities, they were willing to make significant concessions in terms of market access to secure bilateral agreements with the United States and the European Union. 82 With the negotiation process basically completed, Premier Zhu Rongji headed for the United States in April 1999 with the expectation that President Bill Clinton would sign the agreement, but Clinton changed his mind at the last minute, leaving Zhu to return to China embarrassed. After the May bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, talks only restarted in September. A bilateral trade agreement was finally signed on November 15, 1999.

Nevertheless, China had not yet been granted permanent MFN (also, permanent normal trade relations or PNTR). Without PNTR, China could still enter the WTO but the deals made in the bilateral trade agreement of November 1999 would not apply. Therefore, the U.S. administration and firms that stood to gain from China’s WTO accession spent the following months lobbying the House and the Senate to pass resolutions that would grant China PNTR.

While the Senate was expected to vote in favor of China, obstacles facing the Clinton administration came primarily from the House of Representatives, which was scheduled to vote on this issue in May 2000. Labor unions, who felt threatened by Chinese manufacturing exports, pressured Democrats to oppose the resolution. Republicans were generally pro-trade and in favor of granting China PNTR, but China’s publication of a report around this time that indicated that it might use force to reunify Taiwan with the mainland if negotiations dragged on for too long worried hawkish pro-Taiwan Republicans. Additionally, granting PNTR meant that Congress lost the ability to threaten the PRC annually with not renewing MFN.

For Beijing, not gaining PNTR would not lead to immediate economic costs, but it would be an embarrassment for top leaders who had been willing to take on substantial domestic risks in the pursuit of WTO entry. Not only did they have to overcome objections from industries and state-owned enterprises standing to lose from the agreement, but they also had to accept a potential spike in unemployment in the state sector that could lead to social instability. Second, the refusal of Congress to grant PNTR meant that the bilateral trade agreement signed in November 1999 might have to be renegotiated and China might have to make further concessions. Vice President Al Gore, who was running for president at that time, indicated that if elected he would push for a better deal for the United States and especially provide further protection for American workers and the environment. For Beijing’s leaders, a no-vote by Congress would not only cause them to lose face domestically and internationally but would also introduce significant uncertainties in the future.

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84 Lardy, “Report: Permanent Normal Trade Relations for China.”
85 Sanger, “Threat Seen to Trade Deal to Let China Join W.T.O.”
The period from November 1999 to May 2000 was, therefore, critical and the U.S. administration took pains to persuade members of the House of Representatives to vote for PNTR passage. To address Congress members’ complaints about the human rights situation in China, the Clinton administration took extra efforts to condemn China at the UN Human Rights Commission, as discussed earlier. One observer wrote that

“Clinton can't afford to let members use the trade vote to blow off steam about Chinese brutality against Falun Gong members, Christians, Tibetan Buddhists and democracy activists. When the day of the vote comes, the administration needs to be able to argue that it already is addressing the human rights problem…”

The administration even proposed the establishment of a panel to monitor China’s human rights situation and the creation of a team to track China’s compliance with its WTO commitments. Chinese leaders also used multiple channels to convince US policymakers that its WTO accession would be mutually beneficial and that granting China PNTR would further strengthen bilateral relations and benefit both American and Chinese enterprises. These points were emphasized, for example, when Jiang Zemin met the US Secretary of Commerce William Daley and when the Chinese ambassador to the United States gave a speech in Washington.

Given how critical, but how close the vote would be, it can be predicted that China would avoid, to the extent possible, further clashes with the United States on the Falun Gong issue. I argue that the politics of the WTO accession had at least some effect in restraining anti-

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American rhetoric in the media. Beijing was compelled to criticize U.S. interference as a matter of principle, but it did not introduce further conspiracy theories into its condemnation of the United States and, for the most part, kept its anti-American propaganda limited. This explanation would also accord with what Sutter has observed about Chinese diplomacy at this point. He argues that during this period of time, Chinese leaders tended to act cautiously in their relations with the United States; they “bided their time, endeavoring to avoid complications that would ensue from protracted confrontation with the United States.”

To conclude, I have argued that domestic and international factors work together to explain China’s propaganda strategy in the aftermath of the Falun Gong demonstration and crackdown. Since the Falun Gong was seen by top leaders as a direct threat to the communist party from both ideological and organizational perspective, there was arguably no incentive for them to find an alternative foreign scapegoat. While the broad masses of repentant Falun Gong practitioners were excused and portrayed as victims themselves, the extensive propaganda campaign denounced Li Hongzhi and the Falun Gong leadership. They were blamed for crimes ranging from spreading false teachings, damaging social order to overthrowing the party. My reading of the People’s Daily suggests that foreign governments or other external groups were not accused of sponsoring the Falun Gong movement behind the scenes and there were only defensive criticisms when the United States took actions to condemn the crackdown on the Falun Gong in November 1999 and March 2000.

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4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the 1979 Democracy Wall movement and the 1999 Falun Gong movement. Even though each case features distinctive characteristics, they both posed a threat to the party’s legitimacy and social order. In both cases, I argued that anti-foreign diversionary propaganda was minimal and that both domestic and international factors play a role in explaining the relative absence of diversionary propaganda. First, domestically, the government held an ambivalent or even adverse attitude towards the social groups that led and participated in these protests, and thus, there was little motivation to find alternative targets to shift the blame for the unrest onto. The official propaganda did not hesitate to denounce prominent pro-democracy activists who led the Democracy Wall movement and vilify Li Hongzhi and the Falun Gong leadership. In the Democracy Wall case, I also showed that the government used the pro-democracy movement to further alienate the leftist radicals. The movement came at a time when the government was already engaged in a campaign against the Gang of Four, thus, it became a convenient opportunity to further denounce their pernicious influence.

Second, strategic factors in both cases also discouraged accusations against the United States and the West in general. In 1979, China sought American backing for its border war against Vietnam and assistance for the economic reform program and in 2000, its successful entry into the WTO was dependent on American support and Congress’ granting of Permanent Normal Trade Relations status. This chapter suggests that even though diversionary propaganda might be an attractive option to distract the public from domestic problems, such strategy is not pursued if it is not aligned with the government’s domestic and international interests.
5. Mixing diversion and reassurance: The 1986 and 1989 student protests

5.1 Introduction

In the late 1980s, the Chinese government was confronted with two major protests, both initiated by students at elite universities around the country. The December 1986 protest started at the University of Science and Technology in Hefei, Anhui, and quickly spread to many other university campuses in the following three weeks. In Shanghai, the demonstrations even drew as many as thirty thousand participants. The Tiananmen movement of 1989 was arguably the largest and most destabilizing protest in the post-Mao era. Triggered by the sudden death of former General Secretary Hu Yaobang in April 1989, students from various universities in Beijing staged large-scale demonstrations and eventually occupied Beijing’s Tiananmen Square for several weeks. While the 1986 protest was successfully contained using persuasion and policing measures, the Tiananmen movement was only brought to an end after the government sent in the military to recover control of the city center in a brutal crackdown. The students’ activism was motivated by the convergence of multiple factors, including rising inflation, economic inequality and corruption. Influenced by the liberal ideas of prominent intellectuals, they advocated for Western-style political reform measures and, in the Tiananmen case, even demanded that conservative leaders step down.

I argue that complex domestic and international factors worked together to result in a propaganda strategy that mixes diversionary accusations with reassurances. Domestically, the theory predicts a medium level of anti-foreign diversionary propaganda. First, the main initiators and participants of the protests are elite university students. The students were politically
valuable for the government because, as prospective skilled cadres and professionals, they would help to push forward the economic reform program. The need to co-opt students and maintain their loyalty and support would constrain leaders’ propaganda options. Leaders would be unlikely to adopt a full-out propaganda campaign attacking and denouncing the broad masses of students. They would more likely target alternative domestic enemies or foreign targets.

Second, before the outbreak of the student protests, conservative leaders within the party were already concerned about a group of domestic liberal intellectuals who supported political reforms and espoused “bourgeois” ideas that raised doubts about the party. These intellectuals could serve as convenient targets in the aftermath of the student demonstrations. Taken together, these two factors – the need to co-opt university students and the availability of domestic liberal intellectuals as potential scapegoats – predict a medium level of diversionary motivations against foreign targets.

Internationally, there were also two factors that pulled in opposite directions. On the one hand, the student demonstrators drew their inspiration from the Western democratic political model, which is threatening to the communist party. Western journalists maintained close contacts with student leaders and foreign media organizations spread news about the movement, boosting the participants’ morale. Further, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown, Western countries imposed sanctions on China and offered protection to top dissidents. On the other hand, economic and security cooperation with the United States and other Western countries were highly important for Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform program. These economic and security concerns would likely moderate anti-Western propaganda, which otherwise would have been very pronounced.
The case studies found that the government adopted a mixed propaganda strategy, combining both elements of anti-Western accusations and denunciations with reassurances to foreign investors that China would be firmly committed to economic reforms. In addition, the media also attacked pro-democratic activists operating from abroad and the Kuomintang government on Taiwan. Domestically, a small group of liberal intellectuals, dubbed “black hands,” and select student leaders were held responsible for the unrest, while the media refrained from blaming the large masses of students. The case studies in this chapter suggest that certain domestic political conditions and international interests can lead to a strategic mixing of diversionary and reassurance tactics. In the following sections, I will discuss the government’s prior position towards university students and liberal intellectuals, key events associated with the two student protests, and the government’s propaganda strategies.

5.2 The government’s position towards elite students and liberal intellectuals

The co-optation of elite university students

Since the beginning of the reform period, the government under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping had pursued a consistent co-optation strategy towards students at elite universities. To absorb new scientific and managerial knowledge as well as to make up for the ten years of the Cultural Revolution during which schools were reorganized to serve the primary purpose of political education, the party invested heavily in higher education and promised university graduates with secure employment and high social status. In contrast to the Cultural Revolution emphasis on egalitarian schooling that Hua Guofeng endorsed (eg. recruiting heavily from the peasant and working classes based on recommendation instead of merit), Deng wanted to raise the standards in education and train a class of elite students and intellectuals who would be
tasked with promoting the modernization of science and technology. Deng and other influential officials declared that “science was a productive force,” and that “education was a decisive factor in the development of production.”

In his speech at the National Conference on Education in April 1978, Deng attacked the leftist claim that those with education were “bourgeois intellectuals,” and stressed that “education must meet the requirements of our country’s economic development.” After Deng consolidated his power, his “elitist” education model became prominent and education was reoriented to serve economic development instead of political indoctrination. Higher education was rapidly expanded during the first decade of reform. Universities that were closed during the Cultural Revolution were reopened and new ones were constructed. Between 1978 and 1988, the number of universities increased from 598 to 1,975, and total enrollment increased from about 850,000 to over 2 million students.

The national university entrance examination system was reintroduced in 1977-1978 and those with a university education were guaranteed employment in the state sector. Given such high promised returns to education, in 1978, 6 million candidates competed in the national exam, with only 402,000 eventually granted admissions. A number of high schools and universities were designated “keypoints” that would be overseen and funded directly by the Ministry of Education or other central agencies. According to Barry Sautman, in 1983, the party continued to emphasize the training of “specialists who would advance Open Door policies and economic

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reform” rather than just politically reliable cadres. As Stanley Rosen argued, these changes fostered the development of a two-track education system with a highly selective and better-funded “elite sector” aimed at training “the first-class scientists and engineers necessary to meet the ambitious targets of the Four Modernizations program” and a “mass sector” that provided ordinary people with only basic skills and some vocational training.

Despite these expansions in higher education, a major review of education policy published in 1985 by the Central Committee stressed that tens of millions of professionals in education, medicine, culture, media, public service, etc. needed to be trained. The party also sought to recruit university students, especially in the period from 1983 to 1985. Some local party branches, for example, aimed to recruit 15% of the total number of college students. The education policies adopted during the first decade of Deng’s rule highlighted the important position that students at elite universities occupied. The party not only had great expectations for them and was willing to invest heavily in their education at the expense of other less capable students, but elite students were also promised high social status, employment in the public sector, and easier entry into the party. These elite students, however, turned out to be the main forces in the 1986 and 1989 protests. I argue that the need to avoid alienating the large masses of students encouraged the government to resort to blaming domestic liberal intellectuals as well as a select number of external targets.

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7 Rosen, “Recentralization, Decentralization, and Rationalization,” 301.
Party conservatives’ prior antagonism towards outspoken intellectuals

The party’s position towards intellectuals has from the beginning on been ambivalent, and during some periods even hostile. Intellectuals tended to originate from “exploiting classes” and they oftentimes held independent political views that questioned the party’s monopoly and the concentration of power in the hands of a few leaders. The party under Mao Zedong’s leadership looked down on intellectuals, kept them subordinate to revolutionary cadres, and persecuted those that deviated from the party’s line.10 According to one researcher, party leaders “compared intellectuals to peacocks – which frequently change color – suggesting that the party should control them firmly but not too tightly, lest they suffocate, and not too loosely, lest they fly away.”11

The lot of intellectuals improved with the initiation of reform and opening up. Reform-minded leaders realized that the skills and knowledge of intellectuals in the areas of technology, management and scientific policy-making (as compared to policy making based on ideology) were important for the modernization drive. In 1980, the class status of intellectuals was changed from “bourgeoisie” to “proletariat”, which meant that now they could join the party, and indeed, large numbers were recruited.12 A document issued by the Central Committee in 1982 instructed cadres to pay greater attention to the work and living conditions of intellectuals, treat them fairly and give them the necessary freedom for their work. Hu Yaobang even tried to attach positive meaning to the word “intellectual” (zhishi fenzi) by praising Karl Marx as “the most accomplished intellectual and scientist.”13

11 Lee, 390.
Despite these policy changes, a number of conservative leaders still regarded intellectuals who were dissatisfied with the system and felt victimized by the Maoist era as an ideological threat. Increased trade and knowledge exchange with the West and reduced control over production and personal life meant that access to Western ideas, lifestyles, consumer products and popular culture was more easily available. In addition, a brief period of ideological tightening after the crackdown of the Democracy Wall movement was followed by increased space for expression in the early 1980s. Many writers and artists were emboldened to voice their grievances against policies during the Maoist period and their doubts about the socialist system. Some of these intellectuals were connected to reform-minded leaders, including Hu Yaobang, who adopted a tolerant attitude towards them. However, support from Hu Yaobang was not sufficient to shield them from criticisms by hardline leaders within the party or by Deng Xiaoping, who was alarmed by these liberal intellectuals’ boldness to question the party’s leadership.

Prior to the student demonstrations of 1986, several critics had been targeted, and after each crackdown, the party’s hostility towards liberal intellectuals was deepened. In 1981, an attack against “spiritual pollution” and “bourgeois influences” was launched and the most prominent target was the writer Bai Hua. His novel “Unrequited Love” recounted the story of a Chinese artist who was well-known in the United States but chose to return to China after the communist party came to power because of his patriotism. He was, however, purged during the Cultural Revolution. Not only did the novel raise questions about the sufferings of the people under Mao, it also asked whether loyalty to the party was worth it. The work was publicly criticized in a number of official outlets, including the People’s Liberation Army Daily and the
Beijing Daily. Deng Xiaoping was particularly upset and in a speech in July 1981, he criticized Bai Hua and asserted that “the laxity on ideological issues […] had encouraged the emergence of bourgeois liberalization.”

A bigger campaign against liberal intellectuals followed in 1983. After the public criticisms against Bai Hua faded, intellectuals again enjoyed a period of ideological relaxation that encouraged bold thinking and debates. Two prominent topics discussed at this point were alienation and humanism. Alienation refers, loosely defined, to the estrangement of the worker from the products he has created within a capitalist society where workers do not own the means of production and labor is routinized and commercialized. Humanism refers broadly to respect for individuals and their inalienable rights, and opposition to dictatorship and the cult of personality. At the forefront of the movement were well-connected intellectuals such as Wang Ruoshui, deputy editor at the People’s Daily, and Zhou Yang, deputy director of the Propaganda Department. They argued that serious political and economic alienation existed in China and pointed out that political alienation was a consequence of the cult of personality. They described political alienation as a process by which “a leader arose from among the people. But as a result of propaganda or the personality cult, he became divorced from the people and the people in turn had to obey his order unconditionally.” Such writings constituted an implicit attack on the socialist system itself because they contradicted the orthodox belief that since there was no oppression in socialist societies, there could be no alienation.

Deng blamed these writers for spreading corrupt bourgeois ideas that led to mistrust of communism and the leadership of the party, and other leaders, including Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, Chen Zhongshi, and others.

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16 Goldman, 117.
Peng Zhen, and Hu Qiaomu followed his lead. Some of the intellectuals targeted were forced to make self-criticisms, were sent into early retirement, or discharged from their posts. Nevertheless, because the public denunciation of these intellectuals threatened to disrupt economic production and education, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang persuaded Deng to limit the campaign.

**Theoretical implications:** Overall, this section has argued that during the first decade of reform, the party embraced elite university students and sought to groom them for professional positions. The great emphasis the party placed on higher education and the promised returns of a university degree all suggested that university students were politically valuable for the party. I argue that given the need to maintain university student’s loyalty, the party would logically try to avoid alienating the large masses of university students and it would be motivated to use attack alternative targets, such as a domestic threat or foreign countries and actors. At the same time, this section discussed how conservative party leaders continued to see liberal intellectuals who were critical of the system as a threat to their rule and they launched attacks against these critics in 1981 and 1983. These liberal intellectuals could serve as potential scapegoats in the case of social unrest.

According to the proposed theory, we have thus two forces working in opposite directions. On the one hand, the need to co-opt elite students means that diversionary incentives would be high, but on the other hand, the availability of liberal intellectuals as potential domestic scapegoats would moderate these diversionary incentives. The theory would predict overall a medium level of diversion against foreign targets. Indeed, I show in the following two case studies that even though university students were the main forces behind the protests, the party

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18 Zhang, 87.
shifted most of the responsibility for the protests on outspoken intellectuals and accused the West as well as other actors (Chinese activists abroad, Taiwan, Hong Kong) of meddling in China’s domestic affairs and supporting the protests with the ulterior motive of weakening the party.

5.3 The 1986 student protest

Overview of the causes and development of the protest

The student demonstration of December 1986 was brought about by multiple convergent factors, including the leadership’s promise of greater “democracy,” liberal intellectuals’ activism, and student discontent with campus conditions. First, prior to the protest, students were emboldened by top leaders’ embrace of “democracy” and “democratic reforms.” In early 1986, Deng revived his previous call for political reforms made in 1980, stressing that changes needed to be made to realize “the democratization of the political life of the Party and the state, the democratization of economic management, and the democratization of the life of society as a whole.”\(^{20}\) What was meant was not the introduction of multi-party democracy, but rather the removal of bureaucratic barriers and the easing of the party’s control over the state system to facilitate economic reforms. Hu Qili also urged scientists and writers to carry out research that could assist the party with decision-making and promised that their activities would be protected from political attacks.\(^ {21}\) Hu Yaobang went even further, believing that “political reform in its own right had a unique value beyond merely serving economic reforms.”\(^ {22}\) Among the top leaders, Hu was probably the most tolerant of diversity of political opinion, diverging from

others who believed that the indoctrination of the people to strengthen popular faith in communism and the combat against bourgeois ideas were necessary.\textsuperscript{23}

Such official encouragement gave open-minded elites and intellectuals, many of them well-connected and working within the establishment, a boost. Conferences at important research institutes were held on diverse themes such as modernization, culture, freedom of expression and legal protection of individual rights. They proposed bold ideas, including the formulation of laws to protect intellectuals, artists, and cultural associations, reforms of the media system to grant the media greater independence and to protect editors and journalists, and legal measures to shield ordinary citizens against power abuses by officials.\textsuperscript{24} Some prominent outlets, including the Shanghai-based \textit{World Economic Herald}, provided the space for intellectuals to express their advocacy for democracy, the right to hold different political opinions (as contrasted with democratic centralism), greater political participation for social groups like peasants and workers, and institutional reforms, even including the introduction of a multi-party system.\textsuperscript{25} Fang Lizhi, a prominent astrophysicist and Vice President of the University of Science and Technology in Hefei, Anhui, was especially active. He gave talks across the country on the rule of law and free elections, advocated for the revival of the May Fourth spirit of democracy and science, and even called for “complete Westernization”\textsuperscript{26} In a speech given in November 1986 at Shanghai Jiaotong University, he argued that:

“democracy granted by leaders is not true democracy. […] What is the meaning of democracy? Democracy means that each human being has his own rights and that human

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Zhang, 126–29.
\item Goldman, \textit{Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China}, 174–76.
\item Goldman, 176–78.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
beings, each exercising his own rights, form our society. Therefore, rights are in the hands of every citizen. They are not given by top leaders of the nation.”

Also in November, Fang stated in a speech at Tongji University in Shanghai that “the socialist movement […] has been a failure. I think that complete Westernization is the only way to modernize.”

At the same time, there were various problems on university campuses leading to student discontent, ranging from tuition increases to poor cafeteria food. Other general social issues like inflation, corruption and inequality further contributed to student dissatisfaction. Despite the priority that elite institutions received, the higher education system had expanded too rapidly in response to the need of economic reforms. The big increases in enrollment created strains on the universities’ resources. Encouraged by the leadership’s promise of political reforms and calls by intellectuals for concrete changes, student protests broke out in several cities, not surprisingly, starting at the University of Science and Technology in Hefei, Fang Lizhi’s home institution. On December 5, about 5,000 students there staged a demonstration and shouted slogans such as “No modernization without democracy!” A few days later, on December 9, it was reported that about 3,000 students protested in front of the buildings of the provincial government and the local newspaper.

The direct spark for the movement in Hefei was the amendment to the 1979 election law to make the procedures for electing members to the provincial people’s congress more democratic, but students were blocked from nominating their own candidates. News about the protests spread to other university campuses and in the following days supportive wall posters

27 Baum, Burying Mao, 200–201.
29 Zhao, The Power of Tiananmen, 80–86.
31 Baum, Burying Mao, 201.
were put up in Shanghai and Beijing. On December 19, students in Shanghai started marching to demand freedom and democracy.  

A Western diplomat commented that the protests were a reaction to official propaganda about democracy and added that “the leaders have to deal very cautiously with this, because they themselves raised the issue of democracy. The students are testing the limits.”  

Indeed, the authorities were relatively lenient towards the students and, according to Western news sources, there were no reports that the security forces tried to suppress the protests at first. In Hefei and Shenzhen, for example, the authorities even acquiesced to some of the students’ demands, such as no tuition increases and allowing students to nominate some candidates to the local people’s congresses.

On December 21, protests in Shanghai drew 30,000 to 35,000 people and students held sit-ins throughout the night outside the Shanghai People’s Congress building and the City Hall. Shanghai Mayor Jiang Zemin was reported to have met with student representatives, who presented four demands to him: greater democracy, freedom of the press, protection for the student protesters and an acknowledgment that the protests were legal. However, the police later dispersed the crowd and some students told reporters that the police had arrested some participants.

The day after, the official media denounced the protests as a danger to stability and unity and accused the students of beating police officers and breaking into the congress building. Nevertheless, demonstrations still went on in the following few days, attracting more students

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34 Southerland.
and workers. Students started to print and distribute leaflets that called the people “to oppose bureaucracy and authoritarianism, and strive for democracy and freedom.”

Students from Qinghua University also marched to support the protests in Shanghai. The authorities started to adopt a tougher approach towards the movement and warned against “extreme actions” in the official media. Student leaders and participants were also afraid that the authorities might retaliate by giving them undesirable job assignments upon graduation. In both Beijing and Shanghai, the municipal governments issued regulations that required organizers to register before they staged protests and prohibited protests in certain key areas, including outside the Zhongnanhai leadership compound. The People’s Daily warned that those opposed to the party and provoking the people would face consequences. University administrators were active in preventing students from leaving campuses and urged them to return to their classes.

The government was successful, and by January 5, 1987, the demonstrations had completely died down.

The government’s propaganda strategy after the 1986 protest

To study the official propaganda strategies in the aftermath of the student protest, I rely on People’s Daily reports in December 1986 and January 1987, in particular, front-page articles, editorials, authoritative commentaries, and articles reporting speeches made by officials. I also corroborated the findings from the People’s Daily reading with secondary accounts and contemporary news reports. The primary goal is to assess how the government assigned responsibility for the demonstration and whether antagonistic propaganda was applied against

Kwong, “The 1986 Student Demonstrations in China.”
foreign countries or other external actors, for instance, whether the government blamed outsiders for supporting the protest or criticized foreigners in some other ways. The findings support the argument that the need to prevent a public rift between the party and elite students encouraged the government to target alternative actors, including both a group of outspoken liberal intellectuals and external targets, including the radio station *Voice of America*.

Information on the causes and development of the protest presented in the previous section suggests that university students were the main forces behind it. Their mobilization was driven by the lack of opportunities for political participation, leaders’ promises of democracy and outspoken intellectuals’ pro-democratic ideas. Once protests broke out in Hefei, students in other cities also started marching to echo these demands and show their support. According to Merle Goldman, student leaders of informal discussion groups on campus played the role of organizing the protests and relaying information to their connections on other campuses, facilitating the spread of information from one city to another. In Shanghai, it was reported that students mailed thousands of letters and called their acquaintances across the country to keep them updated. Groups of students even walked to the train stations and asked passengers to disperse the news once they had arrived at their destinations.

Even though students themselves were the organizers and participants, the government adopted a relatively lenient approach towards them, consistent with the prediction that the authorities would hesitate to condemn groups that they were trying to co-opt. At the end of December, He Dongchang, Vice Minister of the State Commission for Education, told a group of journalists that “God allows young people to make mistakes. When we were young, we did similar things.” He added that except for some extremists, most students were patriotic but had

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41 Gargan, “China Denounces Student Protests as ‘Illegal Acts.’”
wrong ideas about democracy. According to my qualitative reading, several People’s Daily articles reporting on the demonstrations that occurred on December 24 and 25 expressed understanding for the students’ concerns about reforms, but urged them to cherish stability, hold firm to the Four Cardinal Principles and serve the country through their studies. Other articles published in early January 1987 further sought to persuade students to abandon their protest and return to classes. They stressed the need to protect the reform process and that students should be optimistic given the dramatic improvements in their living standards as compared to the Cultural Revolution. Students were encouraged to correct their understanding of freedom and democracy and were reminded that leaders were not intending to suppress democracy but only create conditions for it to develop.

While excusing the students, the party shifted the blame for the protest onto a small number of liberal intellectuals at home, in line with the prediction that the government might use the unrest as a convenient occasion to attack elements seen as threatening. At a meeting of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee in mid-January, a report prepared by He Dongchang highlighted the need to distinguish between a small number of instigators and the majority of patriotic students who had good intentions. The report stated that the disturbances were caused by the influence of erroneous ideas and trends that called for a complete rejection of Chinese culture and total Westernization. Even though the report acknowledged problems on university campuses, such as poor administration and bureaucratism, the party was firm in the diagnosis that a small number of hostile elements that were opposed to socialism planned to

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43 See People’s Daily issues on January 5, 7 and 9, 1987.
provoke chaos for a long time. The spokesperson of the Beijing municipal government stated that some had plotted to take advantage of the student demonstration to create chaos and turmoil in Beijing and around the country.45

From mid-January on, the media carried attacks that singled out three intellectuals and accused them of spreading “bourgeois liberalism” to mislead and provoke the students. These three were Fang Lizhi, Liu Binyan and Wang Ruowang, and they were all expelled from the party.46 Several articles claimed to offer evidence that under the guise of advocating for democratic management of schools, Fang Lizhi had instigated the students to “make trouble” and to break away from the leadership of the party and the socialist road.47 In another article which announced his expulsion from the party, Fang was accused of having given radical speeches to incite “bourgeois liberalism,” especially on university campuses.48

The choice of Fang Lizhi was understandable, given his provocative lectures on university campuses that gave students encouragement; however, the other two intellectuals had a distant connection to the protest. This disconnect supports the argument that the unrest was a convenient opportunity to attack those seen as a menace by leaders. Liu Binyan was an investigative reporter with the People’s Daily and the Vice Chairman of the Chinese Writers’ Association. His reports exposed corruption and injustice, some of which even embarrassed officials. He was previously targeted during the anti-rightist campaign of 1957 for his

investigative journalism. Another attacked was the writer Wang Ruowang, who had written works critical of the party. Yet, Wang shared in a phone interview with the *South China Morning Post* that “if they want to expel me, they must tell me what I’ve done wrong. I personally don’t think I’ve done anything and I was not involved in the student protests.”

Even though the student protests were kept in check through persuasions, warnings, and police interventions, they solidified the conservatives’ antagonism towards liberal intellectuals and led to a campaign against “bourgeois liberalization” in early 1987. Behind the doors, Hu Yaobang was blamed for his lenient approach towards outspoken intellectuals and removed from his position as General Secretary on January 16, 1987. Already on December 27, 1986, several party leaders including Wang Zhen, Peng Zhen, Hu Qiaomu, Bo Yibo and Deng Liqun had tried to persuade Deng to demote Hu. A document prepared by Bo Yibo dating January 17, 1987 and leaked to the press suggested that Hu’s “attitude toward opposing bourgeois liberalization was not resolute,” and that he had neglected ideological rectification and committed mistakes in economic policy making. According to Zhao Ziyang’s memoir, Deng had been repeatedly dissatisfied with Hu’s tolerance of liberal intellectuals from 1983 on and probably decided in the summer of 1986 that Hu had to be replaced. Zhu Houze, who was the director of the Propaganda Department and an ally of Hu Yaobang, and Ruan Chongwu, the minister of public security, were also removed from their positions during the 1987 anti-bourgeois liberalization campaign.

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49 “Communist Party Members Must First Have Discipline.”
Besides Fang Lizhi, Wang Ruowang and Liu Binyan, who were officially blamed for the protest and dismissed from the party, several other outspoken figures came under attack or were pressured to resign from their positions later in 1987. These included playwright Wu Zuguang, former People’s Daily deputy editor Wang Ruoshui, Su Shaozhi and Yan Jiaqi (the latter two held leadership positions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences). Newspapers, journals, and publishing houses were more closely monitored and 37 publications were closed down in the few months after the protest.⁵⁴ As will be discussed in the Tiananmen movement case, some of these intellectuals were again accused of manipulating the students behind the scenes in 1989 and I argue that the party’s prior hostility against them is an important factor that explained why they were targeted.

Despite propaganda attacks against individual critics, the party did not launch an all-out campaign against intellectuals in general, likely because of the adverse effect such a campaign might have had on economic reforms. A speech by Li Peng pointed out that intellectuals were part of the working classes and therefore, their collaboration with the party for the sake of socialist modernization was crucial. He further refuted rumors that the current campaign against bourgeois liberalism would lead to a rectification campaign (meaning large-scale purges and criticisms) against the intelligentsia.⁵⁵

Blaming outside actors: Voice of America and Taiwan

While the domestic propaganda focused for the most part on accusing the three intellectuals charged with instigating the protest, it also criticized and blamed external actors for

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taking advantage of the occasion to weaken the party. According to my reading of the *People’s Daily*, two external actors were specifically targeted: *Voice of America* (VOA) and Taiwan. VOA was blamed for spreading information about the protest and thereby enlarging it, which it clearly did. Taiwan was only mentioned once, but it was accused of calling its spies on the mainland to encourage the student protest, which is a more severe accusation. None of the accounts or news coverage on the student protest that I surveyed mentioned anything about Taiwan having played a role in the student protest, suggesting that this accusation was likely diversionary and probably motivated by the fear that the Kuomintang on Taiwan could take advantage of the instability on the mainland for certain political purposes.

VOA was established in 1942, during World War II, by the Office of War Information of the US government and has been the official international broadcasting organization of the United States since then. During the Cold War, it pledged to broadcast independent and trustworthy news that citizens in authoritarian countries did not have access to, thereby helping to spread democratic ideas and contain communism. According to Krugler, in a speech in 1950, President Harry Truman described the radio station as “the voice of truth and freedom, pitted against communist lies and oppression.”\(^\text{56}\) The VOA Charter signed into law by President Gerald Ford in 1973 identified three tasks for VOA: provide reliable and objective news, represent the American people, and present American policies to the world.\(^\text{57}\)

VOA’s provision of timely news contributed to the spread of information about the student protest. According to a *New York Times* report, the radio station “is widely listened to by students and, according to many of them, is a principal source of information about what is

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happening in the rest of China.”

Kyodo News reported on December 23, 1986, that Qinghua University students had put up posters complaining that the domestic media did not report on the demonstrations in Hefei and Shanghai. Another student poster cited a VOA broadcast that said that “7,000 policemen were mobilized when as many as 50,000 students in Shanghai took to the streets in demonstrations for three days in a row, resulting in the arrest of 200 students.”

Responding to this broadcast, China News Service declared that the VOA reporting of the arrests “was completely groundless and was a sheer fabrication.” Wenhui News, an official paper based in the Shanghai region, alleged that VOA rumors of the arrests in Shanghai had motivated students in Beijing. Xinhua accused VOA of emboldening students to disregard the ban on protest. It “quoted an unidentified Beijing resident as having said that while the Chinese Government was taking measures to ‘educate’ the students, VOA had broadcast comments by a U.S. journalist saying he hoped the demonstrators would not be discouraged.”

Criticisms of VOA in the People’s Daily were present but somewhat more muted. A spokesperson of the Beijing municipal government indirectly referred to VOA in a speech calling for vigilance on December 30, 1986. He warned residents against a certain foreign radio station that had recently stepped up its reporting activities. In the same speech, the spokesperson stated that the Taiwanese radio station Voice of Free China had broadcast a message on December 17, 1986, encouraging Taiwanese spies in China to “choose an opportune moment to

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58 Gargan, “China Denounces Student Protests as ‘Illegal Acts.’”
60 “VOA Reports ‘designed to Stir up Trouble,’” Hong Kong Zhongguo Tongxun She (China News Agency) - Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-CHI-86-249, December 25, 1986.
63 The name of this radio station has been changed to Radio Taiwan International. It was established in Nanjing in 1928 by the Kuomintang government. See http://english.rti.org.tw/aboutri/?recordId=1
take actions” and “use all possible means to encourage youth and students to participate [in the protest] and give them strong support.” This statement was also noted by Kyodo News. This accusation against Taiwan could be classified as a diversionary scapegoating tactic, since Taiwan played barely any the role in the student protest. While these accusations against VOA and Taiwan came from authoritative sources, they were, according to my reading, not repeated in the People’s Daily in the following weeks, likely because starting in January, the official propaganda was focused on denouncing domestic intellectuals.

_Criticisms of Western democracy mixed with reassurance rhetoric_

While the accusations in the news media only targeted VOA and Taiwan specifically, the propaganda machine criticized Western-style democracy and portrayed the Western system as an ideological threat to China. To complement the accusations that Fang Lizhi and other intellectuals sought to spread “bourgeois liberalization” and the “total Westernization of China,” the media ran multiple articles that pointed out the shortcomings of Western democracy and its incompatibility with current Chinese conditions. Articles in late December and early January argued that the socialist system, because it had only been in place for 30 years, still had limitations, but it had proven to be superior to the Western system in combating social ills, raising the standards of living of Chinese people, and fighting against oppression from the feudal and capitalist classes. One article tried to dispel the students’ idealization of Western democracy:

> “Western bourgeois democracy is not a flower; we should not see capitalist countries’ ‘democratic system’ in such a good light. If one occupies the minds of young students

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64 “Beijing Municipal Government Spokesperson Calls City Residents to Be on High Alert and Resist Troublemakers“ [北京市人民政府发言人发表谈话：号召全市人民提高警惕防止坏人捣乱].”
with an uncritical analysis of bourgeois democracy, it might clog their thinking, hinder their intellectual development, and even completely destroy their ambition.”

Another argued that there was really no true democracy in the West, but only the power of money. In America, “without money you cannot run for office, you cannot become a congressperson. Without money, you cannot hire a lawyer, cannot file a lawsuit; law is like null.”

At the same time, the articles that criticized Western democracy made clear that fighting against “total Westernization” was completely separate from the modernization program, which was an unshakeable goal of the party. The media reaffirmed the need to learn from advanced countries’ technology, economic management, and culture, but rejected the “exploitative social structure” and “corruption” of the capitalist system. The official media were careful to not upset foreign investors or provoke doubts about China’s development. This reassurance component was reflected in statements during meetings between high-level Chinese and foreign leaders, for example, between Deng Xiaoping and the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party’s Secretary Noboru Takeshita, or Zhao Ziyang and World Bank officials. Chinese leaders affirmed their commitment to the open door policy and stated that the protest at home would not affect international cooperation. These reports were placed prominently on the first pages of the People’s Daily. A Kyodo News report based on information from Japanese officials who were present during the meeting between Deng and Takeshita recalled that Deng told his counterpart

67 “Shanghainese People Are Concerned about Student Street Demonstration, Hoping Students Will Attach Importance to Stability and Unity, Remember the Four Cardinal Principles, and Study Hard to Advance China” [上海各界群众对部分学生上街游行表示关注：希望大学生们一安定团结大局为重，牢记四项原则为中华腾飞刻苦学习],” People’s Daily, December 25, 1986.
68 “‘Total Westernization’ is the Total Rejection of Socialism” [‘全盘西化’就是全盘否定社会主义],” People’s Daily, January 12, 1987.
that “student demonstrators account for only 1 to 2 percent of all students in China. And even if the percentage rises to 10 percent, China will promote its economic and political reforms, open-door policies and modernization projects anyway.”\(^{70}\)

Leaders also sought to prevent the fallout from the removal of Hu Yaobang. For example, Deng Xiaoping reiterated in multiple meetings with foreign guests that the change in the leadership would not affect China’s reform policies.\(^{71}\) The reading of the propaganda material confirms what the late General Secretary Zhao Ziyang shared in his secret memoir, written after he had been removed from power, about the months immediately after the 1986 protest:

“During this period of time, whenever I received foreign guests or spoke in public, […] I emphasized that reforms would not backtrack, but rather would only improve. I reiterated that current urban and rural policies would not change; the overall approach to reform would not change; the policy of opening up to the outside world would not change; the drive to reenergize the domestic economy would not change; and the policy of rewarding individual knowledge and merit would not change. Moreover, we would attempt to build on these efforts.”\(^{72}\)

Overall, I have argued that the party’s education policies during the reform period stressed the need to train elite university graduates who would be tasked with pushing forward the development of science and technology. The importance of university students to the party likely motivated leaders to avoid alienating the students publicly as a group. In the aftermath of the protest, leaders settled on a strategy that would shift most of the blame onto three liberal


\(^{71}\) See the first pages of the *People’s Daily* from January 13\(^{rd}\) to January 16\(^{th}\), 2017

\(^{72}\) Zhao, *Prisoner of the State*, 186–87.
intellectuals, towards whom leaders had already adopted an antagonistic attitude. While the choice of Fang Lizhi was understandable, the other two targets did not seem to have a connection to protest. Accusations against external actors, including Voice of America and Taiwan were also found, as well as a general rebuke of Western democracy; however, leaders were also seeking to persuade foreign investors that they would be committed to economic reform.

5.4 The Tiananmen student movement of 1989

The Tiananmen student movement of 1989 was much more serious and prolonged, leading to much more antagonistic propaganda strategies. A larger group of liberal intellectuals was accused of having instigated and controlled the movement and foreign hostile forces were portrayed as having colluded with internal enemies and supported them with the goal of overthrowing the socialist system. While during the 1986 student protest, I could not find a single student leader who was denounced in the media, after the 1989 crisis, the government arrested or released arrest warrants for a number of student leaders and described them as having worked together with behind-the-scenes “black hands.” The following sections will discuss the dynamics of the movement and the government’s propaganda strategies. While the Tiananmen case is special because of its severity, I argue that the proposed explanation could give us insight into the calculations of the government. The need to avoid publicly alienating university students likely motivated the scapegoating strategy targeting domestic outspoken intellectuals and external actors. However, likely because the movement was so severe and threatening, I find that a host of outside elements were attacked, including Western media organizations, the Kuomintang on Taiwan, Chinese dissidents abroad, supporters from Hong Kong, etc. The U.S. was heavily criticized for supporting Chinese dissidents and for its sanctions against China.
There were general denunciations of foreign forces and the Western political system due to the threat they pose to China through attempts to weaken the socialist system. Yet, we still see attempts in the media to reassure foreign investors, many of whom fled China after the Tiananmen crackdown.

The propaganda strategy after Tiananmen diverged slightly from the theoretical expectation. The theory predicts a medium level of anti-foreign propaganda given the prior co-optation of the students and the availability of domestic intellectuals as scapegoats, but the government adopted strong anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric and targeted both student leaders and outspoken intellectuals at home. It is likely because the Tiananmen movement was much more severe than the previous 1986 student protest. As a result, leaders might have felt the need to attack anybody who was either convenient to target or was related to the protest in order to justify the harsh crackdown.

The causes of the Tiananmen student movement

Students that participated in the Tiananmen movement were motivated by a number of grievances. A policy change by the State Education Commission in 1988 eliminated the official job assignment system and students were left on their own to find employment. This meant that those from more privileged families had an advantage in finding jobs, even if they did not perform as well academically. Employment was also more difficult to find for university graduates in the late 1980s, once the shortages of personnel after the Cultural Revolution had been filled. The fact that merit did not guarantee a job, especially given that the labor market was not developed, discouraged students. At the same time, student living conditions had not improved. Even though university enrollment more than tripled between 1977 and 1988, funds
for education only increased by 2.2 times, reaching only 3.27% of the government budget. Popular sayings such as “those who produce missiles earn less than those who sell tea eggs” reflected the general disillusionment of students as their education was not accordingly rewarded compared to those in the private sector.  

In addition, economic reforms within the context of immature market institutions and poor political oversight led to deeper structural problems that contributed to grievances, not only among students and intellectuals but also among workers, urban residents, and government employees. Price reforms in the summer of 1988 led to panic buying in anticipation of higher prices. Inflation reached 20-30% and the urban cost-of-living index rose by almost 40% within the year alone. Those surviving on fixed salaries and stipends and those that had saved money over time for retirement saw a drastic reduction in their living standards and their savings. Other factors that aroused anger were pervasive official profiteering, nepotism, and bribery. Officials could use their privileges to take advantage of the dual pricing system, buying goods and materials at a cheaper price from the state channel and then selling them for much higher profit on the market. Relatives of officials could rely on their connections to advance their businesses. These challenges eroded popular faith in the party and led many to believe that the solution was further political reform to correct for market inefficiencies.

The political climate was again relaxed after the campaign against bourgeois liberalization, initiated after the December 1986 student protest, was brought to an end in mid-1987. This led to a revival of debates about China’s political future among intellectuals and students. In 1988, a “conference fever” emerged in major universities. At Peking University there were several conferences a day and some of the speakers included intellectuals criticized

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73 Zhao, The Power of Tiananmen, 85–86.
after the 1986 demonstration. Because spoken content was not heavily censored, their talks were often disapproving of the government. Students also organized their own study groups, such as Wang Dan’s Democracy Salon at Peking University. Many participants in these conferences and study groups would later take on leadership roles in the Tiananmen protest. Another phenomenon that contributed to student activism was the popular television series *River Elegy*, which implicitly criticized China’s backward culture and isolation (symbolized by the Yellow River as contrasted to the ocean leading to the outside dynamic world). This series gave students a new perspective from which to look at Chinese history.

Liberal intellectuals continued to be politically active. In January 1989, Fang Lizhi wrote a letter to Deng Xiaoping asking for the release of Wei Jingsheng, who had been imprisoned since the Democracy Wall movement. Other liberal intellectuals followed his lead and between January and March, 1989, three petitions calling for political reforms, respect for individual rights and greater freedom of speech were submitted to the government. Two of these three petitions were signed by more than forty intellectuals. These petitions irritated not only conservative leaders, but also the relatively tolerant Zhao Ziyang and Hu Qili. Many of the signatories would later be accused of plotting and manipulating the Tiananmen student movement. These signs of social tensions and political activism did not go unnoticed. An internal document by the State Education Commission instructed universities to keep a watch out for potential student protests on April 5, the anniversary of the Tiananmen incident in 1976, and May 4, the commemoration day of the May Fourth movement of 1919.

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75 Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen*, 76.
77 Goldman, 295.
The development of the movement

The spark for the student protest was the sudden passing of former Secretary General Hu Yaobang on April 15, 1989. People had a high regard for Hu because of his backing of intellectuals and his sympathy towards political reforms before he was demoted. In contrast, students regarded Deng as an old oligarch who was neither willing to yield power nor tolerate political changes. In their eyes, Hu became a “martyr for the cause of freedom and democracy” and his passing provided them with an opportunity to air their dissatisfaction.\footnote{Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, 598.}

Posters mourning Hu and indirectly attacking Deng were immediately put up on university campuses.\footnote{Craig Calhoun, *Neither Gods nor Emperors: Students and the Struggle for Democracy in China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1994).} Within a few days, the content of the posters shifted to a discussion of freedom of association, independent media, and democracy. Students also organized marches to Tiananmen Square to commemorate Hu on April 19. A group of students even clashed with the police in front of the Xinhua gate on April 20, creating the rumor that the police had beaten some of the students. On the morning of April 22, tens of thousands of students, after an overnight march from their campuses, assembled in front of the Great Hall of the People, where Hu’s funeral took place. Three representatives knelt just outside the building, waiting to talk to Li Peng and to present their demands, which included a reevaluation of Hu Yaobang, renunciation of the previous anti-bourgeois liberalization campaigns, disclosure of officials’ incomes and permission to run independent newspapers.\footnote{Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen*, 149–54.}

Amidst the protest, Zhao Ziyang departed for North Korea for an official trip. In his absence, Li Peng and conservative leaders alerted Deng of the severity of the situation. Li Peng even went so far as to claim that the protest was attacking Deng personally and that behind-the-
scenes plotters were aiming to topple the government.\textsuperscript{81} This misinformation led Deng to approve the publication of a harsh \textit{People’s Daily} editorial on April 26, which declared that the incident was a “planned conspiracy and a disturbance” by “an extremely small group of the people” who sought to “once and for all, negate the leadership of the CPC and the socialist system.”\textsuperscript{82}

Instead of deterring the students, the editorial shocked them because their concern for the country was interpreted as an anti-government plot. Even though many had grown tired of protest from the previous days, the editorial motivated them to stage larger demonstrations.\textsuperscript{83} The march towards Tiananmen Square that the students organized on April 27 reached 150,000 people and was arranged by campus groups and an umbrella autonomous student union which had representatives from 21 universities.\textsuperscript{84} The marchers demanded that the editorial be retracted but were also careful to show their loyalty to the government by shouting slogans that supported socialism and the communist party and by limiting their concerns to specific issues such as inflation and corruption.\textsuperscript{85} Workers and city residents cheered the students on and the police resistance to the demonstrators was weak.\textsuperscript{86}

After this march, the government adopted a more conciliatory approach by covering the movement more positively and inviting student representatives to a dialogue to discuss students’ demands, albeit arranged through the official party-sponsored student associations. While some students were dissatisfied because the government did not recognize the Students’ Autonomous

\textsuperscript{81} Liang Zhang et al., \textit{The Tiananmen Papers} (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), 71–76.
\textsuperscript{83} “Student Reaction to Article,” \textit{Hong Kong Zhongguo Tongxun She (China News Agency) - Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-CHI-89-080}, April 26, 1989.
\textsuperscript{84} Zhao, \textit{The Power of Tiananmen}, 154–56.
Union (gaozilian), others were optimistic and arranged for the establishment of a student Dialogue Delegation that would be in charge of communicating with the government in the future. When Zhao Ziyang returned from North Korea, he charged the Central Committee’s United Front Work Department and the Propaganda Department with the task of holding dialogues with the students. In addition, his speeches on the occasion of the May Fourth movement commemoration and at the Asian Development Bank conference expressed sympathy with the students’ concerns and added that the party took the task of building democracy seriously. With these assurances, most students decided to return to their classes, leaving the forthcoming tasks to the Dialogue Delegation, and the movement seemed like it had run its course.

However, more radical student leaders like Wuer Kaixi, Wang Dan, and Chai Ling were skeptical about the government’s intention towards the dialogues and decided to press for further concessions. They mobilized students to start a hunger strike on May 13, taking advantage of Gorbachev’s official visit to China on May 15 to put pressure on the government. They predicted that with the presence of the international media, the government would be unlikely to suppress them. Their approach contrasted with that of moderate student leaders who wanted to stop further protests and consolidate the gains.

The hunger strikers demanded that the government carry out dialogues with the students “based on the principle of equality of the parties” and to recognize the movement as a “patriotic student democracy movement.” Further meetings between students and leaders, including Yan Mingfu from the United Front Work Department, and then Li Peng, failed to assuage the hunger

87 Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen*, 156–58.  
89 Brook, *Quelling the People*, 35.  
strikers. The students’ willingness to sacrifice their lives drew sympathy from all quarters. For several days, the government basically lost control over the crowd. On May 17, it was reported that more than a million people marched to support the movement. Among them were employees of government agencies, official newspapers, and government work units. Editors and journalists boldly defied government censorship and reported positively on the demonstration, praising the students’ patriotism. By that time, demonstrations had also spread to 21 other cities.93 Workers had joined hands with students, established their own autonomous organization and set up their headquarters to the west of the square.94 The number of hunger strikers swelled to several thousand participants, and between May 13 and May 24, it was reported that 32 hospitals in Beijing treated over 9,000 cases of collapse.95

This escalation meant that room to retreat and save face for both sides was constrained. Inside the leadership circle, Zhao Ziyang’s moderate approach was heavily criticized in a meeting on May 17. Li Peng and other conservatives brought charges that Zhao’s speech at the Asian Development Bank meeting had diverged from the April 26 editorial. Further, Zhao’s comment to Gorbachev that Deng Xiaoping still held preeminent power implicitly held Deng responsible for the unrest. Zhao was accused of revealing publicly the differences within the leadership and worsening the protest. He was sidelined on the morning of May 18, and the remaining top leaders decided to impose martial law, which would start on May 20.96 Troops were called in to enforce order in Beijing, but they were blocked from entering the city by residents, who used trucks, buses, and other objects to stop the military. Residents surrounded

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95 Brook, *Quelling the People*, 37.

96 Zhang et al., *The Tiananmen Papers*, 184–211.
the soldiers’ vehicles, educated them on the demonstration, and tried to convince them to retreat.⁹⁷

Support for the hunger strikers continued among the populace, but the government was able to restrain media outlets and government work units after martial law was imposed. At the same time, the protest became more disoriented and conflict-ridden. The split within the student leadership continued and some that advocated for an end to the hunger strike were dismissed. Efforts by groups of student leaders to persuade other students to leave were unfruitful, as those who left were replaced immediately by others taking their place. More and more students had arrived from outside of Beijing, and many of them were determined to stay, as compared to the Beijing students who had become relatively worn out. By the end of May, an estimated ten to twenty thousand students were staying on the square overnight, and probably over 90% were from the provinces.⁹⁸ Many entertained the hope that once Wan Li returned from an official trip to Canada and the United States, he would be able to call a special meeting of the National People’s Congress to reverse martial law. Some intellectuals like Wang Juntao and Chen Ziming tried to coordinate among the various unions representing students, workers, intellectuals and Beijing residents, but their newly established Joint Liaison Group achieved little as the crowd occupying Tiananmen cannot be controlled by a single organization. Eventually, the students decided to stay until the National People’s Congress meeting on June 20.⁹⁹ Their spirit was lifted at the end of May with the arrival to the square of the Goddess of Democracy, a statue made by


⁹⁸ Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen*, 199.

students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and tents and supplies from Hong Kong, which dramatically improved the living conditions on the Square.\textsuperscript{100}

During the last few days of May, while the student protest appeared to have calmed down to some extent, the authorities were preparing for the clearing of the square. Soldiers were ordered to dress in civilian clothing and to use public transportation to get to the center of the city. Weapons and equipment were transported separately using buses and other non-military vehicles. On June 2, the elders and remaining members of the Politburo Standing Committee met and decided to order the military to clear the square.\textsuperscript{101} On the evening of June 3, the government issued an emergency announcement requesting people to stay clear of streets and of Tiananmen Square and after that, soldiers and tanks started moving towards the square. On their path, they were obstructed by city residents and students, against whom they used live ammunition, leading to the death of several hundred people. When the troops closed in on the square, a delay was negotiated so that the students who had persisted to the end could leave.\textsuperscript{102} Even though most students on the square escaped the bloody crackdown, the fact that the military fired at the people enraged the public. Individual clashes between citizens and the military continued in the following days, but after the crackdown, the government regained firm control of the capital.\textsuperscript{103}

\textit{The government’s strategy of blaming domestic “black hands”}

Even though the movement was primarily student-driven, one of the core components of the propaganda strategy in the aftermath was the attack on domestic “black hands” and external forces that they colluded with. These elements were accused of plotting the protest and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{100} Zhao, \textit{The Power of Tiananmen}, 195–97.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Zhang et al., \textit{The Tiananmen Papers}, 354–55.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Zhang et al., 379–82.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Zhang et al., Chapters 10 and 11.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
manipulating the students with the goal of overthrowing the government. Such propaganda exaggerated the role of domestic liberal intellectuals and foreign actors and can be interpreted as diversionary. According to one editorial, “under the pretense of fighting against corruption and demanding democracy,” these handful reactionaries “took advantage of the governments’ policy shortcomings and the students’ patriotism to incite the students to stage street protests.”

It would be difficult in a fair analysis to attribute the movement to a small number of behind-the-scenes actors. First, large-scale demonstrations broke out not only in Beijing, but also in almost all major cities, with the participation of students, workers, intellectuals, ordinary citizens, government agency employees and party cadres. Second, the movement had its own momentum that made it impossible for any individual to control. The various quarrels and divisions among the student leaders, the tendency for radical students to prevail because moderate ones would leave over time and the arrival of students from the provinces to Beijing meant that demands and tactics were constantly shifting and that no group could persuade the participants to act one way or another. Finally, a host of other factors contributed to the outbreak and endurance of the movement, such as economic conditions, official corruption, division within the party leadership, Gorbachev’s visit and the international media.

Nevertheless, the official verdict by the government blamed a small group of instigators for the instability. In his speech to the martial law units on June 9, 1989, his first public appearance after the crackdown, Deng Xiaoping asserted that the counterrevolutionary turmoil (反革命暴乱) was premeditated and instigated behind-the-scenes by a handful who had misled and taken advantage of students and the large masses. They had colluded with anti-party forces both inside and outside the country and their goal was to overthrow the government and the

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socialist system and build a bourgeois republic completely dependent on the West [完全西方附庸化的资产阶级共和国]. A detailed report by Chen Xitong delivered to the National People’s Congress Standing Committee listed names of these alleged instigators, most of whom were Chinese academics, researchers, and editors. They were accused of having colluded with students (Wang Dan was the only student mentioned) to establish illegal organizations, draft reactionary statements, collect funds, and recruit criminal elements to stop the martial law units from entering the city.106

The arrest warrants for the instigators of the protest and the leaders of illegal autonomous student and worker organizations were published shortly after the crackdown. An arrest warrant for Fang Lizhi and his wife Li Shuxian was issued on June 12. Another list of seven intellectuals accused of having taken part in “the behind-the-scenes planning and direction of the counterrevolutionary riots in Beijing” was released on June 24. These seven were Yan Jiaqi, Bao Zunxin, Chen Yizi, Wan Runnan, Su Xiaokang, Wang Juntao, Chen Ziming. This did not include a number already arrested shortly before or after the crackdown including Liu Xiaobo.107 Prominent student leaders such as Wang Dan, Wuer Kaixi, Liu Gang and Chai Ling were also put onto a most-wanted list,108 but the speeches by Deng Xiaoping and Chen Xitong indicated that they were largely seen as pawns controlled by more sinister plotters.

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107 Zhang et al., The Tiananmen Papers, 449.
Some of the intellectuals played an active role, but others were only marginally involved or even sought to moderate the students’ demands. This suggests that these intellectuals were likely used by the government as scapegoats to explain how the movement could have started and to justify the crackdown. Yan Jiaqi, Bao Xunxin and Su Shaozhi wrote a poster on May 13 calling other intellectuals to participate in the demonstration to show support for the hunger strike. They and others signed a statement published in the *Guangming Daily* asking the government to recognize the student movement as a “patriotic democratic movement.” However, their concerns were also shared by several university presidents, leaders of the democratic political parties, the Chinese Communist Youth League, the All China Youth Federation, and the All China Students’ Federation. A similar petition was signed by more than 2,000 party members, even including some at the ministerial level.\(^{109}\)

Likewise, Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao, who were trying to coordinate among the various autonomous groups, held moderate views (not demanding Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping to step down) and sought to work out a peaceful solution to the protest, which failed because of the insistence of the hunger strikers to stay on the square.\(^{110}\) Liu Xiaobo started a hunger strike during the last days of the protest in order to unite the fractured student protest, but, according to Dingxin Zhao, this decision “reflected the intellectuals’ ambivalence toward the movement. They supported the movement but were greatly worried about its direction of development.”\(^{111}\) Su Xiaokang was not directly involved, but he was persecuted for writing the TV series *River Elegy* that had energized the discussions about China’s future prior to the unrest.\(^{112}\) Even though Fang Lizhi helped to start the petition movement with his letter to Deng Xiaoping in January


\(^{111}\) Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen*, 199.

1989, he avoided coming to the Square or showing public support for the students to prevent the protest from being seen as manipulated. He later wrote in his autobiography that he was not a “black hand” behind the protest, adding that “if there was something we had contributed to the movement, it might be our simple message, which had struck a chord … with the public.”\textsuperscript{113}

These intellectuals’ support for the movement was not unique. According to Zhao, the students received material contributions from government agencies and moral backing from the state media, who were sympathetic to their cause.\textsuperscript{114}

Overall, it would be an exaggeration to blame a group of intellectuals for plotting and manipulating the protest with the aim of overthrowing the party. The most likely reason for why leaders did so, according to my interpretation, is because they did not want to publicly alienate the large masses of students and ordinary citizens and because they had already held antagonistic attitudes towards these intellectuals prior to the protest.

The \textit{Tiananmen Papers}, a compilation of leaked party documents considered to be authentic, suggest that from the very beginning on, conservative leaders within the regime saw the student movement as an outgrowth of the various activities organized or supported by intellectuals in the years before that. In July 1988, a report from the State Economic Commission already cautioned that another student protest might erupt. The report stressed that “a small number of bad elements have infiltrated colleges to stir up trouble” including some that were active in the 1978/79 Democracy Wall and 1986 student movements.\textsuperscript{115} Internal discussions among top leaders during the course of the movement tended towards the view that liberal intellectuals were responsible for the protest. On April 24, Li Ximing, the Beijing Party

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item An example includes how students divided Tiananmen Square into zones for each school and in order to move across these zones, passports were required. Zhao, \textit{The Power of Tiananmen}; Calhoun, \textit{Neither Gods nor Emperors}.
\item Zhang et al., \textit{The Tiananmen Papers}, 16.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Committee Secretary, said in a meeting that “the students themselves would not be able to come up with this kind of power. Black hands and provocateurs are behind them,” and added that “the most eager of the Peking University students are operating under the direction of Fang Lizhi’s wife Li Shuxian.” Yao Yilin and Li Peng further commented that “bourgeois liberal elements with ulterior motives have already exploited this student movement” and that “we are deep into a struggle with bourgeois liberalism.”

In a meeting on April 25 at Deng Xiaoping’ residence, Li Peng told Deng that illegal autonomous student organizations had sprung up with other people “behind them calling the shots.” Yang Shangkun even added that “we certainly can’t allow a few people with ulterior motives to make use of this movement to manufacture turmoil.” Deng was convinced by their diagnosis and agreed that “a tiny minority is exploiting the students; they want to confuse the people and throw the country into chaos.” This view ultimately informed the harsh April 26 editorial. Even after the demonstration of April 27, during which students shouted pro-party slogans to show that they were patriotic, conservative leaders like Li Peng and Li Ximing hanged on to the view that the protest was planned. During a high-level meeting on May 8, Li Ximing reported to the Politburo Standing Committee that “this clearly is a planned, organized conspiracy. Why is the situation at Peking University so explosive? Because Fang Lizhi and his wife, Li Shuxian, are orchestrating it from behind the scenes.” While leaders’ views were not united, with Zhao Ziyang and Wan Li seeing the student activism in a more positive light and

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116 Zhang et al., 56.
117 Zhang et al., 60.
118 Zhang et al., 73.
119 Zhang et al., 71–75.
120 Zhang et al., 126.
acknowledging that economic problems and corruption contributed to societal grievances,\textsuperscript{121} the conservatives’ position prevailed and shaped the official verdict in the aftermath of the protest.

\textit{Diversionary propaganda targeting external actors}

Even though the primary responsibility was placed on domestic liberal intellectuals, in the aftermath of Tiananmen, the leadership also blamed several external actors for supporting the student demonstration. A variety of actors were denounced, including the Kuomintang government on Taiwan, \textit{Voice of America}, Chinese pro-democracy activists operating from abroad, supporters for the movement in Hong Kong, etc. A paragraph from the report by Chen Xitong sums up the accusations:

“Reactionary political forces in Hong Kong, Taiwan, the United States and other Western countries were also involved in the turmoil through various channels and by different means. Western news agencies showed unusual zeal. The Voice of America, in particular, aired news in three programs everyday for a total of more than ten hours beamed to the Chinese mainland, spreading rumors, stirring up trouble and adding fuel to the turmoil.”\textsuperscript{122}

Diversionary propaganda portrayed the West as a serious and long-term threat towards China’s political system. According to the official verdict, Western political forces “always attempt to make socialist countries, including China, give up the socialist road” and “eventually bring these countries under the rule of international monopoly capital and put them on the course

\textsuperscript{121} In a meeting on May 8, Hu Yaobang even spoke of the need to create a “clean government.” Zhang et al., 126–29.\textsuperscript{122} “Text’ of Chen Xitong Report to NPC [National People’s Congress] 30 June,” \textit{Beijing Xinhua (English) - Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-CHI-89-128}, July 6, 1989.
of capitalism.”

The media made frequent references to the support by external hostile forces (国外敌对势力) for the domestic reactionaries. *Voice of America* was again targeted because of its role in spreading information about the protest and the suppression. Prior to the crackdown, one article in the *People’s Daily* accused the radio station of falsely reporting that Gorbachev had expressed the wish to give a speech at a Beijing university. After the suppression of the movement, there were several editorials that blamed *Voice of America* for spreading rumors about the crackdown and they attributed the escalation of the protest to the allegedly fabricated information provided by VOA. One written by an eyewitness said that VOA had exaggerated the “quelling” of the unrest by asserting that the military used machine guns to kill more than 3,000 people on the square and that tanks ran over many people. The rumors of a “bloodbath” spread by VOA were also denounced by Chen Xitong in his speech to the NPC.

Chinese pro-democracy activists and organizations operating from abroad were also part of the “hostile external forces” condemned by the media. One of the groups attacked was the New York-based Chinese Alliance for Democracy. Several of its leaders, such as Hu Ping and Chen Jun, were accused of working together with Liu Xiaobo and Wang Dan to foment the protest. According to official statements, individuals and groups abroad wrote letters to spur the students on, established an opposition party abroad, returned to China to take part in the protests, and sent money back to support the movement.

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123 “‘Text’ of Chen Xitong Report to NPC [National People’s Congress] 30 June.”
126 “‘Text’ of Chen Xitong Report to NPC [National People’s Congress] 30 June.”
127 “‘Text’ of Chen Xitong Report to NPC [National People’s Congress] 30 June.”
The Kuomintang party (KMT) on Taiwan was one of the most prominent targets and was attacked in a number of authoritative speeches and first-page articles. While the KMT was militarily weak and could not possibly take back the mainland by force, in the case the mainland democratizes, it could potentially return as an opposition party or could even replace the communist party. A front-page article on June 24, 1989 indicated that leaders feared such a possibility. The article ridiculed the Kuomintang’s “mistaken calculation” that its opportunity to take back the mainland after 40 years of waiting had arrived. It accused Taiwan of starting an “an anti-communist wave” and calling all compatriots to topple the communist party and abandon the Four Cardinal Principles. Chen Xitong’s report to the National People’s Congress stated that protest instigators called for “unity among all forces including the Kuomintang in Taiwan” to oppose the government. Whether true or not, this reference suggests that leaders likely worried about protesters joining hands with Taiwan.

More specific accusations against Taiwan were also made. According to the Ministry of Public Security, “the KMT secret service in Taiwan ordered its agents on the mainland to exploit the so-called ‘democratic movement,’ escalate it into an overall ‘anti-communist’ movement and collect information for the Taiwan secret service.” A People’s Daily article reporting the arrest of a Taiwanese agent stated that Taiwanese authorities had sent instructions to the agent to secretly instigate the students and spread the rumor that the communist party would really

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128 For example, see the People’s Daily issues on June 24 and 28, 1989. Taiwan and the Kuomintang were also mentioned several times in the report by Chen Xitong to the National People’s Congress.  
collapse this time. As part of the crackdown, 45 alleged Taiwanese agents were detained and charged with supporting the student protest and urging the students to attack the authorities. Apart from the denunciation of domestic liberal intellectuals, the accusations against Taiwan were, according to my reading, the most serious. Official speeches and propaganda bluntly denounced the KMT government and ascribed sinister intentions to it.

Hong Kong was also censured but the accusations were more limited despite its extensive support for the student movement. Comparing the treatment of Taiwan versus Hong Kong in the official Chinese propaganda shows that the blame that Taiwan received seemed to have been disproportional to its involvement. Even though leaders and citizens in Taiwan showed support for the movement, their contribution was limited and was far surpassed by the enthusiasm, funding and direct involvement of supporters from Hong Kong. Accounts of the protest by Dingxin Zhao and Graig Calhoun do not mention Taiwan’s role, suggesting that it played at best a minimal part. It was reported that President Li Teng-hui extended “heartfelt sympathy and support” to the students and expressed pride in the fact that the political changes in Taiwan had influenced the students. However, the process of political liberalization had just begun in Taiwan and accounts suggested that students were drawing inspirations from political changes in the Soviet Union rather than those in Taiwan. Mikhail Gorbachev was seen as a “resolute leader

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134 I identified using the index the instances in which Taiwan was mentioned in these two books and found that the sections that mentioned Taiwan did not suggest that it played any role in the protest.
135 “Li Extends ‘Sympathy, Support’ to PRC Students,” Hong Kong AFP - Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-CHI-89-096, May 18, 1989; “5,000 Rally to Support Beijing Students,” Hong Kong AFP - Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-CHI-89-099, May 24, 1989, 0.
taking on political reform” in contrast to Deng Xiaoping and thousands of students at Peking University signed an open letter to invite Gorbachev to deliver a talk on their campus.\footnote{Nicholas D. Kristof, “China’s Hero of Democracy: Gorbachev,” \textit{The New York Times}, May 14, 1989, sec. 1.}

In Taiwan, rallies were organized, sometimes even attended by parliamentarians to show support and collect funds for the movement on the mainland.\footnote{“5,000 Rally to Support Beijing Students”; “Students Hold Petition Drives for Mainland,” \textit{Taipei Central News Agency - Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-CHI-89-099}, May 22, 1989.} Legislators and journalists wrote letters and issued statements supporting the students.\footnote{“Legislators Compose Letter to Demonstrators,” \textit{Taipei Central News Agency - Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-CHI-89-099}, May 18, 1989.} Nevertheless, while the reported rallies in Taiwan numbered several thousand people, in Hong Kong, the support was much more enthusiastic. In one event, over 100,000 people gathered downtown to protest against martial law and shouting “Down with Li Peng.”\footnote{Sau-Ying Wong, “100,000 Protest Martial Law,” \textit{Hong Kong AFP - Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-CHI-89-097}, May 21, 1989, 0.} The funds and tents provided by Hong Kong were critical in sustaining the movement in the final weeks. According to Dingxin Zhao, important activities such as the construction of the Statue of the Goddess of Democracy, the establishment of Democracy University and the four activists’ hunger strike would likely not have occurred without that material support. Students interviewed at that time also expressed that the decision to stay was influenced by the Hong Kong factor. Additionally, Hong Kong students and intellectuals were active from the beginning. A delegation was sent by the Hong Kong University Student Association on April 20 to make contacts with the Beijing students.\footnote{Zhao, \textit{The Power of Tiananmen}, 189–95.}

These pieces of evidence substantiate Richard Bernstein’s comment in a \textit{New York Times} article that Taiwan’s stance towards the protest was reluctant compared to that of Hong Kong.\footnote{Richard Bernstein, “Crackdown in Beijing; In Taiwan, Sympathy and Aloofness,” \textit{New York Times}, June 4, 1989, sec. 1.} Even though Hong Kong’s role was much more decisive, it was not blamed to the extent that Taiwan did. Hong Kong newspapers were criticized for providing mainland liberal intellectuals...
with an outlet, writing speculative news about the mainland leadership, and calling Deng Xiaoping to step down. Individuals from Hong Kong were charged with donating money to the protesters which was used to block the martial army’s advance.\textsuperscript{142} As compared to the 45 alleged Taiwanese agents arrested, there were only seven residents of Hong Kong and Macao who were detained for helping activists escape after the crackdown, but three were released after a few months.\textsuperscript{143}

Two reasons likely explain the severe diversionary accusations that Taiwan received. First, it was home to the Kuomintang, the communist party’s long-time political rival. Instability and democratization on the mainland could give the KMT an opportunity to return as a potential opposition party. Second, trade with Taiwan was limited at that time, while Hong Kong served as a link between mainland China and the world. Trade and investment data from 1988 show that Hong Kong was the mainland’s largest trade partner, accounting for 29.42\% of the mainland’s total trade. Hong Kong and Macao also provided 30.41\% of the mainland’s foreign funds.\textsuperscript{144} On the other hand, mainland direct exports to Taiwan accounted for only 0.43\% of total exports in 1980 and 1.57\% in 1991.\textsuperscript{145} Given the importance of Hong Kong for mainland China’s international trade and investment relations, party leaders likely were not motivated to make severe accusations against it.

\textsuperscript{142} “Report on the Suppression of the Turmoil and the Calming of the Counter-Revolutionary Riots [关于制止动乱和平息反革命暴乱的情况报告].”
\textsuperscript{143} Repression in China since June 4, 1989: Cumulative Data - An Asia Watch Report, 82.
\textsuperscript{144} The China Statistical Yearbook of 1989 reported the data from Hong Kong and Macao together, but according to Sung and Song, the contribution from Hong Kong was much more significant than from Macao. See Yun-Wing Sung and Enrong Song, The China-Hong Kong Connection: The Key to China’s Open Door Policy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 18.
**Criticisms of American interference in the aftermath of the crackdown**

During the course of the movement, the *People’s Daily* took a cautious approach towards the United States. Even when referring to the Goddess of Democracy and Freedom statue, which was modeled after the Statue of Liberty and moved to Tiananmen Square on May 29 as a symbol of defiance, the *People’s Daily* did not directly condemn Western democracy, nor draw a connection between the West and the demonstration. A similar strategy of restraint could be observed on the American side. President George H. W. Bush was careful to avoid being perceived as meddling in China’s domestic affairs. In a detailed statement on May 21, 1989, he emphasized American support for freedom of speech and assembly and urged the students to “stand up for what you believe in,” but also added that “I am not going to dictate or try to say from the United States how this matter should be resolved by these students. I’m not going to do it.”

However, criticisms of the United States intensified after June Fourth. President Bush responded to the crackdown immediately with the suspension of military sales and visits between American and Chinese military leaders. He also decided to provide temporary shelter to Fang Lizhi and his wife Li Shuxian at the American embassy in Beijing. Even though President Bush sought a fine balance between condemning the suppression and preserving relations with China by resisting calls by Congress for further sanctions, he defended the decision to provide shelter to Fang Lizhi and his wife based on “humanitarian reasons.” Several further punitive measures against China, under pressure from Congress, were adopted. These included the suspension of military sales and visits.

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146 See the *People’s Daily* issue on June 1, 1989
high-level official contacts and the withdrawal of American support for at least $1.3 billion in
World Bank and Asian Development Bank loans to China. The US also persuaded its allies to
do the same. Japan was initially against sanctions, but given the American pressure, it agreed to
suspend support for new loans to China as well.

These steps provoked strong anti-American sentiments in the People’s Daily (besides the
accusations against the United States/the West just discussed). As pointed out earlier, in their
assessment of the protest, Chinese leaders were already biased against Fang Lizhi because of his
prior activities and he and his wife were seen as anti-regime plotters that manipulated the
students from the beginning on. From this perspective, the fact that they were granted shelter at
the American embassy was a serious embarrassment and cause for anger for Chinese leaders.
The media criticized the Bush administration for unilaterally damaging bilateral relations and
interfering in Chinese domestic affairs by providing shelter for Fang Lizhi and his wife.

News articles urged the US to take into consideration the long-term interests and benefits
from cooperation with China. In his June 9th speech to the martial law units, Deng Xiaoping
rebuked the United States, saying,

“America has criticized us for suppressing students. In handling its internal student
strikes and unrest, didn’t America mobilize police and troops, arrest people, and shed
blood? They are suppressing students and the people, but we are quelling a
counterrevolutionary rebellion. What qualifications do they have to criticize us?”

Other editorials added that China would be able to restore stability and that it was not afraid of
sanctions. In late June and early July, a series of further articles denounced the United States for

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150 David B. Ottaway and R. Jeffrey Smith, “Bush Bars High-Level Contacts With Beijing; U.S. Support for Bank
151 K. V. Kesavan, “Japan and the Tiananmen Square Incident: Aspects of the Bilateral Relationship,” Asian Survey
30, no. 7 (July 1, 1990): 669–81.
152 See page 1 of the People’s Daily June 8, 1989 issue.
preaching human rights and freedom, while it had cracked down on anti-war and civil rights demonstrations at home itself. Some asked whether the United States would tolerate similar chaos in Washington.\textsuperscript{154} Less authoritative articles in the \textit{People’s Daily} by specific authors sometimes contained harsher rhetoric. For example, an article on June 18, 1989, criticized the US and \textit{Voice of America} and said that the U.S. had never given up the intention of interfering in China and changing China’s “color.”\textsuperscript{155}

Overall, harsh rhetoric attacking the West, the United States and diverse external actors including Taiwan, Hong Kong and Chinese dissidents abroad was found in the aftermath of the protests. These antagonistic statements were partly driven by an expected reaction to acts of foreign interference, such as American sanctions against China, VOA’s extensive reporting and Hong Kong’s support for the protesters. However, they were also partly driven by diversionary motivations. Instead of acknowledging the initiative of the students, the party blamed domestic reactionaries of colluding with external forces to instigate the protests. The role of Taiwan in the movement, for instance, was exaggerated. Western external forces including the United States were portrayed as having the ulterior motive of trying to bring the socialist system in China to an end. These statements were likely used to delegitimize the movement and justify the harsh crackdown.

\textbf{The importance of economic considerations and reassurance propaganda}

Despite the harsh criticisms against the United States in particular and foreign forces in general, party leaders took measures to reassure foreign companies and investors that China would be firmly committed to economic reforms and opening up. These reassurances were

\textsuperscript{154} See \textit{People’s Daily} issues on June 18, 20, and 30, July 6, 1989.

crucial as many foreign companies evacuated their staff after the crackdown and hesitated to return to China. During the protest, Zhao Ziyang said in the May Fourth commemoration speech that “if turmoil, large-scale social conflict or anarchism should happen again […] then a China that has hope and prospects will become a chaotic and unstable China without a future.”

State Council spokesman Yuan Mu affirmed during a press conference that the Chinese government would protect foreign investment and interests, no matter what the circumstances:

“Probably some foreign friends see the temporary turmoil in China and thus wonder whether China’s open-door policy will continue. Right here I can responsibly say that China’s reform and open-door policy will not change. […] Maybe some temporary occurrences might cast a shadow on some people’s spirits and affect China’s open-door policy for a short time, but historical development will prove that China’s open door policy will not change. On the contrary, it would be more welcoming. This is our established policy.”

In a series of meetings in late May with Asian Development Bank officials and delegations from Australia, Nigeria, Myanmar, and Mexico, even Li Peng, a staunch hardliner, praised the achievements of reform and implied that since the “lead architect of reform is Deng Xiaoping himself, not just some other person,” other countries should not be worried about China’s directions. Just before the crackdown, the Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Li Jinhua told foreign investors that China wanted to attract further foreign investment and she expressed the hope that investment inflows would not change. However, at the same time as leaders sought

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158 See the People’s Daily issue on May 26, 1989.
to reassure foreign countries and investors, they urged them to stay out of the complicated internal situation in China.159

After the crackdown, news of officials visiting foreign-owned businesses and factories and the restoration of production in various provinces were common in the following weeks. Several articles affirmed that joint oil drilling projects between the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and foreign counterparts, including Japan and France, would continue on.160 Preserving economic stability was a major theme that appeared almost daily in the official media in June and July, and these messages sought to reassure foreign investors who had left China and evacuated their firms.

These assurances were critical, given China’s high level of dependence on the United States and its allies for the economic reform program. The US was an important trade partner (both directly and through Hong Kong) and an investor for China, as the data in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show. In addition, because of the American influence in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), American support was important for China’s participation in international agreements and institutions.161 As detailed in the Falun Gong case, China formally sought reentry into the GATT from 1986 on, which would be impossible without American backing. The World Bank had committed funds to support 69 projects in China by mid-1989, with a heavy emphasis on agriculture and rural development, energy, transportation, and education.162

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159 See the People’s Daily issue on June 2, 1989.
160 For example, see the People’s Daily issue on June 16, 1989.
162 Jacobson and Oksenberg, 118–19.
Table 5.1 China’s top five trade partners in 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total trade volume</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Export Volume</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Import Volume</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>30,242</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>18,269</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>11,973</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>18,979</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>7,922</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>11,057</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>10,011</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3,380</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6,631</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Germany</td>
<td>4,918</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1,485</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3,434</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet Union</td>
<td>3,258</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1,476</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1,782</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>102,791</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>47,540</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>55,251</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: China Statistic Yearbook 1989, Unit: 1 million USD

Table 5.2 China’s top five sources of foreign funds in 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Foreign borrowing</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>FDI</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Other investment</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>3,354</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>2,756</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong + Macao</td>
<td>3,109</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>2,095</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td>1,105</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>1,105</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,226</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>6,487</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3,194</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: China Statistic Yearbook 1989, Unit: 1 million USD

While the focus of this chapter is on the government’s propaganda strategies, other works on Chinese foreign policies also suggested that after the Tiananmen movement, the government did not steer China towards a confrontational path. As Harding argues, “the outcome of this debate was a compromise, but one in which the elements of continuity with past policy were far more prominent than the retaliatory measures proposed by the conservatives.”163 In some instances, China’s foreign policies became even more cooperative and compromising. Leaders settled territorial disputes, developed closer ties to the Soviet Union, traveled to various developing countries and normalized relations with Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

163 Harding, A Fragile Relationship, 237.
Measures such as the release of political dissidents were also pursued to relax tensions with the United States.  

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that in the face of major student demonstrations, the government resorted to a propaganda strategy that shifted most of the blame for the protests onto a handful of liberal intellectuals. A fair assessment would have acknowledged that the protests were brought about by complex economic, social and political factors and that it was driven by both spontaneous and loosely organized actions of a multitude of individuals, which were beyond the control of any individual or group. Fang Lizhi and his wife were among of those castigated as behind-the-scenes plotters even though they did not seem to have played a role during the demonstrations. Several other liberal intellectuals were also singled out after both the 1986 and 1989 protests, despite the fact that their actions had, for the most part, a limited effect.

I argue that the state’s relationships towards students and liberal intellectuals prior to the protests explain this propaganda strategy. Deng Xiaoping and other conservative leaders had already adopted an antagonistic attitude towards these intellectuals for a long time. They launched attacks against certain critics in 1981, 1983 and 1987. When the student protests broke out, leaders’ internal discussions in the Tiananmen case suggested that they saw the students from the very beginning on as being manipulated by a handful of intellectuals who had been preaching bourgeois ideas for some time. Instead of risking a public rift between the government

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and elite students, leaders followed the strategy of shifting the blame for the protests on a small number of intellectuals.

With domestic intellectuals bearing most of the blame, the government pursued a two-pronged strategy towards external actors, combining both reassurances and antagonistic diversionary propaganda. The West was denounced for attempting to support the protest with the intention of bringing the socialist system in China down. *Voice of America* was blamed for spreading information and rumors that added fuel to the protests. The Kuomintang was accused of using agents to provoke the students and taking advantage of the unrest to destabilize the communist party. Chinese dissidents abroad allegedly colluded with the protest leaders and provided monetary backing. I argued that these accusations exaggerated the role that foreign forces played and downplayed the agency of the student protesters, thus, they can be interpreted as diversionary. At the same time, the need to protect the economic reform process motivated leaders to reassure foreign economic partners and investors that China was committed to the open-door policy and that their interests in China would be protected. Overall, these two cases suggest that complex political and practical motivations motivated a propaganda strategy that mixes both diversion and reassurance towards external actors.
6. Diversionary propaganda attacking ethnic exiles and the West: Unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I study the state’s propaganda strategies in the aftermath of three serious ethnic unrest cases in the post-Mao era. The cases include two waves of riots in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), in 1987-1989 and 2008, and riots in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), in 2009. I argue that to maintain stability in these restive regions, which are inhabited by various minority groups, the government has since the reform era pursued a dual strategy of economic and social co-optation coupled with religious and political control. On the one hand, the state has adopted propaganda and formal regulations that emphasize ethnic unity and harmony, implemented preferential social policies towards minorities and used large-scale financial transfers aimed at integrating the economy of the border regions. However, at the same time, restrictions on religious practices were carried out to undermine the influence of Tibetan Buddhism and Islam and prevent secessionist tendencies.

Inspite of the economic development in the region, religious and political suppression has led to resentments because Tibetan Buddhism and Islam are an integral part of the identity of ethnic minorities. Further, the economic co-optation policies have benefited some social groups (educated urban residents, bureaucrats) but failed to improve the livelihoods of others. These factors have led to the outburst of ethnic riots and protests at different times. Even though the government cracked down on protest participants, this chapter argues that the prior economic and social co-optation strategies serve to constrain leaders’ propaganda options. Leaders are discouraged from blaming ordinary minority citizens for staging unrest since doing so would
effectively contradict the mantle of ethnic harmony and cast doubt on the government’s ethnic integration and development policies. The theoretical framework predicts that co-optation towards protesting groups would motivate the government to pursue extensive diversionary propaganda.

Indeed, the media evidence shows that the government refused to acknowledge problems with its ethnic policies and that it tried to shift the responsibility for these riots onto external actors. Tibetan and Uyghur exile leaders and groups were blamed for planning the riots and Western countries were accused of providing support for “splittists” and taking advantage of the occasion to damage China’s image. Anti-Western sentiments were especially severe after the Tibet riots of 2008. Because the incident happened shortly before the Beijing Olympics, the government was likely more sensitive to foreign interference. Western media and politicians were accused of seeking to sabotage the Olympics through biased media portrayal of China and support for the Dalai Lama. The following sections will outline the co-optation strategy that the government has adopted towards Tibet and Xinjiang since the reform era and discuss the propaganda strategies in the wake of three ethnic protests.

6.2 China’s propaganda on ethnic unity and harmony

In official documents and the state media, the Chinese government tries to maintain the appearance that all domestic ethnic groups live together in harmony and solidarity and that the state protects the rights and welfare of all ethnic groups equally. For example, the 1949 Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference endorsed the principles of
ethnic equality, self-rule, and solidarity.¹ The constitution of 1954 states that the People’s Republic of China is a “united multi-ethnic country” (统一的多民族的国家) and forbids discrimination against or oppression of any ethnic group. It also specifies the various rights of the autonomous regions, including the organization of self-government and the use of minority languages as the language of administration.² The 1982 constitution further emphasizes the importance of economic and cultural development in minority regions.³ The Law on Regional National Autonomy adopted in October 1984 states that autonomy granted to ethnic minorities living in concentrated areas “embodies the state’s full respect for and guarantee of the right of the minority nationalities to administer their internal affairs and its adherence to the principle of equality, unity and common prosperity for all its nationalities.”⁴

Under Deng Xiaoping, a pragmatic approach that prioritizes economic development was adopted. The government believed, rightly or wrongly, that modernization and development can provide the answer to ethnic nationalism and grievances and draw the periphery closer to the center. Continuing this emphasis on development, Jiang Zemin introduced in September 1990 “the three unbroken relations” concept (三不分离), which says that “the Han cannot do without minorities, minorities cannot do without the Han, and minorities themselves cannot do without each other.”⁵ As Baogang He argues, consistent with the Confucian outlook that sees the Han Chinese core as more advanced, the central government has taken on the “responsibility” of

⁵ Baogang He, Governing Taiwan and Tibet: Democratic Approaches (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 137.
helping minorities who are regarded as “younger brothers” abandon certain backward and feudal practices, develop economically and adopt Han Chinese language and ways.⁶

References to ethnic harmony and unity are abundant in Chinese official documents and the media during important national events and celebrations. During the meeting of the National People’s Congress, minority delegates are encouraged to wear their national dresses and the occasion becomes “a time to celebrate the notion of a harmonious, multiethnic China.”⁷ White papers released by the State Council Information Office on ethnic minority issues regularly underscore the government’s achievements in delivering freedom, autonomy, and development to minority areas. For example, a white paper on the situation of regional autonomy in Tibet published in 2004 claimed that the establishment of the PRC and the “liberation” of Tibet in 1951 allowed Tibetans to “shake off political and economic fetters” and “brought hope to the Tibetan people that they could control their own destiny in the large family of the motherland.”⁸

In 2003, a white paper on the situation in Xinjiang asserted that since the Han Dynasty, “the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang actively safeguarded their relations with the central governments, thus making their own contributions to the formation and consolidation of the great family of the Chinese nation.”⁹ Hu Jintao’s report at the 17th Party Congress in October 2007, just several months before the riots in Tibet, emphasized the need to improve the conditions in ethnic areas to reduce regional inequality, which was part of a greater push towards balanced development. He stressed that the party needed to respect the rights, interests, and cultures of

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⁶ He, 131.
ethnic groups to “strengthen and develop socialist ethnic relations based on equality, solidarity, mutual assistance and harmony.”

The state has also recruited minorities into various government and party bodies. The 2002 revision of the Law on Ethnic Minority Autonomous Areas mandates that top government posts in minority areas be held by officials from the majority ethnic group in that area. In 2005, it was reported that the National People’s Congress (NPC) had 415 minority deputies, accounting for 13.91% of the total number of deputies. Minorities are thus well represented in the NPC, given that the national minority population was around 8.4%. Independent data collected by Rory Truex on the NPC for the 2011-2012 period (a few years after the ethnic riots in 2008 and 2009) also show that ethnic minorities held 404 NPC positions, which represented 13.6% of the NPC compared to their 8.5% national population average.

Research by Victor Shih and coauthors on the factors influencing potential ranking in the Communist Party Central Committee finds that ethnic minority status did not lead to discrimination, but even had a slightly positive impact on political advancement. Cheng Li shows that the percentage of minorities in the Central Committee has increased from 5.2% (9 members) in 1956 to 10.8% (40 members) in 2007. That year, there were four Tibetans and three Uyghurs in the Central Committee, making up 1.1% and 0.8% of the membership of the Central Committee respectively. There were also fourteen Tibetan and four Uyghur leaders at the provincial leadership level or above, making up 2.6% and 0.7% of the total number of leaders at

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13 Truex, “The Returns to Office in a ‘Rubber Stamp’ Parliament.”
that level. Tibetans and Uyghurs are thus fairly well represented, given that their share of the population in 2005 is 0.57% and 0.74% respectively (See Table 6.3 and 6.6). Even though the positions held by minority leaders are sometimes more symbolic than substantive, at least these trends signal the government’s willingness to promote minority leaders into positions of power. According to Cheng Li, “top Chinese leaders have recognized the value of having ethnic minority cadres serve in the Party-state elite, both for propaganda purposes as well as to inspire minority peoples to view the system as containing opportunities for their own advancement and therefore work within the system rather than against it.”

**Theoretical implication:** While official upbeat statements and optimistic reports tend to downplay ethnic grievances and misrepresent the complicated and oftentimes contentious situations in the border regions, what they demonstrate is an attempt by the government to portray ethnic minorities as an integral part of the Chinese nation and that the central government, at least on paper, cares about welfare, development, and representation of minorities. The economic development strategies and propaganda of ethnic harmony do not arise out of pure benevolence but are rather driven by the desire to control social and political life in peripheral regions, maintain stable rule, and reduce unrest incidents there.

The propaganda is not inconsequential, however. To sustain it, the government needs to continually fend off criticisms that the ethnic policies are not working as intended and avoid suggesting a rift between the party and the ethnic minorities. In the following sections, I will further examine the government’s policies in Tibet and Xinjiang respectively and argue that the

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16 Li, 11.
co-optation strategies might have constrained the government’s propaganda strategies in the aftermath of riots.

6.3 Relaxed policies in Tibet after 1978 and the 1987-1989 riots

Shifting policies towards Tibet under Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang

This section will discuss the central government’s policies towards Tibet from the beginning of reform and opening up in 1978. These policies, implemented under Hu Yaobang, were much more liberal and beneficial to the region’s development than the radical policies pursued under the Cultural Revolution. From the time that the central government established complete control in 1959 to the beginning of reform in 1978, the region witnessed waves of class struggle against feudal and religious authorities.\(^{17}\) During the Cultural Revolution, Tibetan and Han Chinese Red Guards followed Mao’s order to “smash the Four Olds.” They destroyed monasteries and cultural relics, drove monks and nuns out of the monasteries, and subjected local Tibetan officials and former aristocrats to struggle sessions. By the end of the Cultural Revolution, only a handful of the thousands of monasteries in Tibet were still intact, and some important sites such as the Potala Palace were only protected thanks to the intervention of Zhou Enlai.\(^{18}\) According to Grunfeld, the “verifiable activities of the Red Guards are terrifying enough. There were killings and people hounded into suicide. People were physically attacked in the streets for wearing Tibetan dress or having non-Han hair styles.”\(^{19}\)

Tibet also suffered economically from top-down agricultural collectivization policies that were unsuitable for the local conditions. The abolishment of serfdom and the distribution of land

\(^{18}\) Thomas Laird, *The Story of Tibet: Conversations with the Dalai Lama* (Grove Press, 2007), 344–348.
to peasants were first applauded but starting in the mid-1960s (later than other parts of China), peasants in Tibet were forced to pool their land, tools, and animals to establish communes. Between 1970 and 1975, the percentage of townships that had communes rose from 34% to 93%. The state also introduced the cultivation of wheat and the raising of pigs to replace the traditional practice of planting barley and raising sheep and yaks. The introduction of agricultural practices that were inappropriate for the region led to a decline in production and widespread hunger.\textsuperscript{20}

These harsh policies were reversed with the beginning of the economic reform. In 1980, Hu Yaobang led an inspection tour to Tibet and was dismayed by the abject conditions there. He resolved to restore Tibet’s religious and cultural practices, promote Tibetan cadres and require Han Chinese cadres to learn Tibetan. Within a few years, monasteries were restored, political prisoners were freed and the Panchen Lama, the second-highest religious authority, was released from house arrest and permitted to give speeches.\textsuperscript{21} The government admitted that erroneous policies were implemented in minority areas and shifted the blame for these mistakes on the leftist radicalism of Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four.” A \textit{People’s Daily} editorial in August 1980 charged that these leftists “brought cases against large numbers of people which were based on unjust, false and wrong charges, striking blows at minority peoples and their cadres as if they were class enemies.”\textsuperscript{22}

Communes were disbanded, land and animals were returned to peasants and the policy of encouraging wheat planting was eliminated. The state provided subsidies to agricultural production, permitted local trade, and stopped collecting taxes for several years to allow the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Grunfeld, \textit{The Making of Modern Tibet}, 213.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
region to recover economically. In early 1980, 520 work teams bringing animals, food and supplies were sent into Tibet to relief hunger and poverty. Annual subsidies to the region reached 282 million US dollars in 1980, which was about 94 percent of the TAR’s budget. A study by Yasheng Huang based on authoritative internal party documents suggested that from 1980 to 1987, political Han Chinese cadres were transferred out of Tibet and replaced with technical and managerial cadres to promote economic development. This led to an overall reduction in the number of Han Chinese cadres in the region, and movement of Han Chinese workers into Tibet was not encouraged. At the Second Work Forum on Tibet in 1984, the government focused primarily on economic development, in the hope that, according to Grunfeld, “a conspicuous increase in the standards of living and a noticeable decrease in restrictions on Tibetan culture and religion would win more adherents to the idea that Tibet is better off remaining a part of the Chinese state.”

The Dalai Lama’s international campaign for Tibetan autonomy

In December 1978, Deng Xiaoping initiated contacts with the Dalai Lama through his family and representatives, stressing that anything except for independence was negotiable. A mission led by the Dalai Lama’s brother was also allowed to tour Tibet. However, talks between the government and the Dalai Lama did not progress in the following years because both sides had different starting points. Chinese leaders only wanted to negotiate about the personal status of the Dalai Lama, while the Dalai Lama aimed at a political solution for Tibet as

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well as other parts of nearby provinces inhabited by Tibetans.\textsuperscript{28} He was additionally under pressure from other Tibetan exile groups, like the Tibetan Youth Congress, who were not willing to yield on the question of Tibetan independence.\textsuperscript{29}

The talks between the government and representatives of the Dalai Lama broke down in 1984 and the Dalai Lama shifted to a strategy of lobbying Western countries to put pressure on the PRC and get concessions on the question of Tibetan independence. On September 21, 1987, the Dalai Lama gave a speech to the Congressional Human Rights Caucus in Washington, D.C., in which he stated that Tibet was an independent country which was invaded by China in 1949/50. The speech accused the Chinese government of having caused a “holocaust” and practicing “apartheid” and “colonialism” in Tibet. It called for turning Tibet and regions inhabited by Tibetans into a “zone of peace” without the presence of the Chinese military.\textsuperscript{30}

China reacted by criticizing the U.S. Congress for permitting the Dalai Lama “to conduct political activities aimed at advocating independence for Tibet and sabotaging the unity of China” and said that the proposal by the Dalai Lama (called the Five-Point Peace Plan) was aimed at splitting the country.\textsuperscript{31} Several articles in the \textit{People’s Daily} at the end of September denounced his “separatist activities,” and commented that he was not a genuine religious figure, but a political exile intent on agitating for Tibetan independence.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{28} Laird, \textit{The Story of Tibet}, 353.
\textsuperscript{29} Schaik, \textit{Tibet}, 258–59.
\textsuperscript{32} “Resolutely Oppose the Remarks by the Dalai Lama That Undermines the Unity of the Motherland [坚决反对达赖有损祖国统一的言论],” \textit{People’s Daily}, September 29, 1987. Also see the \textit{People’s Daily} on September 23, 28 and 29.
Protests in Lhasa between October 1987 and March 1989

News of the Dalai Lama’s visit to the United States reached Tibet and protests initiated by monks from Lhasa’s major temples broke out on September 27 and October 1, 1987. According to news reports, participants shouted “Tibet wants independence” and carried the traditional Tibetan flag. The protest on October 1, China’s National Day, left between six and thirteen people dead.\(^3\) Xinhua reported that demonstrators seized the policemen’s guns and fired at the police, and foreign witnesses said that the demonstrators threw stones at the police and burned a police station.\(^4\) In the United States, President Reagan supported the Chinese policy of restoring order, while on October 8, the U.S. Senate voted to amend the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for fiscal years 1988-1989 by including a section on Tibet that urged the United States to “make the treatment of the Tibetan people an important factor in its conduct of relations with the People's Republic of China.” It was later signed into law by the President in December 1987.\(^5\) This amendment was met with verbal protest from China,\(^6\) and in the following days, there were several articles in the People’s Daily that criticized American Congress members for supporting the Dalai Lama and his separatist activities.\(^7\)

Both domestic, as well as international factors, contributed to the outbreak of the riots. Enze Han listed three reasons: (1) loss of autonomy and grievances against the government that had built up during the previous three decades, (2) increased contacts between the local

\(^{3}\) Nina Mcpherson, “‘Draconian Measures’ reported,” Hong Kong AFP - Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-CHI-87-193, October 6, 1987.


\(^{6}\) “U.S. Senate Amendment on Xizang Protested,” Beijing Xinhua - Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-CHI-87-194, October 7, 1987.

population and the exile community as a result of relaxed policies, and (3) the Dalai Lama’s international campaign to advocate for Tibetan independence and the growing international attention towards the Tibet issue. The protests seemed to have been a spontaneous response to the Dalai Lama’s visit to America. According to Enze Han, Tibetans overestimated the degree of American sympathy, believing that “support from members of Congress is tantamount to official support from the U.S. government.”

My qualitative reading of the official media found that, in the aftermath, China’s propaganda accused a small number of separatists inspired by the Dalai Lama’s activities of creating the disturbance. Articles in the People’s Daily stated that the protests were not spontaneous, but a coordinated response to coincide with the Dalai Lama’s visit to the United States. The fourth page of the October 4, 1987 issue provided photos of blazed cars and smoke coming up from some buildings in Lhasa. A joint press conference by the Foreign Ministry and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission reiterated the view that the protest was instigated by separatists and confirmed that six people were dead and 19 policemen were injured.

A few months later, in March 1988, it was again reported that thousands of people staged a demonstration in Lhasa, with some setting fire to buildings and throwing stones at the police. At least 18 monks and several police officers died. Foreign witnesses described a heavy police presence in Lhasa in the aftermath. The Dalai Lama gave another speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg in June 1988, in which he proposed that Tibet become “a self-governing democratic political entity […] in association with the People’s Republic of China.”

39 Han, 142.
The PRC would be responsible for Tibetan foreign policy and can maintain a limited number of forces there, but Tibet would be effectively autonomous with its own basic law and popularly-elected government. The proposal did not demand full independence for Tibet, a change in the Dalai Lama’s position, but it did seek genuine autonomy.\textsuperscript{42}

When a team of reporters from the \textit{South China Morning Post} visited Lhasa in February 1989, they suggested that ordinary people were primarily concerned with their daily lives but tensions in the monasteries were high, especially after the sudden death of the Panchen Lama in January that year. Between February 13 and early March, 1989, there were four illegal demonstrations in Lhasa.\textsuperscript{43} The largest protest during this episode broke out on March 5-7, 1989, in anticipation of the commemoration of the Tibetan uprising on March 10, 1959. According to the official media, a crowd of monks, nuns and laypeople gathered in front of the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa and even though the police tried to disperse them with teargas, the crowd got bigger and started to smash and damage shops, set fire to buildings, beat pedestrians and use guns to fire at the police forces.\textsuperscript{44} Western witnesses and tourists reported that thousands had participated in the riots and attacked Han Chinese and their stores. Some said that the police did not use gunfire at first but they heard the sounds of shooting later, and others recalled that the police was firing on a group of rioters who were trying to break into a building. Rioters apparently also attacked Han Chinese and the police with knives.\textsuperscript{45}

The \textit{People’s Daily} again reiterated the position that the unrest was plotted by “a small number of separatists” and reported that there were eleven deaths (ten protesters and bystanders

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[42] Goldstein, “The United States, Tibet, and the Cold War,” 159–60.
\end{footnotesize}
and one police officer), and more than a hundred injured, including a large number of police officers. On March 9, an editorial by Xinhua was reprinted on the first page of the People’s Daily, which launched criticism at the exile Tibetan “separatists” and accused them of plotting the unrest and sending in weapons through the border. The article reads:

“What is ironic is that today some of those abroad that talk about human rights are exactly those that use brutal means to trample on human rights in Tibet and that create disturbances to protect their own privileges. […] some separatist clique from abroad has recently sent people to enter the mainland disguised as tourists to plan the disturbances. At the same time, they sent other people to cross the border illegally and carry weapons into the mainland. Conclusive evidence shows that the unrest cases that started in Lhasa on February 10 and March 5 are planned by separatist cliques abroad.”

_Explaining the government’s propaganda strategy:_ Even though we do not have direct evidence on the decision-making of leaders, the propaganda materials suggest that leaders likely wanted to avoid criticisms of their policy in Tibet. During a press conference, the State Council spokesman was asked by a reporter about the cause of the riots in Tibet, to which the spokesman replied that even though the government’s policies were correct, the problem was that separatist forces wanted to split Tibet from the motherland. Another article argued that the development and prosperity in Tibet as well as China’s improved relations with foreign countries had worried

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separatist groups who were afraid that the tide has turned against them. Therefore, they used all means to create unrest in Tibet.\textsuperscript{49}

The government could have put the blame on activist monks and nuns, who were, as news reports and secondary accounts suggest, the main participants in the protest. However, doing so would create a public rift between the government and the relatively pious Tibetan population. It would also suggest that the government’s policy towards the region in general was problematic. In official accounts, for example, the government avoided references to Tibetan monks and nuns, and instead use general terms such as “rioters” (骚乱分子) or “separatists” (分裂主义分子). Overall, the strategy of blaming exile groups seems to have been strategically pursued to preserve the image of harmonious ethnic relations.

While the media focused on attacking unnamed foreign separatists, the actions of American Congress members that were supportive of the Dalai Lama were also criticized. The amendment passed by the Senate and added to the Foreign Relations Authorization Act in 1987 contained a number of allegations by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exile communities that have been questioned by scholars. For instance, the amendment stated that over a million Tibetans had perished as a result of the central government’s policies and repressions,\textsuperscript{50} but scholars have argued that this number is highly inflated and more likely based on rumors.\textsuperscript{51} The amendment also stated that the “Chinese Communist army invaded and occupied Tibet,” which runs counter to the official American policy that has consistently recognized Tibet as a part of China and refused to support Tibetan independence.\textsuperscript{52} It would be no surprise that Chinese leaders would feel compelled to respond to such accusations. China’s reactions towards the

\textsuperscript{49} “Behind the Disturbance in Lhasa [拉萨骚乱的背后],” \textit{People’s Daily}, April 7, 1989.


\textsuperscript{52} Goldstein, “The United States, Tibet, and the Cold War.”
United States in this case is expected and likely not diversionary. In this case, diversionary antagonistic propaganda was mostly used against ethnic exile groups.

6.4 Tightening control over Tibet after 1989 and the 2008 riots

Continued economic co-optation strategies in Tibet after 1989

After 1989, the government stepped up political and religious control, but continued to pursue economic and social co-optation policies that are skewed towards rapid development and faster linguistic and cultural integration. While some social sectors, such as urban and more educated Tibetans and bureaucrats might have been bought off by the financial transfers and economic opportunities, material co-optation was also accompanied by stricter control over religious life, leading to high grievances especially in the monasteries. A field trip to Tibet by New York Times reporter Nicholas Kristof in September 1990 noted this complicated situation. He reported that, on the one hand, some yearn for independence and the return of the Dalai Lama, but many other Tibetan residents and officials were either not particularly interested in politics, see involvement in politics as too risky, or believed that life has improved under direct Chinese rule and therefore were hesitant about supporting independence.53

For many ordinary Tibetans, economic reforms and the government’s co-optation strategies did indeed lead to improved living conditions. An independent survey of 780 rural Tibetan households conducted by Goldstein and coauthors between 1997 and 2000 reported optimistic statistics: 85.5% of the respondents agreed that their life was better than their parents’, 94% agreed that their livelihood had improved since decollectivization, and 92% said they

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expected that their children would do better than themselves. The researchers reported an increase in living standards and concluded that “the majority of inhabitants in the areas studied have made marked progress since decollectivization and secured basic subsistence, in the sense of good food and housing, according to traditional Tibetan standards.”

In urban areas, research by Hu and Salazar shows that the state has pursued a strategy of “over-subsidization” to co-opt urban Tibetans. Large financial transfers from the central government to Tibet have created a class of urban and privileged Tibetan elites, often state employees and bureaucrats, whose social status and material fortunes are tied to the central government. From 1985 to 2006, the average wage of staff and workers in state-owned units in Tibet are much higher than the national average and similar to the levels in Shanghai, Guangdong and Beijing.

From the late 1980s on, the government started to invest more heavily in large-scale projects to develop Tibet’s transportation facilities, agricultural production, tourism and modern industry (primarily electricity production, textile and handicrafts, and mining). In July 1994, the Third Work Forum on Tibet set the ambitious goal of 10% annual GDP growth in the region and instructed central government agencies and other provinces to provide aid to Tibet. A white paper on Tibet’s development issued by the State Council in 2001 discussed the growth in the region’s industry, energy production, road constructions, and telecommunication, and reported that regional GDP grew at an annual rate of 12.4% from 1994 to 2000.

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55 Goldstein et al., 202.


Since the 2000s, the government has shifted from an emphasis on quantitative growth to social development that prioritizes the people’s wellbeing. Instead of allocating funds to large-scale infrastructural construction, newer programs would invest directly in projects benefiting farmers and herdsmen. These programs helped with building educational facilities, health care centers, rural roads, and better irrigation systems. Households received subsidies to construct or renovate homes, take care of the elderly and purchase health insurance. Case study work in rural Tibet by Goldstein and coauthors showed that half of the households took advantage of the housing construction benefits and almost all were enrolled in the government’s health insurance plan.\textsuperscript{59}

Table 6.1 provides data on socio-economic indicators in Tibet as compared to the nearby province of Sichuan. As we can see, annual per capita income in Tibet was higher than in Sichuan in 1980 and 1990 but lagged behind in 2000 and 2006. This might be explained by the fact that Tibet’s geography and climate are harsher and thus it might not have benefitted as much from economic reforms and marketization as Sichuan. However, the state is clearly more involved in Tibet. A higher percentage of workers are employed by the state in Tibet than in Sichuan and salaries in state-owned units are also much higher. In 2006, for example, the state employed 10.84% of the workforce in Tibet and paid them on average 31,518 yuan, whereas in Sichuan, the state only provided employment to 6.46% of the working population and the average salary was much lower at 17,852 yuan.

### Table 6.1 Data on income levels in Tibet and Sichuan, 1980-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Annual per capita disposable income (in urban households) (yuan)</th>
<th>Annual per capita disposable income (in rural households) Total (yuan)</th>
<th>Employees in state-owned units as percentage of total employment (%)</th>
<th>Average wage of employees in state-owned units (yuan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>17.64</td>
<td>1,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>11.92</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,685</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>13.82</td>
<td>3,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,490</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>11.54</td>
<td>1,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>7,426</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>14,976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5,894</td>
<td>1,904</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td>8,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>8,941</td>
<td>2,435</td>
<td>10.84</td>
<td>31,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>9,350</td>
<td>3,002</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>17,852</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Provincial data (University of Michigan – China Data Online database)

### Table 6.2 Data on local government finances in Tibet and Sichuan, 1980-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Local Revenue (100 million yuan)</th>
<th>Local Expenditure (100 million yuan)</th>
<th>Local expenditure per capita (yuan)</th>
<th>Local expenditure on government administration per capita (yuan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>34.62</td>
<td>33.51</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>12.92</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>81.87</td>
<td>106.92</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>59.97</td>
<td>2,324</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>233.86</td>
<td>452.00</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>14.56</td>
<td>200.20</td>
<td>7,023</td>
<td>1,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>607.59</td>
<td>1,347.40</td>
<td>1,649</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Provincial data (University of Michigan – China Data Online database)

Table 6.2 shows data on local government finances, again comparing Tibet and Sichuan.

As we can see, Tibet’s revenues are quite low compared to its expenditure, meaning that the central government has to assist the region with large subsidies. In 2006, for example, Tibet’s income was 1.456 billion yuan, but its expenditure was 20.02 billion yuan. At the same time,
Tibet has spent much more per capita than Sichuan: 7,023 yuan in 2006 compared with 1,649 yuan in Sichuan. Tibet spends more on agriculture, capital construction as well as government administration per capita.

However, one serious issue that has drawn criticisms from local Tibetans is that the government has allowed a large tide of Han Chinese migrants to enter the region. Local Tibetans have a difficult time competing with these Han Chinese workers because of worse language and occupational skills. Research done in Tibet suggested that the large tide of Han Chinese immigration was likely not the result of official encouragement, but because of economic incentives in the tourism and construction industries and high pay in the Tibetan public sector that trickles down into the economy. For example, a survey by Rong Ma of 1,470 temporary migrants in Lhasa in 2005 found that 45.3% of the migrants found their current jobs on their own and 40.9% got their jobs through relatives, friends and fellow villagers.\textsuperscript{60} The economic competition has led to widespread resentments in Tibet. In rural areas, Goldstein et al. noted that “villagers and many of their leaders are frustrated by the dearth of job opportunities in construction projects, blaming this not on the lack of economic investment in Tibet but rather on the unrestricted influx of non-Tibetan migrant laborers.”\textsuperscript{61} Similarly, Rong Ma reported “many complaints from local Tibetan residents and temporary migrants about the competition in job markets owing to large numbers of Han migrants.”\textsuperscript{62}

Two other dimensions in which ethnic minorities, including Tibetans, receive preferential treatment is child birth and university admission. When the one-child policy was introduced in China in 1980, ethnic minorities were not subject to the same restrictions as Han Chinese. Field

\textsuperscript{60} Rong Ma, \textit{Population and Society in Contemporary Tibet} (Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 97–135.
\textsuperscript{62} Ma, \textit{Population and Society in Contemporary Tibet}, 69.
research by scholars suggested that in Lhasa, Han cadres were allowed to have one child, while Tibetan cadres could have two children, but fines or other sanctions were not imposed if this restriction was violated. They also found that there was no effective restriction on the number of children for rural Tibetan families. The demographic statistics in Table 6.3 show that the birth rate and natural growth rate for Tibetans, at 14.97% and 8.16% respectively, are higher than for the Han Chinese overall. They also have higher average family size. While their life expectancy is lower on average compared to Han Chinese, it has increased from 62.18 years in 1990 to 66.67 years in 2000.

Table 6.3 Comparison statistics for Tibetan and Han populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tibetans</th>
<th>Han Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total population in China</td>
<td>0.57%</td>
<td>90.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of population in TAR</td>
<td>97.40%</td>
<td>1.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth rate</td>
<td>14.97%</td>
<td>11.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural growth rate</td>
<td>8.16%</td>
<td>4.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage in urban</td>
<td>31.40%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage in rural</td>
<td>68.60%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy in 1990</td>
<td>62.18</td>
<td>67.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy in 2000</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>71.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average family size</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data for first two rows are from the China 2005 1% population survey (University of Michigan – China Data Online database), all the other data are from Rongxing Guo’s *China’s Ethnic Minorities: Social and Economic Indicators* (Routledge, 2013)

Ethnic minorities also get a leg up in the university admissions process with extra points awarded and some universities and programs are required by the central government to reserve a certain quota for minorities. The same applies to Tibetans, who can enter universities with lower examination scores than Han Chinese. In 2000, for example, Tibetan humanities students

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would pass with 237 points, while Han Chinese needed 340 points.\textsuperscript{65} Other educational policies largely lined up with the attempt to co-opt and assimilate Tibetans, even though it seemed like the attempt to integrate Tibetans was more forceful from the early 2000s on. Educational policies were the most relaxed from 1987 to 2000, when Tibetan was used as the language of instruction for Tibetan students from primary school up to university, with Mandarin only taught as a language subject. However, in 2000, under a new policy, middle and high schools had to switch to Mandarin as the main language of instruction, with Tibetan only used for teaching in primary schools.\textsuperscript{66}

\textit{Political and religious control in Tibet}

Alongside with material co-optation and select social preferential policies, the state has tried to impose strict political and especially religious control to suppress secessionist tendencies. However, adherence to Tibetan Buddhism and loyalty to the Dalai Lama are integral aspects of the Tibetan identity, thus, attempts to suppress free religious worship are interpreted as threats to the local identity and culture. As discussed previously, Hu Yaobang adopted liberalization policies that led to a religious revival in Tibet from 1980 on and Deng Xiaoping initiated talks with the Dalai Lama, based on the belief that Tibetan nationalism had faded by that time. However, the demonstrations from 1987 to 1989 shocked leaders and “reportedly convinced many Chinese officials that Tibetan autonomy could never be allowed.”\textsuperscript{67}

In the early 1990s, several measures were pursued to restrict religious practices. A turning point was the decision made during the Third Work Forum on Tibet in 1994 to call for a

\textsuperscript{65} Ma, \textit{Population and Society in Contemporary Tibet}, 307.
\textsuperscript{66} Rong Ma, “Bilingual Education and Language Policy in Tibet,” in \textit{Minority Education in China} (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), 83–106.
\textsuperscript{67} Warren W. Smith, \textit{China’s Tibet? Autonomy or Assimilation} (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 277.
public denunciation of the Dalai Lama. Previously, the Chinese authorities had criticized the Dalai Lama for his political activism, but now they openly attacked his religious leadership and presented him as a threat to national security. The attack against the Dalai Lama cannot be taken lightly because for Tibetans, he occupies an essential role as both “political leader and earthly manifestation of Tibet’s protector deity Chenrezig, the Buddha of Compassion.” 68 Robert Barnett has argued in various works that “such a move was unprecedented for the Chinese authorities in the post-Cultural Revolution era” and that “was probably the single most important factor in the increase in protest, nationalism and unrest among Tibetans that took place over the following decade and a half.” 69

A patriotic education campaign was carried out in 1996 in all monasteries and nunneries. Monks and nuns were forced to study materials that taught that “the Dalai Lama has betrayed the motherland and is therefore no longer the rightful leader of Tibetan Buddhism” and that “his splittist activities” are the “root cause for instability in Tibet.” 70 At the end of the study sessions, they were required to take an exam that tests their loyalty to the government. If they fail to give the right answers, they would be expelled from the monasteries and nunneries. Several other patriotic education campaigns were carried out from the mid-1990s and some targeted regular Tibetan residents. According to an organization established by Tibetans in exile in India, between 1996 and 2004, over 11,000 clergy were expelled under these campaigns. 71

There are also strict limits on the size of monasteries and nunneries and those that exceeded their quotas had to send members back to their families. While ordinary Tibetans can practice their faith in private, the government bans the ownership and display of portraits of the

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70 Smith, *China’s Tibet? Autonomy or Assimilation*, 178.
71 Smith, 182.
Dalai Lama. A 2007 report on religious freedom by the US government also noted that the state suppressed veneration of the Dalai Lama in particular, while other traditional practices and displays are generally allowed.\textsuperscript{72} Goldstein et al reported that “informal discussions with Tibetans revealed widespread resentment of this. A few villagers explicitly voiced the view that these policies are incompatible with the state’s claim of religious freedom.”\textsuperscript{73}

Another incident that drew resentments from devout Tibetans was the selection of the eleventh Panchen Lama, the second highest authority of the Tibetan Buddhism Gelug tradition. After the tenth Panchen Lama passed away in 1989, the Chinese government at first allowed a Tibetan committee to use traditional methods to search for the new Panchen Lama. When the committee found the boy, they sought approval from the Dalai Lama and obtained his confirmation in April 1995. The Chinese government was angered by the fact that the committee reached out directly to the Dalai Lama and detained the boy and his family. Another boy was chosen shortly thereafter to take his place.\textsuperscript{74} The Dalai Lama and Tibetans in exile have requested access to the detained Panchen Lama in vain.\textsuperscript{75} According to Smith, the reason why the Chinese government rejected the choice confirmed by the Dalai Lama is because “the issue was more political than religious; it was a question of the unification of the motherland and of Tibet’s subordination to the Chinese central government.”\textsuperscript{76}

Overall, the government has pursued a mixed strategy in Tibet – on the one hand, using development projects, economic assistance, and preferential social policies to co-opt Tibetans, but on the other hand, relying on religious suppression to curb loyalty to the Dalai Lama and Tibetans.

\textsuperscript{73} Goldstein et al., “Development and Change in Rural Tibet,” 197.
\textsuperscript{74} Smith, \textit{China’s Tibet? Autonomy or Assimilation}, 167.
\textsuperscript{76} Smith, \textit{China’s Tibet? Autonomy or Assimilation}, 168.
check the desire for true autonomy or independence. I have also discussed that even though the livelihoods of Tibetans have generally improved, there are resentments against the state because of the large Han Chinese in-migration and the official attacks against the Dalai Lama. These conditions set the stage for the riots in March 2008.

*The March 2008 Tibet riots*

The eruption of a serious riot in March 2008 in Tibet was the result of the convergence of multiple factors. In October 2007, the Dalai Lama was awarded the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal by President George W. Bush. The Chinese government criticized the award, while in Lhasa, the police clashed with several monks from the Drepung monasteries who attempted to whitewash the walls of the monastery to celebrate the award. Several monks were detained as a result. The protests in Lhasa in March 2008 started with marches by several hundred monks from the Drepung monastery to demand the release of these previously arrested monks. The date was symbolic because it marked the 49th anniversary of the unsuccessful Tibetan uprising in 1959. Protests in 1988 and 1989 also occurred around this date. Additionally, China was scheduled to host the Olympics in August that year; thus, there was the perception both inside and outside of Tibet that protests would attract international attention and would not be violently suppressed by the government in the lead-up to the Olympics. The award of the Congressional Gold Medal and the high status enjoyed by the Dalai Lama signaled to Tibetans that international

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public opinion would be favorable towards their activism. The 1987 protest was similarly “triggered” by the Dalai Lama’s visit to the United States.79

The police quickly intervened to stop the march by the Drepung monastery monks, detained the protesters and according to some reports, beat them violently. On the first day, about 60 monks were reportedly arrested.80 On the same day, a small protest by fourteen monks from the Sera monastery, which was a few miles away from the center of the city, broke out. They carried the traditional Tibetan flag and shouted pro-independence slogans. Again, the police quickly stopped them and arrested some of the monks.81 Words of the protest likely spread through cell phones to other parts and scattered protests were reported outside of the TAR.82 On March 11 and 12, monks from the Sera monastery held a sit-down protest and then started a hunger strike, but security forces surrounded the monastery, preventing their activism from spiraling out of control.83

On March 14, according to a detailed Human Rights Watch report based on over 200 interviews with eyewitnesses, monks from the Ramoche temple in central Lhasa gathered and intended to march to protest against the detention of monks from the Sera and Drepung monasteries. However, they were blocked by the police from leaving the compound.84 Angered by the heavy police presence, they overturned a police car, leading to confrontations with the police outside of the temple. Bystanders and nearby residents became involved to help the monks and threw stones at the police. Their number quickly reached several hundreds of people.85 The

79 Han, Contestation and Adaptation, 144.
81 Smith, Tibet’s Last Stand?, 12.
83 Smith, Tibet’s Last Stand?, 12–13.
85 Smith, Tibet’s Last Stand?, 13.
police was overwhelmed and retreated, leaving the city center unprotected until that evening. Taking advantage of the weak security presence, Tibetan rioters started to loot and burn Han Chinese and Hui Muslim shops, attacked bystanders, and set vehicles on fire. The violence spread to several main streets in Lhasa. According to a Xinhua report on March 15, the riots on the first day killed 10 people and left significant damage to about 100 shops as well as numerous vehicles. In addition, banks, schools and hospitals were also set on fire.86

James Miles, a journalist for The Economist, who was the only accredited foreign journalist present in Lhasa at the time, recalled that “it was an extraordinary outpouring of ethnic violence of a most unpleasant nature to watch,” and both the violence as well as the inability of the police to take quick actions shocked even the Tibetan residents there.87 The violent attacks against Han Chinese residents and property continued until the security forces finally moved into the city with significant reinforcement in the night of March 14-15, after which hundreds were arrested. While the official media stated that the police did not use lethal force, some eyewitnesses argued that they shot at several rioters and bystanders.88 The Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala claimed that “at least 99 Tibetans have died in Lhasa during the crackdown.”89 According to an April 9th statement by the Tibet Autonomous Region government 18 civilians were killed and 380 were wounded in total; 935 people were detained and arrest warrants were issued against 403 of them.90

After the riots in Lhasa, the unrest also spread quickly to other provinces with significant Tibetan populations, such as Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu. An assessment by Robert Barnett

88 Human Rights Watch, “‘I Saw It with My Own Eyes’: Abuses by Chinese Security Forces in Tibet, 2008-2010.”
89 Yardley, “As Tibet Erupted, China Security Forces Wavered.”
estimated that from March 10 to April 5, 2008, anywhere between 95 and 150 protests occurred in the TAR and surrounding provinces. These scattered incidents involved diverse social groups. In contrast to the unrest between 1987 and 1989, where almost all of the participants were monks and nuns, this time, there were 20 protests by monks (such as the ones originating in the Drepung and Sera monasteries), 55 protests by lay or mixed groups (largely rural residents), and 17 protests by students. The subsequent activism for the most part expressed support for events elsewhere or sympathy for those detained or beaten in previous protests.  

*The government’s strategy of blaming the Dalai Lama and Tibetan exiles*

The riots in Lhasa seemed to have emerged spontaneously, started by monks from Lhasa’s major temples but then spiraling out of control and attracting radical Tibetans in the following days. However, a strategy of blaming “Tibetans” or “Tibetan monks and nuns” would run the risk of further fanning up ethnic tensions and discrediting the government’s expensive co-optation policies. As expected, the government directed the blame for the unrest onto an alternative target - the Dalai Lama and his “clique” - and accused them of plotting and organizing the violent riots to split the country and sabotage the Olympics. It also criticized all other foreign governments and groups that showed sympathy for the arrested or killed rioters, supported the Dalai Lama or condemned China’s suppression of the riots. Such rhetoric was widespread in the media and various prior works have also noted the consistent strategy of pinning the blame on the Dalai Lama. In this case, we see a high level of diversionary rhetoric targeting foremost Tibetan exiles but also Western politicians and the Western media.

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91 Barnett, “The Tibet Protests of Spring, 2008.”
92 Smith, *Tibet’s Last Stand?*, 79; Han, *Contestation and Adaptation*, 144.
From various experts’ observations, the evidence is not sufficient to demonstrate that the Dalai Lama and his supporters singlehandedly plotted and directed the protest. Given the scale and the manner in which the protest happened, it would be difficult to believe that any group could have planned the protests (including the violence during the Lhasa riots). According to James Miles, from what he observed in Lhasa during that time, there was no evidence that an organization was behind the protest and given that the propaganda routinely criticizes the Dalai Lama, it is “not at all surprising that they would repeat that particular accusation in this case.”

Robert Barnett argues that the riots in Lhasa on March 14 “did not show obvious signs of being organized, with no prepared banners or focused objectives, and no obvious evidence of leadership or management.”

The Tibet riots happened while the National People’s Congress (NPC) was in session, therefore, articles in the *People’s Daily* prior to the unrest were mainly about NPC activities, such as national leaders’ speeches and meetings with NPC delegates from various provinces and delegates’ profiles and achievements. According to my analysis, news about the Lhasa riots first appeared on the *People’s Daily* print edition on March 17 (three days after the riots) and then only at the bottom of the fourth page. This article echoed the prior statement by *Xinhua* on March 15 that the “riot involved beatings, vandalism, looting of shops and arson orchestrated by the Dalai Lama clique, disturbing 18 years of tranquility in the city.” It argued that the plot by the Dalai Lama was motivated by the desire to reinstate the old feudal system under which he enjoyed special privileges and to destroy the development and prosperity in Tibet. As evidence, the article mentioned that during his visit to the United States in 2007, he repeatedly said that “2008 is an important year; the Olympics might be the last opportunity for Tibetans.” It accused

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93 “Transcript: James Miles Interview on Tibet.”
95 “Lhasa Calm after Riot, Traffic Control Imposed.”
him of encouraging his supporters to stage protests during the Olympics and asking foreign
countries to link their position towards the Olympics to the Tibet issue. The Tibetan Youth
Congress (considered part of his “clique”) apparently also called for a “Tibetan People’s
Uprising Movement” which would start with a march from India to Lhasa beginning on March
10 and it was accused of seeking to gather external and internal forces to start an uprising.96

A statement by the chairman of the TAR Qiangba Puncog on March 18th expressed
regrets that the Dalai Lama and some people from Western countries called the rioters’ violent
destructions “peaceful demonstrations” and legal measures to handle these criminals “repression
of peaceful demonstration.”97 The Foreign Ministry spokesperson on the same day stated that the
incident showed that the Dalai Lama’s rhetoric of “peace” was hypocritical and deceitful.98
During a press conference after the closing ceremony of the NPC meeting, Premier Wen Jiabao
repudiated the accusation that the Chinese government damaged the Tibetan culture and stated
that the government had the full ability to protect Tibetan stability and normal social order and
promote economic development and social progress. He reiterated the position that the “Dalai
Lama clique” planned the riots in Tibet and even hinted that they supported attacks against
Chinese embassies abroad.99 Despite these accusations, Robert Barnett, writing in the aftermath
of the 2008 riots, observed that “in the last 20 years the Chinese security services are not known
to have produced a court case demonstration any substantive link of exiles to unrest in Tibet.”100

96 “The Dalai Lama Clique’s Scheme to Undermine Social Stability Is Doomed to Fail [达赖集团破坏西藏社会稳
定注定要失败],” People’s Daily, March 17, 2008.
97 “Any Plot to Damage Tibet’s Stability and to Carry out Splitist Activity Is Doomed to Fail [任何破坏西藏稳定、
制造分裂的图谋都注定要失败],” People’s Daily, March 18, 2008.
98 “Concerning the Serious Violent and Criminal Incidents in Lhasa: Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Press Meeting
Reporters’ Questions [十一届全国人大一次会议举行记者招待会: 温家宝总理回答中外记者提问],” People’s
The potential grievances of Tibetan people or deeper-seated problems in the policies towards the region were mostly ignored in the media and ordinary people were portrayed as victims of separatist thugs. In the official media portrayal, there was no reason why ordinary Tibetans would be involved in the riots at all. One article cited a comment from a netizen stating that “the kindhearted Tibetan compatriots are our brothers and sisters; we need to maintain unity and love and protect the country, […] our lives have become better and better under the caring policies of the government, why would some kill people and burn property? […] Plots to divide the fatherland will surely fail.”

A commentary by Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai, a prominent religious figure in Tibet and Vice Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference National Committee, stated that no force could stop the historical process (历史进程) of development and progress in Tibet, and the Dalai Lama’s attempts to split the country would surely fail.

*Nationalistic anti-Western propaganda in the aftermath of the riots*

Concurrent with the strategy of pinning the blame on the “Dalai Lama clique”, the party also criticized Western politicians and individuals that showed support towards the Dalai Lama, denounced the crackdown in Tibet or threatened to boycott the Olympics opening ceremony. The anti-Western propaganda was likely driven by two factors. First, the Chinese government was motivated to respond to perceived interference in Chinese affairs and the Western media’s biasedness. By showing public support for the Dalai Lama, Western politicians undercut the

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101. “Ignorance or Bias? Netizens Comment on Some Western Media’s Reporting [无知还是偏见？ - 网友议某些西方媒体的报道],” *People’s Daily*, March 27, 2008.
Chinese government’s domestic propaganda message. The Western media’s coverage of the riots was also heavily skewed and downplayed the violence committed by Tibetan rioters. Under normal circumstances, we would expect criticisms of the West in the Chinese press.

However, the anti-Western propaganda was likely also useful for the purpose of diversion. My analysis of the People’s Daily printed version shows that there were multiple articles denouncing the Western media; they were mostly placed in prominent positions and the coverage was extensive, many including several photos and comments by angry Chinese netizens. If the government was purely responding to perceived interference, we would likely not have seen such extensive coverage. For example, anti-American criticisms in the aftermath of the Falun Gong crackdown were present in the People’s Daily, but they were found only in a handful of articles. Additionally, there were commentaries that use strong nationalist rhetoric, accusing the Western media of using the occasion to sabotage the Olympics.

One of the most harshly criticized foreign officials is Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the U.S. House of Representative. Besides her record of advocacy for human rights for Tibetans in the past, she led a delegation of legislators and met with the Dalai Lama on March 21, 2008, in Dharamsala, just a week after the protest. There, she voiced her support for the Dalai Lama and said that China’s accusations against him made “no sense.” On March 22, the official propaganda immediately criticized Nancy Pelosi’s meeting, further adding that supporters of the Dalai Lama violated basic international principles and could not speak from a moral high ground. It mentioned that international opinion was on the Chinese side, with almost a hundred countries

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supporting the Chinese position that violence needs to be condemned and that Tibet has always been an integral part of China.\textsuperscript{105}

On April 9, the U.S. House of Representative passed a resolution sponsored by Pelosi that stated, in contrast to the Chinese position, that the Tibet protests were caused by “six decades of cultural, religious, economic and linguistic repression” and that the government response was “disproportionate and extreme, reportedly resulting in the death of hundreds and the detention of thousands of Tibetans.”\textsuperscript{106} These statements clearly had the potential to undermine the official propaganda that blamed the “Dalai Lama clique” for the unrest, leading to a predictable response from the Chinese side. The\textit{People’s Daily} ran a number of articles in early April criticizing Pelosi personally, accusing her of “publicly agitating for the separation of China.”\textsuperscript{107} One article, referring to the House resolution, reads:

“We denounce this resolution. The more you try to shield the Dalai Lama clique and interfere in the preparations for the Beijing Olympics, the more the Dalai Lama’s true identity will be exposed, and the more the Chinese people will protect the social stability and ethnic unity and the more determined they will be to stage a successful Olympics. The march forward of the Chinese people cannot be blocked by anyone.”\textsuperscript{108}

During this time, other countries also criticized China and anti-China protests were staged during the Olympics torch relay in major cities, including San Francisco and London. Michael Portillo, a former British politician, wrote an editorial comparing the Beijing Olympics to the Berlin Olympics during the Nazi rule. French president Nicholas Sarkozy said that he “could not rule out refusing to attend the opening ceremony of the Beijing Games.” Heavily embarrassed in the lead up to the Olympics, the Chinese Foreign Ministry replied that such comparison “was an insult to the Chinese people and people all over the world” and that acts aiming to disrupt the torch relay were “shameful.”

Several articles pointed out that the Western media reporting of the Tibet riots were systematically biased against China; for example, reports used cropped images and misleading descriptions to downplay the violence of the rioters. Articles by individual commentators adopted a more nationalistic tone. One commentary stated that the Western media has harbored evil intentions towards China and has been opposed to China’s hosting from the beginning on, bringing up complaints about “no reporting freedom” and “bad environment” in China. This time, the Western media has used the incident in Tibet as another occasion to “stir up anti-China sentiments” and “sabotage the Olympics.” Several articles cited comments from netizens echoing the denunciation of the Western media, saying that the “immoral” Western media turned

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112 “Expose the Falseness to Restore the Truth [戳穿假相还原真相],” People’s Daily, March 27, 2008.
113 Liu Wenzong, “Western Media Attempt to Take Advantage of the Vandalism, Beating and Arson Incident in Lhasa to Sabotage the Beijing Olympics Is Doomed to Fail [西方某些媒体利用拉萨‘3-14’打砸抢烧暴力事件破坏北京奥运必败],” People’s Daily, March 30, 2008.
a blind eye to the losses of ordinary people because of the riots and adopted double-standards against China.\textsuperscript{114}

*Conclusion for the Tibet riot cases*

To sum up, the two case studies of the Chinese government’s official propaganda strategies in the aftermath of riots in Tibet in 1987-1989 and 2008 highlight that a consistent strategy of shifting the blame for domestic unrest onto Tibetan exile leaders and groups was pursued. I argued that given the extensive investment in the economic and social integration of Tibet during the reform era, the government has strong incentives to preserve the mantle of harmonious ethnic relations and to avoid creating a public rift between the government and Tibetans. By scapegoating the Dalai Lama and Tibetan separatist groups abroad, the party was likely hoping that such accusations would further serve to discredit them.

The propaganda strategy saw a slight shift between the two cases. In the aftermath of the 1987-1989 riots, criticisms against the United States was mostly defensive. The United States Congress hosted the Dalai Lama and passed legislation that defended the Dalai Lama’s position and censured China’s activities in Tibet. Such acts of perceived interference were criticized in the official Chinese media. However, after the 2008 riots, criticisms of Western politicians were accompanied by strong denunciations of the Western media. Nationalist rhetoric painted the Western media as hostile towards the Beijing Olympics and called regular citizens to love and protect the country and support the Olympics.

\textsuperscript{114} “Ignorance or Bias? Netizens Comment on Some Western Media’s Reporting [无知还是偏见? - 网友议某些西方媒体的报道].”
6.5 Assimilationist policies in Xinjiang and unrest in 2009

The large northwestern Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is of strategic importance for the Chinese government. The region has plenty of oil and gas reserves to fuel China’s growth. At the same time, it borders Russia and several Central Asian states, which in the past posed security threats for China (as the Soviet Union) but now present economic and trade opportunities. However, the situation in Xinjiang is different from that in Tibet for several reasons. First, various ethnic minority groups (Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Huis, etc.) and a large Han Chinese population live Xinjiang. It is only some sections of the Uyghur population in particular that yearn for nationhood. On the other hand, Tibet is demographically much more homogeneous. Further, the designation of various Turkic/Islamic people groups living Xinjiang as “Uyghurs” has only been in place for about a century and Uyghurs identify themselves more strongly with their families, their clans and their oasis. There are divisions among different Uyghur groups and tensions between Uyghurs and other non-Han ethnic groups (like the Huis). Additionally, Uyghurs do not have a political/religious leader that they look up to like the Dalai Lama for the Tibetans. While the Dalai Lama enjoys a high standing in Western countries, some Uyghur groups operating from abroad have been designated as terrorist organizations.

All these factors make it easier and cheaper for the Chinese government to pursue integrationist policies in Xinjiang, and material co-optation is not as extensive and palpable as in Tibet. Yet, we do see the similar use of investment and infrastructural projects to make Xinjiang more integrated with (and perhaps also more dependent on) the rest of China. Concurrently, control on Islamic practices and repression of political activism are used to suppress secessionist tendencies. As Rudelson and Jankowiak has argued, “soft measures” are supposed to “win favor among the Uyghur population and facilitate acculturation into Chinese society,” while “hard
measures” help to “clamp down on elements believed to be fostering dissent, advocating independence, or carrying out terrorist strikes.” Cliff has referred to this strategy as “normalization,” basically, “the process of making Xinjiang more like Neidi [the core Han-dominated provinces of China] and, in particular, making people in Xinjiang more like people in Neidi.”

State-driven economic development in Xinjiang

One of the ways in which the government has exercised control over the region and controlled its economic course is through the Production and Construction Corps (bingtuan). The bingtuan was created in the early 1950s, after the end of the Chinese civil war, to absorb a large number of demilitarized soldiers. The corps’ main tasks were engaging in agricultural production, receiving new settlers, helping the government maintain stability, and protecting the frontiers when Sino-Soviet relations worsened. The size and economic significance of the bingtuan has increased over the years. In 2010, it had 2.6 million soldiers and their families (or 12% of the total Xinjiang population) under its jurisdiction. It oversees hundreds of state farms and construction, transportation and commercial enterprises and units. According to Zhu and Blachford, “from the perspective of economic development, Bingtuan has become the leading force for Xinjiang’s regional economic growth,” while at the same time, “the overall Han dominant Bingtuan population is seen as the reliable support force in Xinjiang.”

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After economic reforms were initiated in 1978, there were few changes in Xinjiang, primarily because reform policies did not affect the bingtuan directly and natural resource extraction required heavy state investment that did not come until later. However, several changes occurred from the 1990s on. First, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the establishment of Central Asian republics on the border of Xinjiang in the early 1990s speeded up Xinjiang’s trade with these countries and enhanced its role as a trade hub. Cross-border trade was also encouraged by the central government through the opening of new border crossing points and the construction of new railroads and highways. In 2000, 59.7% of Xinjiang’s investment in capital construction came from central government budgets, as compared to the national average of 32%.118

The “Open Up the West” campaign launched in 2000 planned further ambitious projects, including the construction of railroads and highways connecting the region with eastern provinces and with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, water conservatory projects, and the restoration of the Tarim River. State-owned corporations have also intensified oil and natural gas extraction efforts.119 The government has paired prefectures in Xinjiang with more developed inland partner provinces. State-owned enterprises in partner provinces would provide the target prefectures in Xinjiang with investments, loans, and training to construct roads, bridges, and oil and gas pipelines. Investments in fixed assets in Xinjiang between 2000 and 2009 reached 1.4 trillion yuan, or the equivalent of the GDP of Beijing in 2010.120 According to Becquelin, heavy industry already accounts for about 2/3 of Xinjiang’s GDP and state-owned enterprises own 80%

120 Cliff, “Lucrative Chaos: Interethnic Conflict as a Function of the Economic ‘normalization’ of Southern Xinjiang.”
of the industrial assets.\textsuperscript{121} However, a problem with these large-scale investments is that they have made Xinjiang highly dependent on the central government, and there are questions about the sustainability of the development and how much of the benefit is retained in the region.

\textbf{Table 6.4 Data on income levels in Xinjiang and Qinghai, 1980-2006}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Annual disposable income per capita (in urban households) (yuan)</th>
<th>Annual disposable income per capita (in rural households) (yuan)</th>
<th>Percentage of workers employed by state-owned units (%)</th>
<th>Average wage in state-owned units (yuan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghai</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>1,065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,356</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>2,174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghai</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,119</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>2,632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5,645</td>
<td>1,618</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>8,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghai</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5,170</td>
<td>1,491</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>10,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>8,871</td>
<td>2,737</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>17,819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghai</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>2,358</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>22,679</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Provincial data (University of Michigan – China Data Online database)

\textbf{Table 6.5 Data on government finances in Xinjiang and Qinghai, 1980-2006}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Local Revenue (100 million yuan)</th>
<th>Local Expenditure (100 million yuan)</th>
<th>Local expenditure per capita (yuan)</th>
<th>Local expenditure on government administration per capita (yuan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>16.22</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghai</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>21.58</td>
<td>47.62</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghai</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>7.24</td>
<td>17.13</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>79.07</td>
<td>190.95</td>
<td>1033</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghai</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>16.58</td>
<td>68.26</td>
<td>1320</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>219.46</td>
<td>678.47</td>
<td>3310</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghai</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>42.24</td>
<td>214.66</td>
<td>3919</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Provincial data (University of Michigan – China Data Online database)

\textsuperscript{121} Becquelin, “Staged Development in Xinjiang.”
Table 6.4 presents data on income levels in Xinjiang. Data on Qinghai, a large province bordering Xinjiang to the east, are provided for comparison. As we can see, income levels in Xinjiang are very similar to those in Qinghai, but the state is more heavily involved in the local economy in Xinjiang, employing 43.6% of the working population in Xinjiang in 1980, and 22.5% in 2006. In Qinghai, the government only employed 10.3% of the working population in 2006. The average salary in state-owned units in Xinjiang is lower than in Qinghai. This might be driven by the fact that the public sector is dominated by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps and natural resource extraction companies, which would employ a large number of agricultural and manual workers. Table 6.5 suggests that the level of local government expenditure in Xinjiang is slightly lower, but comparable to that in Qinghai. Both provinces run deficits, which have to be met by central government assistance.

One challenge to the government’s integrationist policies is market dynamics that tend to reward Mandarin skills, education, and entrepreneurial capabilities, leaving Uyghurs disadvantaged when competing with Han Chinese and Huis. A study conducted in 2005 in Urumqi found that in the private sector, Uyghurs earn 52% less than Han even if they had similar backgrounds. In state companies, which tend to hold monopolies and face less survival pressure, there is no evidence of discrimination against Uyghurs. The author argues that this discrimination arises because private firms face stiffer competition and are more likely to hire Han Chinese who are perceived to be more productive. Research by Harlan also shows that in the private sector, Han Chinese-owned businesses tend to dominate, with Uyghur businesses usually operating in niche industries, like food, export/import to Central Asia and commercial services aiming at other Uyghurs. To grow, Uyghur businesses found it pertinent to collaborate with government officials and Han businesses, which usually have more capital and experience.

According to Harlan, “Uyghur businesses that develop into large companies do not do so outside the state or the Han-dominated system but rather in alliance with the state.”

**Preferential social policies in Xinjiang**

Similar to the situation in Tibet, ethnic minorities in Xinjiang were not required to adhere to the one-child policy and can enter universities with lower examination scores. Sautman found that minorities living in urban areas in Xinjiang were allowed to have two children and in rural areas, up to three or four, and these policies were not strictly enforced in the countryside.

According to Table 6.6, the birth rate and natural growth rate of Uyghurs are 16.38% and 11.34% respectively, higher than the rates for Han Chinese. They also have larger average family sizes than Han. The life expectancy of Uyghurs has also increased from 62.62 years in 1990 to 67.44 years in 2000.

**Table 6.6 Comparison statistics for Uyghur and Han populations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Uyghurs</th>
<th>Han</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total population in China</td>
<td>0.74%</td>
<td>90.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of population in XUAR</td>
<td>46.91%</td>
<td>39.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth rate</td>
<td>16.38%</td>
<td>11.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural growth rate</td>
<td>11.34%</td>
<td>4.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage in urban</td>
<td>37.20%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage in rural</td>
<td>62.80%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy in 1990</td>
<td>62.62</td>
<td>67.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy in 2000</td>
<td>67.44</td>
<td>71.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average family size</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data for first two rows are from the China 2005 1% population survey (University of Michigan – China Data Online database), all the other data are from Rongxing Guo’s *China’s Ethnic Minorities: Social and Economic Indicators* (Routledge, 2013)

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In Xinjiang, various bilingual school models exist, but the most common model for minority students is one that uses minority languages (Uyghur, Kazakh, Kirgiz, Mongolian, Xibo and Russian) as the language of instruction and teaches Mandarin Chinese for four to five hours per week. These schools enrolled 56.33% of the total number of minority students in 2009. In urban areas, many families choose to send their children to schools that use Mandarin, and enrollment in Mandarin-language schools increased from only 4.95% of the minority student population in 2006 to 22.30% in 2009. Several hundred boarding schools in pastoral areas grant minority children free tuition and guarantee free food and accommodation. Minorities that want better opportunities for their children are often compelled to send them to Mandarin-language schools, since the quality of teachers is often higher, instruction materials in math and science subjects are more abundant, and higher education and employment prospects are better after graduation.

Even when minority students went to the same school as Han Chinese students and take the same exam in Mandarin, they can receive extra points on the university entrance exam. In Xinjiang, from 1987-2003, students whose parents are both minorities and who take the university entrance exam in Mandarin receive 150 extra points if they applied for universities in Xinjiang, and 100 extra points for universities in inner China. This advantage was reduced to 70 points in 2003 and 50 points in 2006 as education standards among minorities have increased, but they still provide a significant advantage in a highly competitive system.

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Political and religious control in Xinjiang

The economic and social integrationist strategies are at the same time coupled with strict political and religious control in order to dampen down support for secessionism among more activist and belligerent Uyghurs. After the consolidation of power, the government under Mao Zedong sought to weaken the influence of the local Islamic establishment. Islamic laws were replaced by secular laws, Islamic leaders and clergy were put under the control of the government, and the land belonging to mosques and other religious institutions were confiscated, which meant that they no longer had any independent income.\textsuperscript{129}

The government purged Islamic leaders and nationalists who spoke out against official policies and demanded greater local autonomy during the Hundred Flowers movement of 1956. Since China-Soviet relations also worsened during this time, ethnic leaders in Xinjiang who were pro-Soviet were attacked. In 1958, the Religious Reform movement was launched in Xinjiang with the goal of further undermining Islam and completely assimilating all ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{130} During the Cultural Revolution, many local minority cadres were expelled, mosques were destroyed by Red Guards, local customs were attacked and traditional clothing was forcibly replaced by Mao suits. The Cultural Revolution deepened resentments among Uyghurs and other minorities, for whom it was “not merely a political and social assault but an attack on their identities.”\textsuperscript{131}

Between 1978 and 1989, the government reversed course and adopted more tolerant policies in the region. The state allowed mosques to be rebuilt, implemented laws that respected Islamic holidays and food requirements, improved minority regulation, elevated the status of


\textsuperscript{130} Millward and Tursun, 92–94.

\textsuperscript{131} Gardner Bovingdon, The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 52.
minority languages, etc. Nevertheless, the Tiananmen protest of 1989 and the breakup of the Soviet Union heightened leaders’ insecurity and resulted in increased vigilance and stiffer measures. Political examinations were implemented in order to eliminate imams who were not patriotic and politically reliable. New mosque constructions were limited and Islamic religious schools (madrasas) and classes were more heavily monitored or shut down if they were underground. Cadres and professionals are often sent to distant areas and villages to propagate the government’s official policy, “correct” the people’s view of the party and praise the party’s achievements. Several “strike hard” campaigns attacking crimes, terrorist and separatist activities and suspect religious activities have also been launched since the mid-1990s.

While in Tibet, protests tended to originate from monasteries, the situation in Xinjiang is more complicated because of scattered militant Uyghur groups that use violent attacks to oppose the government. In April 1990, there was a riot in Baren township and in February 1997, protests lasting for several days flared up in Yining. Several groups were held responsible for the attacks and were classified as terrorist groups, such as the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the East Turkistan Liberation Organization (ETLO). Several hundred militants were even trained by Al-Qaeda and a portion returned to China to plan terrorist attacks. Militant groups even transferred small arms and explosives into China across the border. In January 2007, the government authorized a raid on a training camp in Xinjiang apparently run by ETIM, killing 18 terrorists and arresting 17 more. Smaller protests by ordinary citizens also occur from time to time, but most of the time, these protests concern economic and environmental issues, such as

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132 Rudelson and Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux.”
133 Bovingdon, The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land, 70–74.
134 Bovingdon, 54.
135 Han, Contestation and Adaptation, 50.
opposition to the construction of a new dam or hydropower station or demands for better land compensation.¹³⁶

Overall, the response from Uyghurs to the government’s dual co-optation and control strategies has been mixed – many choose to accept integrationist policies, send their children to Mandarin-language schools, and even succeed by partnering with the state, others use peaceful means like writing and preserving ethnic culture to show resistance, while a few adopt more militant measures. As Rudelson and Jankowiak argue, “Uyghur identity had evolved in such a way that the Uyghurs can neither acculturate comfortably into China, as Beijing would like, nor effectively resist the Chinese state, as Uyghur nationalists and militants would like.”¹³⁷

*The 2009 riots in Urumqi*

Just more than a year after the unrest in Tibet, another riot occurred in Urumqi, Xinjiang. On June 25, 2009, a clash between Han Chinese and Uyghur workers broke out in a toy factory in Guangdong. According to the official media, a former Han employee tried to return to the factory but was not rehired. Angered, he circulated rumor online that six Uyghurs raped two Han Chinese women at the factory. This started a fight, with Han workers trying to punish the Uyghurs. The fight escalated and involved hundreds of workers, leaving two Uyghurs dead and 118 wounded.¹³⁸ After the incident, many workers fled to avoid arrest and only the man who was accused of circulating the rumor online was arrested. Complaints about the violence against Uyghur workers, the slow reaction of the police force, and potential misreporting of the death

¹³⁷ Rudelson and Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux.”
toll quickly surfaced on Uyghur websites and message boards in the aftermath.\textsuperscript{139} People called for an investigation into the incident and a march to Urumqi’s People’s Square to voice their demands. Such online messages were numerous and many people, probably including the authorities, were aware of them. A peaceful crowd assembled on the People’s Square late afternoon on July 5, 2009, but when the police tried to disperse the crowd and detained some of the participants, the protest grew to over a thousand people and turned into a violent riot. The protesters threw rocks at the police and attacked bystanders, vehicles and shops.\textsuperscript{140}

The police quickly contained the riots within the next hours. A witness described that they “used tear gas and fire hoses to disperse the crowd.”\textsuperscript{141} According to the \textit{Economist}, foreign journalists the next day “found the riot area full of broken shop windows, fire-damaged buildings and scores of burned-out cars” and heard stories of witnesses physically injured by the rioters.\textsuperscript{142} In the following days, it was reported that Han Chinese went onto the streets to voice their fear and demanded greater protection from the police, while family members of detained or missing Uyghurs gathered sporadically to protest against the police suppression.\textsuperscript{143}

\textit{The government’s strategy of targeting exile groups}

In the wake of the Urumqi riots, the central government followed the old tactic of shifting the blame onto exile elements, in particular, the World Uyghur Congress and its leader Rebiya Kadeer and similar Uyghur organizations abroad dubbed as “East Turkestan” separatist and


terrorist forces. Just one day after the incident, barely enough time to conduct any thorough investigation, a *Xinhua* article concluded that the riots were “masterminded” by the World Uyghur Congress, which had instigated the incident via the Internet, “calling on supporters ‘to be braver’ and ‘to do something big.’” A first-page report on the *People’s Daily* on July 7 asserted that the incident was not an ethnic, nor a religious issue, but planned by foreign reactionary forces in order to stir up trouble. The official media provided some pieces of evidence to bolster the claim that Kadeer was behind the protest, including that on July 1, 2009, a meeting of the World Uyghur Congress allegedly planned “to instigate unrest by sending messages via the Internet, telephones and mobile phones,” and that on July 5, she called her brother saying that “we all know something might happen in Urumqi tomorrow night.” Kadeer was additionally accused of trying to plot further protests on July 6 and directing the attacks on the Chinese embassies in Germany and the Netherlands. An article called Kadeer “an ironclad separatist colluding with terrorists and Islamic extremists and an instigator unceasingly fanning unrest among her followers within and outside of China.”

The government had targeted Kadeer before, which probably explained why she was immediately blamed for the riots. In 2006, when she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson responded by saying that her “statements and actions are aimed at destroying the peace and stability of Chinese society, which runs counter to the original intention of the Nobel peace prize.” The statement further added that she “had colluded

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with ‘East Turkistan’ terrorist force abroad, distorted facts and maliciously attacked the Chinese government under the pretence of ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights.’”

Several articles in the following days also mentioned that the plotters of the incident wanted to intensify tensions and provoke hostility among ethnic groups. Other articles stressed the theme of social stability and restoring order in Xinjiang, stating that stability is the desire of all ethnic groups. The media also purposefully presented different “East Turkestan” exile organizations as acting in unison to coordinate the unrest inside China and attacks against Chinese embassies and consulates abroad. Xinhua articles reported that the World Uyghur Congress and two other East Turkestan organizations that it was coordinating with had links to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which had been listed as a terrorist organization by the United Nations Security Council.

Exile sources, on the other hand, de-emphasized the violence committed by Uyghurs. Rebiya Kadeer wrote in a commentary published on the Wall Street Journal that the peaceful demonstration became “a bloodbath” because of the “heavy-handed policing.” She blamed the government’s enduring suppression of Uyghurs for grievances that led to the protest and called the United States to denounce China and open a consulate in Urumqi in order to monitor human rights violations there. However, Kadeer’s statement also needs to be taken with a grain of salt. According to James Millward, both the official news as well as accounts by Uyghurs inside and out.

outside of China contained biases, with the government tending to emphasize violence committed by the rioters and Uyghur sources focusing on the police crackdown of the protest.\textsuperscript{153}

\textit{Propaganda attacking the Western media}

Anti-Western rhetoric was less intense in the aftermath of the Xinjiang riots as compared to the Tibet riots from the year before. One important reason is that support from Western countries for Uyghur activists was more muted. There was no high-ranking Western politician that openly defended Uyghur exile groups, like the way Nancy Pelosi defended the Dalai Lama. Most Western countries took a passive stance or even ignored the incident. The United States, for example, has been cooperating with China since the 9/11 attack to crack down on international terrorism. In 2002, the United States designated the East Turkistan Islamic Movement as a terrorist organization. Several Xinjiang Uyghur fighters were captured by U.S. forces in Afghanistan and were held in the Guantanamo Bay prison. The only major country that showed support for the Uyghurs after the riots was Turkey. Turkish politicians and the media denounced the Chinese crackdown and expressed sympathy for Uyghurs.\textsuperscript{154}

Nevertheless, criticisms of the Western media were again present, echoing the strategy adopted after the Tibet riots from the year before. Several articles complained that the Western media produced biased reporting by showing sympathy to the rioters. A \textit{People’s Daily} article compiled a list of such misrepresentations and stated that the Western media violated moral principles by supporting those that “sabotaged social stability and exercised the act of violence”

\textsuperscript{153} Millward, “Introduction.”
and turning “a blind eye to the innocent civilian casualties.”\textsuperscript{155} One article stated that “the Western press made groundless accusations, started rumors and created trouble,” they not only “disregarded the facts and created numerous distorted reports, but even created fake news, drawing strong objection and anger from the Urumqi people.”\textsuperscript{156} The official propaganda also pointed out the connection between the World Uyghur Congress and the West. A commentary on the \textit{People's Tribune (Renmin Luntan)} stated that the World Uyghur Congress had received financial support from the U.S. Congress-funded National Endowment for Democracy, enabling them to stage violence under the mantle of promoting human rights and religious freedom.\textsuperscript{157} Overall, while anti-Western sentiments were not as extensive as after the Tibet riots, there were instances of strong criticisms and linking the West to the exile groups accused of plotting the disturbance.

\textbf{6.6. Conclusion}

In this chapter, I have discussed three cases of unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang. I argue that these two regions are of considerable strategic and economic importance for the government, and thus, since the reform period, the government has used material co-optation strategies and preferential social policies to “win the hearts and minds” of ethnic minorities there. Official propaganda and leaders’ statements regularly emphasize the successes and achievements of the development policies in these regions, and stress that ethnic groups live in harmony and unity there. In reality, the uneven development strategy and policy shortcomings as well as restrictions


\textsuperscript{157} “To Connive at Violence Is to Connive at Terrorism [纵容暴力就是纵容恐怖主义],” \textit{People’s Daily - People’s Tribune}, July 16, 2009.
on free religious worship have created tensions and grievances in the region, contributing to the flaring up of protests and riots. These incidents have the potential to undermine the government’s ethnic harmony propaganda and cast doubt on the integrationist policies.

The theory predicts that the high degree of co-optation would motivate diversionary propaganda. Indeed, to prevent a public rift between the government and ethnic minorities and maintain the mantle of ethnic unity, the propaganda in the aftermath of the protests avoided blaming monks and nuns and ordinary Tibetan and Uyghur citizens. Instead, the government attacked exile ethnic leaders and groups and blamed them for instigating the unrest in the country. By targeting the Dalai Lama and the World Uyghur Congress, the government can avoid addressing policy failures and ethnic grievances in Tibet and Xinjiang.

While to the Western observer, these accusations seem far-fetched, they make sense from Chinese leaders’ perspectives since exile organizations challenge the legitimacy of the central government in the border regions. According to He and Sautman, Tibetan exiles were hopeful in the early 1990s that China would follow the Soviet path of disintegration,158 in which case they might stand the chance of returning to an independent Tibet. Given the example of the Soviet breakup, it is realistic to imagine border provinces one day breaking away from the control of the central government. After the riots, Western politicians and media organizations were heavily criticized for supporting ethnic exile leaders and portraying the situation in a biased way. The media content in the aftermath of the Tibet riots was particularly nationalistic. Western politicians are said to be attempting to split up China and the Western media accused of trying to sabotage the Beijing Olympics.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Overview

The dissertation has examined whether we would see an increase in anti-foreign diversionary propaganda in China when leaders are confronted with serious domestic protests. Through both quantitative analyses of the *People’s Daily* and detailed case studies, I found that the answer to this question is more nuanced than what we might have originally expected. Leaders face unique constraints and motivations and domestic and international factors are continuously changing, thus, it is difficult for us to make a precise prediction. However, I found that some conditions have tended to motivate anti-foreign propaganda. The previous chapters argued that diversionary rhetoric was adopted with greater intensity when the government needed to co-opt elite university students or maintain the appearance of ethnic unity and harmony. Diversionary motivations were low when the protest participants posed a threat to the party and the propaganda campaign had to make clear the government’s position that the Democracy Wall activists were “anti-regime reactionaries” and that Falun Gong was a “dangerous and evil sect.” Ultimately, the purpose of the official media is to shape public beliefs and perceptions about events, and the framing needs to be congruent with the government’s domestic goal of co-opting certain social groups and marginalizing others.

The cases also found that there are three factors outside of the theoretical framework that also contributed to the explanation. The first is the severity of the protest itself. I found that anti-foreign propaganda was more extensive and antagonistic after the Tiananmen crackdown than what the theory predicted. Even though domestic intellectuals bore much of the blame, the
government did not hesitate to attack a range of external actors. The most likely reason is that the survival of the communist party was on the line, and under such a circumstance, leaders might not hesitate to blame anyone with even the slightest connection to the movement.

The second factor is the *degree of foreign interference or foreign reaction to domestic problems* in China. I found that anti-American and anti-Western propaganda was partly driven by the perception of interference in China’s domestic affairs. For example, criticisms of the United States were more extensive after the Tibet unrest in 2008 than after the Xinjiang riots in 2009, due to the fact that American support for the Dalai Lama was more pronounced.

Even though this factor is influential, I argue that the domestic co-optation/marginalization strategies would be more important. Leaders would likely have pursued a strategy of blaming Tibetan and Uyghur exile organizations regardless of American interference or not. In the Falun Gong case, anti-American rhetoric was minimal and did not appear during the first few months of the crackdown because leaders were preoccupied with the anti-Falun Gong campaign at home.

The third factor is the *need for international cooperation*. In crafting their propaganda strategies, the need to rely on Western trade and technology for the economic reform program was likely in the forefront of leaders’ minds. This explains the use of reassurance rhetoric even after the serious Tiananmen movement. Strategic considerations likely limited anti-American propaganda in the Democracy Wall and Falun Gong cases. While international factors are important, I argue in the section below that they cannot give us satisfactory predictions if they are the only variables that we rely on.

In the following sections, I will discuss some of the questions and issues that have not been adequately addressed so far. The first question is whether we can use alternative indicators of regime insecurity and whether these indicators can explain the presence or absence of anti-
foreign propaganda. I provide charts of inflation and GDP growth in China to show that the relationship between economic indicators and the People’s Daily tone towards the United States is not as straightforward as we might think. The second question is whether we can use alternative approaches to explain propaganda strategies, such as leadership division and security factors. I argue that while these explanations can be insightful, it is either difficult to measure the variables or the predictions do not line up well with the findings from the cases. The third issue is whether the proposed explanation can shed light into recent developments in China and cases outside of China. I briefly discuss the Chinese government’s propaganda strategy during the Hong Kong 2014 Occupy Central movement and the Vietnamese government’s framing of a wave of environmental protests in 2016 to show that the theory can help us interpret other cases and travel beyond the Chinese context.

7.2 Using economic indicators to measure regime insecurity

As discussed in the theory chapter, besides counts of protest events, the literature has also used economic indicators like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates and inflation rates to proxy for regime insecurity. We would expect a higher level of anti-foreign propaganda when GDP growth is low or when inflation is high. Figures 7.1 and 7.2 plot the annual GDP growth rates and inflation rates respectively for China. The data were taken from the World Bank World Development Indicators database. Figure 7.3 plots the People’s Daily tone towards the United States (same figure as in Chapter 3).
As we can see from Figure 7.1 there were several periods of slowing GDP growth in China, including in 1981, from 1989 to 1990, from 1998 to 2000, from 2008 to 2009, and post-2012. Figure 7.2 shows that inflation was particularly serious from 1988 to 1989, and again from
1993 to 1995. Inflation was also higher in 2008 and 2011. If we combine insights from both indicators, we would predict that the tone towards the United States would be more negative/less positive between 1989 and 1990 and in 2008.

Figure 7.3 People’s Daily tone towards the United States (1986-2010) (chapter 3)

Figure 7.3 shows that the tone towards the United States was lower between 1989 and 1991, matching the expectation. However, the relationship is not as straightforward. The high inflation in 1988 and 1989 was one of the factors that led to the Tiananmen protest. When the Chinese government cracked down brutally on the movement, the United States responded with sanctions and offered protection to Fang Lizhi, forcing the Chinese media to react. Anti-American sentiments were also driven by the fear that the West wanted to take advantage of the instability to promote democracy and “peaceful evolution” in China. The diversionary rhetoric
was not driven by the high inflation and slower growth directly, but by the ensuing Tiananmen crisis. Similarly, anti-American sentiments in 2008 was driven by the Tibet riots. Rising inflation might have played a role in exacerbating leaders’ insecurity, but it was unlikely the direct cause. Furthermore, inflation was high between 1993 and 1995, but we see relatively positive propaganda towards the United States. Overall, economic conditions can intensify leaders’ concerns, but they might not have a straightforward relationship with anti-foreign propaganda.

7.3 Alternative explanations

*Alternative explanation: Leadership division*

As discussed in the theory chapter, one popular domestic-level explanation for diversionary actions is leadership division.\(^1\) When there is a higher level of competition between different leadership factions, leaders on both sides might ramp up hawkish nationalist rhetoric or even engage in diversionary military actions to bolster their own domestic legitimacy. While this argument is plausible in the case of China, testing this theory is difficult due to the limited access to the leadership.

The first challenge is to measure leadership division. One could use as proxy purges of high-profile leaders. This measure would suggest that the level of leadership division was the highest in January 1987 and May/June 1989, when Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang were respectively ousted from the party. Other serious purges include the removal of Beijing Party

\(^1\) Mansfield and Snyder, “Democratization and the Danger of War”; Blaydes and Linzer, “Elite Competition, Religiosity, and Anti-Americanism in the Islamic World.”
Secretary Chen Xitong in April 1995, Shanghai’s Party Secretary Chen Liangyu in September 2006, and Chongqing’s Party Secretary Bo Xilai in March 2012.²

Applying this measure to explaining the presence or absence of diversionary propaganda in the aftermath of the seven protest cases is problematic, since only two protest cases overlapped with cases of leadership ousters (the two student protests in 1986 and 1989 and the Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang purges). The other protest cases all occurred outside of the timeframes of the purges. This leadership division measure would thus predict a high level of diversionary propaganda during the student protests and a low level of diversionary propaganda for all the other cases. This prediction would be inaccurate, since the Tibet riots of 2008 demonstrated a very high level of diversionary propaganda targeting both exile groups as well as the West. Further, the removals of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang were because of the poor handling of the student pro-democracy protests. The logic is very different from the standard case in the literature where leadership division precedes and causes anti-foreign diversion.

Another possible proxy for leadership division is the occurrence of communist party congresses that happen every five years. Leaders would have to agree on key policy directions and the assignment of important leadership positions before each party congress. It is usually seen as a time for power jockeying as leaders from different “camps” might put forward candidates from their faction. The party congresses in China happen typically between September and November and thus, the power struggles, if any, will happen during the months before that. The party congresses since the reform period took place in 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017, which unfortunately do not overlap with any of the protests. This measure would predict a low level of diversion across all cases.

A third possibility is to code the level of leadership division prior to each protest case. The challenge facing this method is that this coding scheme would be subjective and in most cases, we do not have reliable information to code this variable. Given my understanding of the cases, leadership division was likely low during the Falun Gong 1999 protest, the Tibet riots in 2008 and Xinjiang riots in 2009. However, the ethnic unrest cases saw a relatively high level of diversionary rhetoric. The level of leadership division was likely higher during the Democracy Wall movement (competition between Deng Xiaoping and Hua Guofeng) and the student pro-democracy protests (Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang were pro-reform while the party elders were conservative). Yet, we see a low level of anti-foreign propaganda in the Democracy Wall case and medium/high in the student protest cases. Overall, the leadership division argument is either difficult to test or the predictions do not fit the cases well.

Alternative explanation: China’s security relations with the United States

This alternative explanation based on security concerns would only account for the presence or absence of American sentiments in particular; it would not deal with attacks against Taiwan or exile ethnic groups. According to this explanation, if security relations with the United States are more cooperative, diversionary motivations would be weaker. On the contrary, if security relations are more contentious, diversionary motivations would be stronger. China’s relations with the United States can be broadly divided into the more cooperative pre-1989 and the more contentious post-1989 period.

Stronger security cooperation before 1989: From the time of the US-China rapprochement in 1972 to the Tiananmen crisis in 1989, the United States and China maintained close security cooperation. As discussed in the Democracy Wall case, China was seeking support
from the United States for its border war against Vietnam in 1979. When the student protest of 1986 broke out, China still faced a heavy Soviet troop presence along the northern border and continued cooperation with the United States was necessary to contain the Soviet threat. In addition, the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 and had occupied the country since then. The Soviets also supported the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. As Harding argues, certain Soviet actions in the mid-1980s even exacerbated the security rivalry, including the deployment of SS-20 missiles in the Far East, which could reach most of China, and Tu-16 bombers in the Vietnamese Cam Ranh Bay, threatening China’s southern flank.3

The security cooperation with China was beneficial from the American perspective as well, since Sino-Soviet tensions locked down a significant portion of Soviet forces along the eastern border, keeping its forces overstretched. In addition, the possibility of escalation along the Sino-Soviet border can be used as a leverage to check Soviet expansion elsewhere. These strategic incentives motivated frequent meetings and consultations between Chinese and American military officials, intelligence sharing, and American arms sales to China.4 During this time, China and the United States also cooperated to support the Afghan rebels fighting against the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan. China even permitted the United States to establish stations in Xinjiang to monitor Soviet missile, space and nuclear programs.5 Even after several developments that paved the way for Sino-Soviet normalization in the late 1980s, Chinese leaders tried to convince the Americans that this would not affect Sino-American relations and that China would not tilt to the Soviet side.6 American arms deliveries to China continued to increase rapidly from $8 million in 1984 to $106.2 million in 1989. These sales

3 Harding, A Fragile Relationship, 164–65.
6 Harding, A Fragile Relationship, 176–79.
covered strategic areas, including upgrades for Chinese interceptor aircraft, anti-tank missiles, radio and communications systems, radars, antisubmarine torpedoes, etc.7

More contentious security relations after the Tiananmen crisis and the Taiwan strait crisis: China’s suppression of the Tiananmen student protest in 1989 shocked the United States and questioned the American belief that increased engagement would speed up the process of liberalization and democratization in China. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War also eliminated a common threat and eroded the strategic foundation of their security cooperation. Without a common enemy, other contentious issues came to the forefront. Many only involve the United States indirectly but could escalate into a military conflict between China and the United States if poorly handled. These include maritime disputes between China and Japan and pro-independence activities on Taiwan.

The Taiwan issue, for example, had become increasingly thorny since the late 1980s as the island started to democratize and internal social and political forces pressured for independence from the mainland. This created problems for U.S.-China relations as the American president is required, by the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, to help Taiwan defend itself against the mainland, while China has few options but to resort to a show of force to deter Taiwanese independence. In 1992, the Bush administration decided to sell 150 F-16 fighter planes to Taiwan, contrary to the commitment made in the 1982 communiqué to reduce arms sales to the island. In 1995, the United States granted Taiwan’s President Lee Teng-hui a visa to visit Cornell University. China responded in the following months, and in particular, around the time of the March 1996 presidential election in Taiwan, with military exercises and missile tests near Taiwan, forcing the United States to send a carrier battle group to the east of Taiwan to signal its opposition. According to Robert Ross, the confrontation “was the closest the United

7 Harding, 168.
States and China had come to a crisis since the early 1960s. It was a critical turning point in post-
Cold War U.S.-China relations and the development of the new regional order.”

In early 1999, NATO forces under the leadership of the United States used airstrikes against targets in Yugoslavia to stop the ethnic cleansing committed by Serbs against Albanians in the Kosovo region. NATO actions alarmed Chinese leaders who feared that such military intervention might be “applied to future secessionist movements in their own country – that is, in Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang.” By that time, the politically engaged public in the PRC had also moved away from the relatively liberal and pro-Western attitudes adopted in the 1980s towards more inward-looking and nationalistic views. In this context, the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999 was seen as an attack on Chinese sovereignty and large anti-American demonstrations broke out in various cities in China.

The growing strength of the Chinese economy and military also led to concerns about a coming US-China rivalry. China’s GDP grew by 9.6% and its official defense increased by 12.9% annually during the 1996-2008 period. The military budget doubled between 1989 and 1994, and nearly doubled again between 1994 and 1999. Overall, security relations have become a lot more contentious than during the Cold War period.

With this coding of US-China security relations, we should see an increase in anti-American sentiments during protests that occurred later on. More specifically, we should see low levels of diversionary anti-American propaganda during the Democracy Wall, the 1986 and 1989 student protests and the 1987-1989 unrest in Tibet. On the other hand, we should see stronger

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10 Gries, China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy.
anti-American propaganda after the Falun Gong protest and the 2008 Tibet and 2009 Xinjiang riots.

While security considerations are likely taken into account of by leaders, relying on this explanation alone does not give us satisfactory results. We saw an increase in propaganda denouncing Western style democracy and American interference after the student protests in the late 1980s. The strong security relations did not prevent leaders from launching propaganda attacks against the United States. In the aftermath of Tiananmen, the report by Chen Xitong alluded to continuous Western attempts to change China’s political system and turn it into a capitalist country. On the other hand, there were only mild, defensive criticisms against the United States after the Falun Gong crackdown. Security relations, while certainly important, do not seem to be the decisive factor driving propaganda strategies.

### 7.4 Recent developments: The Occupy Central movement in Hong Kong

I will briefly discuss the Chinese government’s propaganda strategy during the Occupy Central movement that lasted from late September to early December 2014 in Hong Kong. This case is different from the previous protests considered, since the protest participants were not directly under the rule of the communist party and the responsibility for handling the protest fell on the local government in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, I argue that the need to cultivate support from the general Hong Kong population discouraged the communist party from attacking the students, young professionals and ordinary citizens that took part in the protest. Diversionary

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12 “Report on the Suppression of the Turmoil and the Calming of the Counter-Revolutionary Riots [关于制止动乱和平息反革命暴乱的情况报告].”
incentives would be high in this case. Indeed, the government pursued a strategy of scapegoating “a very small number of instigators” and blaming Western actors for supporting the movement.

**The development of the movement**

Several months before the Occupy Central movement broke out, pro-democracy groups had been voicing concerns regarding the procedure for the selection of the Hong Kong chief executive to be held in 2017. Pro-democracy activists and pan-democratic politicians wanted a nomination process in which regular citizens have more influence, for example, candidates only need to secure a percentage of votes from the general population to be nominated. However, the PRC’s State Council released a white paper in June 2014 stating that “the high degree of autonomy” in Hong Kong “is not full autonomy, nor a decentralized power. It is the power to run local affairs as authorized by the central leadership,” signaling that Beijing will tightly control political affairs in Hong Kong. For further details on the selection procedure put forward by the National People’s Congress in August 31, 2014, see Johannes Chan, “Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement,” *The Round Table* 103, no. 6 (2014): 571–80. Further, the central government released a decision in late August 2017 that stipulated that candidates would first have to be nominated by a committee that would effectively be comprised of largely of pro-China and corporate representatives. This conservative screening procedure would essentially ensure that all candidates would be deferential to the central government and that pan-democratic politicians would not be able to put forward a candidate of their choice. Basically, the Hong Kong people would have no real choice and would have to choose from candidates already “pre-approved” by the central government in Beijing.

Students responded by boycotting classes in late September 2014 and staged a protest outside of the Hong Kong government headquarters. The demonstration quickly swelled and

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13 For further details on the selection procedure put forward by the National People’s Congress in August 31, 2014, see Johannes Chan, “Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement,” *The Round Table* 103, no. 6 (2014): 571–80.
14 Chan.
participants starting to occupy the main roads. When the police used tear gas to drive off the
demonstrators, the public was furious and the next day, tens of thousands of people occupied the
street, effectively shutting down main areas of the cities. The “Occupy Central” movement lasted
for weeks thereafter with many camping on the streets overnight. Periodic clashes between the
police and the protesters were reported. The Hong Kong government adopted a firm stance: the
chief executive Chun-ying Leung refused to step down, government representatives initially
canceled talks with student activists, and the court allowed the police to move in and clear the
protesters’ camps. The protest ended after several weeks without concessions from the
government.

*Beijing’s propaganda strategy*

What would the proposed theory predict in the case of Hong Kong? The protest
participants and leaders were mostly students, young professionals and ordinary citizens who
were advocating for a more representative and democratic chief executive election process. The
central government’s relationship towards these social groups might be characterized by a mild
co-optation strategy. Since before the return of Hong Kong to the mainland in 1997, the Chinese
government had tried to build support among various social sectors in Hong Kong. The stability
of Hong Kong’s economy is important for the mainland, since Hong Kong serves as a bridge for
foreign direct investment and is a global financial hub. The government has actively tried to win
the favor of local political elites, businesspeople, industrialists, and real estate tycoons. While
students are not the main target of this co-optation strategy, because of their potential, it would
be beneficial to gain their support. According to Richard Baum, “Beijing also sought to expand
friendly contacts with the territory’s younger opinion leaders and educated professionals. The

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goal was to identify and cultivate a group of ‘young and capable people from different trades and professions… to use for the administration of Hong Kong after 1997.’”

Given some degree of co-optation, the theory predicts that we would likely see diversionary propaganda attacking alternative targets including potentially foreigners.

What we find in the actual media coverage closely lines up with this prediction. The media did not criticize the broad masses of students and ordinary citizens but followed a strategy similar to the student protests in 1986 and 1989 of blaming a small group of people with ulterior motives. For example, an article mentions that a democratic society needs to respect the views of the few but warns that this does not mean that some people can take illegal actions. A very small number of Occupy Central elements (极少数 “占中”人士) were accused of instigating the people, paralyzing traffic, disrupting normal economic activities and even threatening the personal safety and property of Hong Kong citizens. An article warns that such people need to bear full responsibility before the law.

According to some editorials, behind these instigators were foreign forces. This frame was adopted in less authoritative articles, such as opinion pieces by observers and academics. Nevertheless, the fact that such views appeared repeatedly in multiple People’s Daily articles suggests that the government endorses and perhaps wants to spread these allegations. One Fudan University professor was cited by the People’s Daily as saying that “some forces in the West have not stopped to interfere in Hong Kong’s affairs; they do not want to see a stable and prosperous Hong Kong and the success of the ‘one country two system’ model” and that “Occupy Central’ was indeed instigated by a few people under the support of Western forces.

16 “Resolutely Protect Hong Kong’s Rule of Law [坚决维护香港的法治],” People’s Daily, October 4, 2014.
17 “Cherish the Favorable Development Prospects, Maintain Hong Kong’s Prosperity and Stability [珍惜良好发展局面 维护香港繁荣稳定],” People’s Daily, October 1, 2014.
after a long period of planning and preparation.”18 Another prominent academic from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences said that one can see some Western country’s hands behind the Occupy Central movement and warns that China needs to be vigilant against these “behind-the-scenes black hands.”19 A China Daily article in English also circulates similar rhetoric:

“The way ‘Occupy’ evolved and unfolded, in retrospect, strongly indicates that the protests were spurred on by external forces, who aim to trigger a ‘color revolution’ that ignites in Hong Kong but spreads to the mainland. A case in point is that many politicians and media in the West - with perceived hostility, wasted no time adding fuel to the fire as ‘Occupy’ escalated.”20

We see in the propaganda strategy similarities with that adopted after the Tiananmen student protest. The large masses of students and ordinary citizens were portrayed as misled by a small number of behind-the-scenes plotters, who colluded with foreign hostile forces with ulterior motives.

7.5 Further implications

Can the proposed explanation travel to cases beyond China? I argue that the theory can make sense of how the Vietnamese government recently handled a string of environmental protests. In May 2016, the livelihoods of fishing communities in central Vietnam were jeopardized because a Taiwanese steel plant had discharged toxic waste water into the ocean, leading to widespread fish kills along several coastal provinces. The government was slow to

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18 “Occupy Central Severely Harms the Rule of Law in Hong Kong [‘占中’严重损害香港法治],” People’s Daily, October 7, 2014.
respond to the incident and was perceived as trying to shield the Taiwanese steel maker. Protests calling for official transparency, protection of the ocean and severe punishment for the Taiwanese company broke out in several fishing communities and larger cities. The participants were ordinary fishermen and their families, affected residents in the coastal provinces and urban residents sympathetic to the plight of the fishermen. Instead of acknowledging its poor handling of the environmental disaster and the citizen’s grievances, the Vietnamese government claimed that an enemy political party based in the United States, the Viet Tan, was responsible for instigating the protests, and “exploiting the fish kill issue” to “mobilizing the people against the state.”\footnote{Unexplained Fish Deaths Disrupt Vietnamese Vote,” Deutsche Welle, May 20, 2016, http://www.dw.com/en/unexplained-fish-deaths-disrupt-vietnamese-vote/a-19270746.} Viet Tan was established by South Vietnamese living in the United States and professed to fight against authoritarianism in Vietnam.\footnote{For the Viet Tan’s mission, see their website at: http://www.viettan.org/Who-We-Are.html}

The decision by Vietnamese leaders to target a dissident political party can be explained using the theory proposed. The government could not directly attack the fishing communities and their supporters, since doing so would only further enrage the public. Blaming foreign countries like the United States and China would be too far-fetched and would needlessly damage Vietnam’s foreign relations with these countries. Viet Tan was a convenient choice because it has posed a long-term legitimacy threat to the communist party and because it cannot realistically retaliate. This propaganda tactic mirrors the accusations against the Kuomintang that we saw after the student protests in China.

Finally, even though the dissertation primarily addresses the diversionary conflict literature, the theory and case studies are also related to the comparative politics literature on protest management. Many works have focused on applying social movement theories to China and have studied the role played by frames, opportunities, and mobilizing structures. Scholars
have investigated the underlying causes of protests, strategies that demonstrators have used, the social, cultural and political factors that affected the interactions between the authorities and dissidents, and their implications for the government’s survival.23 The case studies in this dissertation tackle a different set of questions, which is how the government uses the official propaganda to deal with the domestic protests, what frames and interpretations the government “imposes” on the mobilization and under what circumstances they might shift the blame for the protests onto alternative actors. The literature on protests and mobilizations typically takes the identity of the protesters for granted, but as shown in the case studies, sometimes the government might downplay the role of certain groups and exaggerate the role of others. For example, during the student protests of 1986 and 1989, the media deemphasized the leadership roles of students and sought to present the activism as manipulated by a handful of behind-the-scenes intellectuals. Future works can focus more specifically on how the government misrepresents or mold the identity of protesters for political purposes.

8. Appendix for People’s Daily analysis section

Figure 8.1 Density plots of the People’s Daily tone
Figure 8.2 People’s Daily tone around Tiananmen (1989)

Note: All the figures plot the daily average of the tone towards an actor and the Loess smoothing curves. The plot shows that there is a decrease in the tone towards the U.S., the West and Japan after the Tiananmen crackdown. There seems to be no change in the tone towards Taiwan.
Figure 8.3 People’s Daily tone around the Falun Gong protest (1999)

Note: All the figures plot the daily average of the tone towards an actor and the Loess smoothing curves. The plot shows that the tone towards the U.S. after the Falun Gong gathering on April 25, 1999 became more negative, driven by the Belgrade embassy bombing incident. The tone towards Taiwan also showed more negativity, but the change started prior to the crackdown and more likely in response to President Lee Teng-hui’s “special state-to-state relationship statement.” There is no visible change regarding the tone towards Japan or the West.
Figure 8.4 People’s Daily tone around the Tibet riots and financial crisis (2008)

Note: All the figures plot the daily average of the tone towards an actor and the Loess smoothing curves. The tone towards the West saw a decrease in response to the Tibet riots. There is not a marked change in sentiments with the start of the financial crisis. The sentiments towards the U.S., Japan and Taiwan did not seem to change visibly. The difference between this plot and the regression results is that the regressions treat each article as a unit of analysis, while here, we are plotting the daily average sentiments. If there are several negative articles written on the same day, they would only show up as one dot in these plots.
Figure 8.5 People’s Daily tone around the Xinjiang riots (2009)

Note: All the figures plot the daily average of the tone towards an actor and the Loess smoothing curves. The tone towards the United States saw little change, but it became more negative for Japan, the West and Taiwan in the aftermath of the Xinjiang riots.
Table 8.1 provides additional regression results to supplement the findings in chapter 3. This time I kept only articles that have at least six references to an actor. Except for some small changes, the results are consistent with those presented in Table 3.2. The tone towards the United States after the Xinjiang riots of 2009 became less positive, but the results are no longer significant. The tone towards Japan also decreased during the Tiananmen protest but again this finding was no longer significant. Table 8.1 shows that after removing overlapping events (discussed in Chapter 3), the tone towards the US became more negative after Tiananmen and the Tibet riots in 2008, and the tone towards the West saw a deep decline after the Tibet and Xinjiang riots in 2008 and 2009.

The regression results presented so far treat each article as an independent unit of analysis. However, one might argue that the tone from one day might be correlated with the tone from the previous day. To take into consideration possible temporal correlations, I ran additional regressions that seek to model autocorrelations in the error term. The dependent variables are the daily average tones towards the United States and towards Japan. These measures average the tone over all the articles published on that day. The tones towards Taiwan and the West were not included because there were fewer articles on them, thus, many days would have missing values for this daily average tone measure.

The regression results presented in Table 8.2 each include one autoregressive term and one moving average term to account for serially correlated errors. After including these terms, the residuals closely resemble white noise. The analysis was done using the R package astsa following the work by Stoffer and Shumway.¹ One significant difference in the results as compared to those in Table 3.2 is that the tone towards the United States saw a decline during the Falun Gong protest and crackdown. This result might have been driven by the fact that the Chinese media covered the US bombing on Yugoslavia around the same time in a negative light.

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Table 8.1 Regression results for the People’s Daily tone, articles with at least six keywords

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) Tone towards the U.S.</th>
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<th>(3) Tone towards Taiwan</th>
<th>(4) Tone towards the West</th>
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<td>-16.10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.82)</td>
<td>(6.99)</td>
<td>(16.80)</td>
<td>(11.60)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Tibet riots 1989</td>
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<td>-3.62</td>
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<td>(11.90)</td>
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Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Table 8.2 Regression results for the People’s Daily tone, modeling autocorrelated errors

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Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
To further understand the *People’s Daily* coverage of the United States, I classified the articles referencing the U.S. into different categories/topics. The classification was done using the K-means clustering algorithm implemented in Python’s Scikit-Learn machine learning library. K-means clustering is an automated method to classify documents into different topics based on whether the documents contain similar words. I also conducted a similar analysis using the Structural Topic Model by Roberts and Stewart. However, I found K-means clustering to be the more suitable approach because each article is clearly categorized into one topic, whereas the Structural Topic Model assumes that each article contains multiple topics and has to model the topic proportions using a more complicated and less transparent algorithm. Additionally, the results from the K-means clustering can be combined with the tone measure to identify not only the most prominent topics but also the most negative topics.

I classified 7,013 articles in the *People’s Daily* from 1986 to 1993 containing at least five references to the United States into 25 different topics. The topics containing the most negative portrayal of the United States are: 1) US foreign policies towards Iraq and the First Gulf War (196 articles, mean tone = -19.11), 2) US-Panama relations and the American invasion of Panama (188 articles, mean tone = -26.62), 3) US foreign policies towards Libya including the bombing of Libya in 1986 (118 articles, mean tone = -33.59), and 4) societal problems in the United States like racism, violence and drug use (104 articles, mean tone = -25.43). From the Chinese perspective then, one of the most threatening aspects of US power seems to be its tendency to intervene militarily in other developing or weaker countries.

After the Tiananmen crackdown, there were more articles on sensitive issues in US-China relations such as American interference in China and the issue of human rights (Figure 8.6). At the same time, there were fewer articles discussing positive and collaborative aspects of US-China relations like trade, exchanges, leaders’ meetings, etc. Articles on cooperative issues in US-China relations surged only in November 1993 with Jiang Zemin’s trip to the United States (Figure 8.7).

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Figure 8.6 Number of articles on sensitive issues in China-US relations (1988-1990)

Figure 8.7 Number of articles on positive issues in China-US relations (1988-1993)
Using the same methodology, I classified 3,878 articles on the United States from 2007 to 2010 into 25 topics. The most negative topics on the United States around this time concern the American war on terrorism and interventions in or foreign policies towards the Middle East and Central Asia, especially the ongoing wars and conflicts Iraq and Afghanistan. As Figure 8.8 suggests, after the Tibet riots in 2008, there was an increase in the number of articles on sensitive issues in China-US relations, especially regarding human rights and the Tibet issue. Another spike occurred in March 2009 due to Chinese reactions to the publication of the U.S. State Department human rights reports with criticized the situation in China. There was no substantial increase after the 2009 Xinjiang riots but other articles critical of the U.S. appeared with greater frequency in late 2009 and early 2010. In October 2009, the Dalai Lama was visiting the United States and was scheduled to meet with President Barack Obama, but the United States delayed the meeting at that time so as not to offend the Chinese side prior to the summit meeting between President Obama and President Hu Jintao. The meeting was held in February 2010, leading to an increase in the number of articles on sensitive issues. The plot confirms that the more contentious issue for China is American moral support for the Dalai Lama. The Xinjiang incident, on the other hand, did not lead to tensions between the two countries.4

Figure 8.8 Number of articles on sensitive issues in China-US relations (2008-2009)
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