

# An Angle on Nationalism in China Today: Attitudes Among Beijing Students after Belgrade 1999\*

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**ABSTRACT** It is widely claimed that radical anti-US nationalism has become dominant in China, especially among young students. Based on a survey of 1,211 students and interviews with 62 informants conducted in three elite Beijing universities about four months after the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, this article shows that most students believed that the embassy bombing was a deliberate action and that their anger towards the bombing incident was genuine. Yet, contrary to initial expectations, the study also shows that the anger expressed by the students during the anti-US demonstrations was more a momentary outrage than a reflection of a long-term development of popular anti-US nationalism, that Beijing students saw the United States more as a superpower than as an enemy, and that they considered “to counteract US hegemony” the least important among the eight national goal statements that were provided. The findings demonstrate that, at least among China’s elite student population, a population that has always been at the forefront of Chinese politics in the 20th century, there is no domination of anti-US nationalism.

China has become increasingly nationalistic ever since the early 1990s, some scholars and policy analysts argue.<sup>1</sup> Bernstein and Munro warn that “driven by nationalist sentiment, a yearning to redeem the humiliations of the past, and the simple urge for international power, China is seeking to replace the United States as the dominant power in Asia.”<sup>2</sup> Friedman asserts that “an extraordinarily strong and sensitive nationalism infuses elite political circles in Beijing at the end of the twentieth century.”<sup>3</sup> James Lilley observes that “there is a rallying cry for Chinese everywhere ... that after a century of humiliation and Mao’s social and economic experiments China’s time had come ... it will rise in the world to the

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1. See Geremie R. Barmé, “To screw foreigners is patriotic: China’s avant-garde nationalists,” in Jonathan Unger (ed.), *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), pp. 183–208; Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Knopf, 1997); Suping Lu, “Nationalistic feelings and sports: the incident of the overseas Chinese protest against NBC’s coverage of the Centennial Olympic Games,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 8 (1999), pp. 517–533; Jonathan Mirsky, “Chinese knots: Kosovo crisis,” *The World Today*, Vol. 55 (1999), pp. 16–18; Suisheng Zhao, “Chinese intellectuals’ quest for national greatness and nationalistic writings in the 1990s,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 152 (1997), pp. 725–745; Yongnian Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

2. Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, “The coming conflict with America,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76 (March/April 1997), p. 19.

3. Edward Friedman, “Chinese nationalism, Taiwan autonomy and the prospects of a larger war,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 6 (1997), p. 5. See also Edward Friedman, “The prospects of a larger war: Chinese nationalism and the Taiwan Strait conflict,” in Suisheng Zhao (ed.), *Across the Taiwan Strait* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 243–275.

place it deserves.”<sup>4</sup> Ming Zhang states that “suspicion and hatred of the US have prevailed among the public interviewed, old and young, intellectual and less educated.”<sup>5</sup> Two major claims can be discerned in this literature. The first is a China threat claim, which argues that the Chinese government has become increasingly nationalistic and militaristic in the 1990s, and that, with the further development of its economic and military power, China will pose a greater and greater threat to the interest of the United States. The second is a popular anti-US nationalism claim, which argues that the current rise of nationalism is not just a state behaviour but has a popular base among Chinese.

The general argument that China has become increasingly nationalistic has induced a heated debate. At this stage, however, most of the debate is focusing on the first claim of the argument. Opposing the China threat claim, for example, Robert Ross argues that China will remain in a foreseeable future a conservative power with its major interest only in maintaining the stability in the East Asian region.<sup>6</sup> Suisheng Zhao points out that nationalism in current China is reactive and pragmatic rather than proactive in its international orientation.<sup>7</sup> Thomas Christensen holds that China’s current realpolitik displays little interest in the outside world except on two issues: Japanese military build-up and Taiwan independence.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, they all advocate a policy to engage rather than to contain China.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, less attention has been paid to the second claim of the general argument, and it has hardly been examined whether the anti-US nationalism has a popular base. At this stage, much analysis has been on nationalistic writings in China.<sup>10</sup> When the focus is on the people, such as Gries’ recent article on the Chinese reaction to the Belgrade embassy bombing,<sup>11</sup> its conclusion is not drawn from a representative sample, but

4. James R. Lilley, “Nationalism bites back,” *New York Times*, 24 October 1996.

5. Ming Zhang, “The new thinking of US–China relations – an interview note,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 6 (1997), p. 122;

6. Robert S. Ross, “Beijing as a conservative power,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76 (March/April 1997), pp. 35–44.

7. Suisheng Zhao, “Chinese nationalism and its international orientations,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 115, No. 1 (2000), pp. 1–33

8. Thomas J. Christensen, “Chinese realpolitik,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75 (September/October 1996), pp. 37–52.

9. For other works with similar views, see William H. Overholt, “China after Deng,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75 (May/June 1996), pp. 63–78; Bates Gill, “Limited engagement,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78 (July/August 1999), pp. 65–76; Ezra F. Vogel, *Living with China: U.S.–China Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997); Phillip C. Saunders, “Supping with a long spoon: dependence and interdependence in Sino-American relations,” *The China Journal*, No. 43 (January 2000), pp. 55–81.

10. For the anti-US books, see Xiguang Li and Kang Liu, *Yaomohua Zhongguo de beihou (Behind the Scene of a Demonized China)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996), and Qiang Song, Zangzang Zhang and Bian Qiao, *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu (China Can Say No)* (Beijing: Zhongguo gongshang lianhe chubanshe, 1996). See also Barmé, “To screw foreigners is patriotic” for an excellent analysis of nationalistic sentiments in Chinese dramas.

11. On the night of 7 May 1999, more than 40 days after the US-led NATO airstrike in Yugoslavia had begun, five “smart bombs” launched by the US military force hit the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Three were killed and over 20 were wounded. See Peter Hays Gries, “Tears of rage: Chinese nationalist reactions to the Belgrade embassy bombing,” *China Journal*, No. 46 (July 2001), pp. 25–43.

from postings on the website of a Chinese newspaper. As a volunteer sample, it only represents the feelings of a special group, not the larger population.

Yet, the anti-US protests triggered by the embassy bombing is an ideal case for studying anti-US nationalism.<sup>12</sup> Nationalistic feeling reaches zenith in times of crisis. The Chinese students' view of the United States at the time tells much about the nature and extent of anti-US nationalism in China. To understand the students' attitudes, this research was conducted between August and September 1999, that is, three or four months after the embassy bombing. During the research, 62 informants were interviewed, together with a stratified random survey of 1,211 students in three major Beijing universities. The research shows that the students were very familiar with the anti-US nationalism discourses in the 1990s. It confirms Gries' findings that most students believed that the embassy bombing was a deliberate act and that the anger expressed towards the incident was genuine. Yet, contrary to initial expectations, as well as to Gries' argument that the embassy bombing marked a long-term negative shift in popular Chinese perceptions of America, the study demonstrates that the anger expressed during the anti-US demonstrations were more a momentary outrage than a reflection of a long-term development of popular anti-US nationalism. Moreover, it also shows that most Beijing students did not believe that the United States had treated China as an enemy state, took economic development as China's topmost national goal, and placed "to counteract US hegemony" the very last of the eight national goal statements that were provided. Therefore, at least among China's elite student population, a population that has always been at the forefront of Chinese politics in the 20th century, there is no persistent domination of radical anti-US nationalism.

### Methods

The research was conducted in Beijing in the summer of 1999, with interviews of 62 individuals and a survey of 1,211 students. Both the interviews and the survey focused on issues related to the embassy bombing, although other themes were also explored. Beijing was chosen for the study because the city has always been the centre of political activism in China. Students were chosen as the sample population because they have played a very important role in China's national politics.<sup>13</sup> During the Republican era, student nationalism contributed to the demise of the Kuomintang regime and the rise of Communist

12. In Beijing, thousands of students shouted anti-US slogans, burned American flags, threw bricks, and besieged the American embassy for four days.

13. See Tse-tsung Chow, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967); John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China: 1927–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-century China: The View from Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

China.<sup>14</sup> During the late 1980s, a widespread crisis of faith among Chinese students towards the communist regime led to frequent student protests, which culminated in the 1989 pro-democracy movement.<sup>15</sup> The political attitudes of today's Chinese students will shape tomorrow's Chinese politics.

The survey was conducted in Beijing University, Qinghua University and People's University. Around 400 samples were taken from each university. They were selected because, although Beijing has 67 institutions of higher learning, these three are among the most prestigious and have exerted a great impact on students in other universities and on Chinese politics. The studies on the 1989 pro-democracy movement shows that the three universities had all reached a higher level of student activism during that movement than most other universities in Beijing.<sup>16</sup> They are the vanguard of student activism in the city.

Except for one top-rank university authority and one white-collar employee from a Beijing company, the informants for the interviews were students from the three universities, roughly 20 students from each. The informants were recruited mainly through a snowball method: after each interview, the informant was asked to suggest friends or acquaintances who might be willing to participate. To ensure the representativeness of informants and to maintain efficiency in data collection, we would decide whether a suggested candidate would be contacted. We tried to avoid interviewing two students from the same dormitory room. We also tried to balance the number of undergraduate and graduate informants in the sample. We failed to make arrangements with several students because of conflict of schedule. No students, however, refused to be interviewed.

The interviews were semi-structured and were audiotaped. Before an interview, the informant was reassured of anonymity. We started the interview by asking informants to recall in as much detail as possible their personal experiences during the anti-US demonstrations triggered by the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, in particular with regard to what they did and saw during that period. Then, the interview proceeded variously according to the narratives of the informant. Meanwhile, we always probed into a few issues that we saw as of vital importance: the sources from which the informant learnt the bombing-related news; the informant's personal reaction towards the embassy bombing; the informant's personal activities during the period of the demonstrations; the mobilization processes and the route of a protest in which the informant had participated; the role played by the university

14. While the May Fourth Movement in 1919 contributed to the rise of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the reorganization of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), the December Ninth Movement in 1935/36 facilitated the formation of the second united front between the Kuomintang and the CCP to resist the Japanese invasion, an event that paved the road for the communist victory.

15. See Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

16. *Ibid.*

authorities in the protest in which the informant was involved; the events or big-character posters by which the informant felt most impressed during the protests.

Almost all the regular students in these three universities live on campus. The student living quarters in Beijing University, for instance, occupies 32 buildings. Among them, 28 buildings are for the regular students, and the rest are for foreign students, unmarried young teachers and students in special programmes. With around six students living in each dormitory room, the 28 regular student dormitory buildings accommodate a total of over ten thousand students. Based on this spatial layout, we designed a stratified random sample. In Beijing University (the sampling in the other two universities followed a similar procedure), for instance, around 400 questionnaires were evenly distributed to the 28 regular student buildings (between 14 and 15 samples in each building). Since most of these dormitories are five to six-storey buildings, we basically took two or three samples on each floor. Then, to ensure that students had roughly equal chances to be surveyed, we randomly drew two or three dormitory rooms on each floor and one student from each of the two selected rooms. If a student refused to participate, we would randomly choose another one in the same dormitory room. Should the second student also refuse to participate, we would select another room and follow the above procedure. In reality, however, no students refused to participate in the survey. The students were asked to fill in the questionnaire straight away once they agreed to participate. Our assistants returned to the dormitories soon afterwards to pick up the finished questionnaires. The return rate for this study is thus 100 per cent.

Various sampling biases can be introduced in such a stratified random sample. For example, the sample has certainly missed those married graduate students who rented apartments off the campus. It was therefore necessary to know the students' profile and to see whether the make-up of the sampled students resembled the entire student population.

The participants came from a wide range of family backgrounds. Some 36.2 per cent of the participants' fathers had only received either primary school or junior high school education. Similarly, 69.6 per cent of the participants were from farmers', workers' and rank-and-file cadres' families. In terms of their places of origin, 23.8 per cent were from rural areas, 15.9 per cent from small towns, 33.8 per cent from county and prefecture level cities, 15.5 per cent from provincial capitals and 11.1 per cent from municipalities directly under the jurisdiction of the central government. It may also need to be noted that 44.4 per cent of the respondents had already taken or prepared to take the GRE and TOEFL tests.<sup>17</sup>

There are no data on the student composition in these three universities

17. TOEFL is used to test one's English proficiency and GRE to test one's verbal, analytical and quantitative abilities. A Chinese student needs to pass both GRE and TOEFL to be enrolled in an American university.

back to 1999. However, during the 2000/2001 academic year (that is, two academic years after the bombing took place), Beijing University had 20.2 per cent of students who were CCP members, 58.5 per cent undergraduate students, and 42.1 per cent female students.<sup>18</sup> In comparison, there were 24.2 per cent CCP members, 66.7 per cent undergraduates and 32.1 per cent female students in our Beijing University sample. We are unable to explain the 4 per cent point difference in CCP memberships in the two cases. Yet it is the case that in the past few years Beijing University has seen a steady decline in the ratio of undergraduates to graduates and an increase in that of female to male students.<sup>19</sup> This has certainly contributed to the differences between our sample and Beijing University's current student composition. In any event, our evidence shows that the make-up of the sampled students highly resembled that of the entire student population in Beijing University.

We would like to stress that most of the survey questions were designed to see the Chinese students' perception of the embassy bombing incident and the United States government, not to judge whether or not such perceptions are well founded. Nationalism is after all more about a certain people's perception than about the objective reality as seen by outsiders.

### *The Results*

The findings in this section are arranged into two topics. The first one examines the intensity of student nationalism around the time of the embassy bombing, in particular with regard to students' familiarity with the popular nationalistic discourses in the 1990s, their understanding of the Kosovo crisis and their reactions to the bombing. The second one analyses the nature of student nationalism in China by looking into issues such as Chinese students' understanding of the United States' China policy and China's policy priorities.

*The intensity of student nationalism.* During the 1990s, several incidents in US–China relations had exerted a great impact on the Chinese public. Some of those events are America's opposition to Beijing's bid for the 2000 Olympic Games, the Yinhe (Milky Way) ship incident, Taiwan's president Lee Teng-hui's 1995 visit to the United States, the Chinese espionage scandal (the Cox Report), and China's illegal US

18. Source: The Office of Student Administration, Beijing University.

19. The following table shows a steady decrease in undergraduate enrolment and increase in the enrolment of female students during Beijing University's past three academic years (The Office of Student Administration, Beijing University). The students of the 1998/1999 academic year are the first-year students in our sample.

<i>Academic year</i>	<i>2000/2001</i>	<i>1999/2000</i>	<i>1998/1999</i>	<i>In our sample</i>
% of undergraduates	47.3	53.2	57.7	66.7
% of females	44.0	41.9	39.5	32.1

presidential donation scandals. These incidents were portrayed very differently in China from the United States. For example, while the espionage scandal was portrayed in the US as part of China's systematic efforts to steal US military technologies, it was described in the Chinese media and nationalistic writings as America's attempt to demonize China and to divert the world's attention away from the embassy bombing. Since these events very frequently appeared in China's government-controlled newspapers and nationalistic writings as evidence of US hostilities towards China, students' knowledge of these incidents indicated their familiarity with the anti-US discourses in the 1990s.

In the survey, the participants were asked to rate their familiarity with the above listed incidents. Out of 1,210 respondents, 1,046 (86.4 per cent) reported that they were either very familiar or familiar with America's opposition to Beijing's bid for the 2000 Olympic Games<sup>20</sup>; 853 (70.5 per cent) knew very well or well about the US–China conflicts centred on Lee Teng-hui's 1995 visit to the United States; 689 out of 1,211 students (56.9 per cent) claimed that they had a very good or good knowledge of the Cox Report; 524 out of 1,210 students (43.3 per cent) were either very familiar or familiar with the Yinhe ship incident; and 462 out of 1,207 students (38.3 per cent) knew very well or well of China's alleged illegal US presidential donation scandal. The results show that students in these three universities were highly exposed to the anti-US nationalistic discourse.

The average score for students' rating of their familiarity with the above five incidents can also be calculated. Let us call the score the familiarity index. The smallest possible score (that is, one) shows that a participant is very familiar with all the anti-US discourses, and the largest possible score (five) indicates that the participant is totally ignorant of them. The probability distribution of the familiarity index illustrates students' general exposure to the anti-US discourses.

Figure 1 shows that the smallest score had the highest percentage of occurrence in the entire distribution. In other words, 114 (or 9.5 per cent) of the survey participants were highly familiar with all the anti-US nationalistic discourses in the 1990s. The entire distribution of the familiarity index is also highly skewed towards the left. There are 77.7 per cent of the students who scored three or below, while less than 3 per cent scored four or above. It again shows that most students in the three universities were familiar with anti-US discourses in the 1990s.

To understand the anti-US demonstrations after the embassy bombing, it is also necessary to know students' views of the Kosovo crisis and the embassy-bombing incident. Table 1 summarizes students' answers to the

20. The question is whether such self-report measures the respondents' familiarity with the issues. Our justification is that the students are from China's elite universities, and they understood the questions well. Moreover, although students may over- or under-estimate their familiarity with some issues, for the 1,211 students as a whole a high correlation between their own judgement and the reality is expected. This is supported by the consistently higher positive (negative) correlations between students' responses to two similar (opposite) questions, as shown in Table 4 and in other cases.

Table 1: Beijing Students' Views of Various Issues Related to the Kosovo Crisis

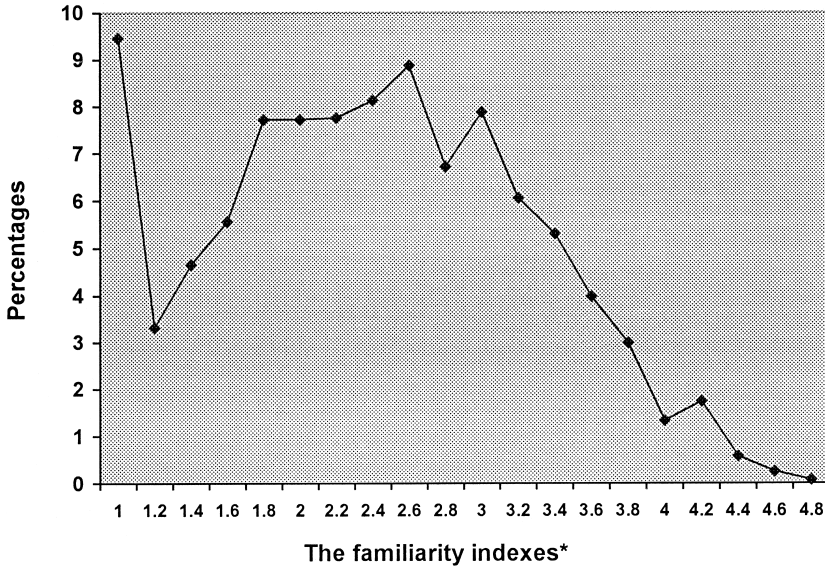
	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>r</i>
Serbia was conducting an ethnic cleansing in Kosovo	5.3	20.9	51.2	15.3	7.2	0.114***
The refugee wave in Kosovo was created by the NATO air strike rather than by the ethnic cleansing	16.5	32.7	35.5	12.1	3.3	-0.014
The ethnic conflict in Kosovo is Yugoslavia's internal affair	39.3	36.2	14.0	6.5	4.0	-0.057*
NATO bombed Yugoslavia out of its own interest	47.8	35.2	10.0	4.5	2.5	-0.014
NATO bombed Kosovo because Russia became weak	10.4	39.7	28.3	18.6	3.0	0.066*
The Western media's coverage of the Kosovo crisis was objective	1.6	5.3	21.5	34.7	37.0	0.117***
Chinese media's coverage of the Kosovo crisis was objective	11.5	32.7	30.5	19.5	5.8	0.017

*Notes:*

The numbers in the table (except for the last column) are percentages. They report students' evaluation on each of the above statements ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The numbers in the last column are correlation coefficients between students' evaluation of each of the above statements and the frequency of their access to the Western media for news related to the embassy-bombing incident. Here, asterisks tell us that the correlation coefficient is statistically significant at  $p = 0.05$  level (\*),  $p = 0.01$  level (\*\*), and  $p = 0.001$  level (\*\*\*).



Figure 1: **Beijing Students' Familiarity with the Anti-US Discourse in the 1990s**



*Note:*

\*The familiarity indexes are the average scores for students' rating of their familiarity with the five major incidents that were often mentioned in the anti-US writings in the 1990s. While the smallest possible score (that is, one) shows that a participant is highly familiar with all the anti-US discourses, the largest possible score (that is, five) indicates that the participant is totally uninformed of the anti-US discourses.

questions related to the nature of the Kosovo crisis. Only 6.9 per cent of respondents agreed that the Western media had given an objective treatment on the real nature of the Kosovo crisis. Around half the students (49.2 per cent) believed that the refugee wave in Kosovo was created by the NATO airstrike rather than by Serbia's ethnic cleansing activities. The majority of students (83 per cent) strongly agreed or agreed that the United States bombed Yugoslavia out of their own interests rather than for humanitarian reasons. Half (50.1 per cent) also agreed that the US-led NATO force bombed Yugoslavia because Russia was now too weak. Clearly, most Beijing students did not see the NATO airstrike as a humanitarian act.

Since China's government-controlled media had criticized the NATO airstrike in Yugoslavia from the very beginning, it could be argued that the students' perception of the Kosovo crisis was a result of government propaganda. Our result, however, shows a rather complicated picture.<sup>21</sup>

21. When we regress students' evaluation on each of the above statements with their levels of access to the Western media during the embassy bombing and use the regression coefficients to indicate the Western media's impact on students' views of the Kosovo crisis, we assume that the students who had more access to the Western media during the bombing incident also had more access to the Western media at other times.

First, most of the respondents had some exposure to the Western media,<sup>22</sup> but as the last column of Table 1 indicates, students' views on issues related to the Kosovo crisis are at most only slightly correlated with their levels of access to the Western media.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, less than half the respondents (44.2 per cent) considered the Chinese media's account of the Kosovo crisis as impartial, and only 22.5 per cent believed that there was no ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Our survey result shows that the contradiction between Chinese students' belief in the possible existence of ethnic cleansing, on the one hand, and their objection to NATO intervention, on the other hand, existed because most students were committed to the idea of national sovereignty and non-intervention. Therefore, the majority of them (75.5 per cent) either strongly agreed or agreed with the notion that the ethnic conflict in Kosovo was Yugoslavia's internal affair.

Regarding the students' understanding of the embassy-bombing incident, the majority of the respondents strongly believed or believed that the embassy bombing was premeditated by either the US government (75.1 per cent) or the US military (77.8 per cent) (Table 2). Only 3.8 per cent of the respondents agreed that the bombing could be a technical error. Again, it could be argued that students' views of the embassy bombing were shaped by government propaganda. Chinese media did have a small but significant impact on students' views of the embassy bombing. The students with frequent access to the Chinese media, for example, had a stronger tendency to see the bombing as an intentional act of the US government ( $r = 0.212$ ) or of the US military ( $r = 0.214$ ) and to reject the notion that the bombing was just a technical error ( $r = -0.172$ ) (Table 2). Yet, the low correlation between the frequency of Chinese media access and students' perception of the embassy bombing suggests that the impact of Chinese media on the students should not be exaggerated. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, only 15.3 per cent of the respondents had no access to any kind of Western media for news during the entire incident (Among those who had resorted to Western media for news on the embassy bombing, 16.1 per cent had frequent access, and another 25.7 per cent claimed to have regular access). As listed in the next to last column of Table 2, with only one exception, the Western

22. Our survey shows that only 15.3% of the respondents did not have any access to the Western media for news related to the embassy bombing. One may argue that the Western media does not exist as a single political line. What is important, however, is whether the students had access to information other than what was provided by the Chinese media. In fact, 52.8% of the respondents had listened to the VOA (Voice of America) and BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) at the time. A large correlation between students' reported access to the Western media and to the VOA and BBC ( $r = 0.59$ ) shows that by the Western media many students actually referred to the VOA and BBC. Our statistical analysis shows that the students' access to the VOA and BBC also has no impact on their views of the embassy bombing.

23. For example, the correlation coefficient between students' levels of access to the Western media and their rating on the statement that "The Western media coverage on the Kosovo crisis was objective" is 0.117, which means that those who had frequent access to the Western media only have a slightly greater tendency to believe in the objectivity of their reports on the Kosovo crisis.

Table 2: Beijing Students' Understanding of the Embassy-Bombing Incident

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	$r_{m-gov.}$	$r_{m-west}$	$r_{rhetoric}$
The embassy bombing was a deliberate act of the US government	47.4	27.7	15.7	7.0	2.2	.212***	-.022	.024
The embassy bombing was a deliberate act of NATO or US military	41.7	36.1	14.5	6.3	1.5	.214***	-.010	.072*
The embassy bombing was a technical error	1.3	2.5	9.9	17.2	69.1	-.172***	.119***	0
The embassy bombing was a revenge on China's opposition to NATO's air strike in Yugoslavia	5.7	22.5	34.1	26.8	10.8	.051	-.017	-.039
The Chinese embassy was attacked because China was not strong enough	30.9	39.8	14.0	10.6	4.6	.097*	-.022	.047
The embassy bombing was aimed to induce political instability in China	19.4	34.8	24.0	15.1	6.6	.188***	-.028	.01

*Notes:*

The numbers in the table (except for the last three columns) are percentages. They report students' own evaluation on each of the above statements ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Numbers in the last three columns are the correlation coefficients between students' evaluation on each of the above statements and the frequency of their access to the Chinese media (under the heading of  $r_{m-gov.}$ ) or the Western media (under the heading of  $r_{m-west}$ ) for news related to the embassy-bombing incident, and the correlation coefficients between students' evaluation on each of the above statements and their familiarity with the nationalistic rhetoric in the 1990s (under the heading of  $r_{rhetoric}$ ).

media had no impact on students' perceptions of the embassy bombing. The exception is that those students who had frequent access to Western media did have a small but significant inclination to see the embassy bombing as a technical error ( $r = 0.119$ ).<sup>24</sup>

During the interviews, we found that even many pro-American students did not consider the bombing as an accident. A pro-America informant (no. 25), who also chose not to participate in the anti-US demonstrations, saw the bombing incident this way:

The Americans bombed our embassy. As a Chinese, I was very upset.... However, there were indeed ethnic cleansing and serious killings in Yugoslavia. From the perspective of the Americans, I was wondering why they wanted to defy the world's opinion and bomb our embassy. Is it possible that our embassy had done something that was against the interest of the Americans?

Here, by American interest, the informant referred to a widespread pro-US rumour that the US bombed the Chinese embassy because the Chinese government allowed the Serbian government to use its embassy as military headquarters in combating the NATO forces.

In our interviews, we found that the students' conviction that the bombing was not an accident was first derived from their faith in American military technology. Since it was not one but five missiles that were launched at the Chinese embassy, many informants concluded that the embassy must have been an intended target. Moreover, few students were convinced by the "outdated map" explanation that the US government had quickly provided. Many informants argued that if the United States had indeed used a four-year-old map to identify the target, the Chinese embassy would not have been selected because the current location of the embassy was still an open area four years before. Another informant (no. 37) explained:

The kind of American missiles that attacked our embassy were guided by images of the target. They need first to enter the photos of the embassy building into the missile's guidance system. There was no way that they were going to use outdated maps. NATO had over 20 spy satellites over Yugoslavia. They may not even use a map printed four days ago, not to say four years ago.

Many students also held the following logic: if the United States took China seriously, the first thing they would do before the airstrike began would be to mark out the location of the Chinese embassy on their maps. From there, the students inferred that the United States did not treat China seriously. This perception greatly hurt their sense of national pride. Therefore, the majority of the students (70.7 per cent) strongly agreed or agreed that the United States bombed the Chinese embassy because China was not strong enough. The students were also very unhappy about the

24. This article is only intended to provide baseline information for the students' attitudes toward the US. Sophisticated regression analyses that can test more specific hypotheses are thus avoided.

initial response of the NATO and US leaders to the bombing incident,<sup>25</sup> which most of them regarded as not serious at all. An informant (no. 23) said:

I do not care whether the bombing was intentional or not. However, there are so many embassies in Belgrade. Only ours was bombed. I thus felt insulted. My strongest feeling after the bombing was that our nation is actually still very weak. I usually think that we have made a great achievement after over 20 years of reform and open-door. It is only when such an incident happened that I realized that we are still very weak.

*The nature of student nationalism.* We have shown that most Beijing students were familiar with the popular anti-US discourses in the 1990s, and that the students had demonstrated a strong indignation towards the embassy bombing. A more important issue, however, is whether the students' anger was a momentary reaction to the embassy bombing or a reflection of a serious development of popular anti-US nationalism in China. To be more rigorous, the issue is examined from three different angles.

One way to test whether there was a serious development of popular anti-US nationalism in China is to examine the relationships between students' familiarity with the anti-US discourses in the 1990s and their views of the embassy-bombing incident. The anti-US demonstrations after the embassy bombing could mark a long-term development of anti-US nationalism if their views of the embassy bombing are highly correlated with their familiarity with the anti-US discourses. The last column of Table 2 lists the values of the relevant correlation coefficients. It shows that students who were more familiar with the anti-US nationalism discourses in the 1990s were inclined to consider the embassy bombing as a conspiracy of the US military ( $r = 0.072$ ). However, since the correlation is only significant at  $p = 0.05$  level, the inclination was very minimal. With this exception, students' familiarity with the anti-US discourses in the 1990s had no impact at all on their views regarding the nature of the embassy bombing. The result shows that the anti-US demonstrations were more likely to be a momentary reaction than a reflection of a serious development of radical anti-US nationalism in the 1990s.

Another way to evaluate the nature of student nationalism is to examine Chinese students' perception of the United States' China policy. In the survey, students were asked to rate five statements. They are: America's China policy is based on America's national interest; America's China policy is aimed at opposing communism; America's China policy is to help China's development; America's China policy is to maintain American hegemony; and America's China policy is still dominated by a Cold War mentality. The questions are designed to see

25. NATO and US leaders in the first two days after the embassy bombing expressed "regret" not "apology" towards the incident and meanwhile emphasized their determination to continue the airstrike in Yugoslavia.

whether, in the eyes of the Chinese students, the United States had treated China as an ally, as a member of the international community or as an enemy. Obviously, the students would see the United States as China's close ally if they favoured the statement that America's China policy is to help China. They would have a "realism" understanding of the United States' China policy if they favoured the statements that America's China policy is based on America's national interest and is aimed to maintain American hegemony.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the students would consider the United States as an enemy if they favoured the statements that America's China policy is aimed at opposing communism and still dominated by a Cold War mentality. If most students favoured the last type of statements, it indicates a very strong sense of anti-US nationalism.

It should first be ascertained whether the five statements indeed fall under three designed categories. Table 3 lists the correlation coefficients of the respondents' ratings on any two of the five statements. It also provides the mean values of the respondents' rating on each of the five

**Table 3: Correlation Coefficients and Basic Statistics of the Five Statements That Measure Beijing Students' Understanding of the US's China Policy**

<i>America's China policy is</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) based on America's national interest	1.0	–	–	–	–
(2) to keep American hegemony	.425	1.0	–	–	–
(3) aimed at opposing communism	.130	.114	1.0	–	–
(4) still governed by Cold War mentality	.094	.150	.273	1.0	–
(5) to help China's development	–.332	–.40	0	0.014	1.0
Sample size	1,205	1,204	1,204	1,203	1,199
Mean	1.268	1.599	2.328	2.660	4.163
Standard deviation	0.594	0.875	1.035	1.085	0.978

26. Of the two realism type statements, the latter one that sees US's China policy as to maintain American hegemony certainly carries a more negative tone. Yet, we would like to stress that a hegemon (*ba* in Chinese) is not necessarily an enemy, it could just be a superpower. A hegemon acts on interest rather than on morality. Therefore, compromises are possible. The word hegemony also does not always carry negative meaning in China. For example, the state of Qi under the reign of Duke Huan (r. 685–643 BC) was a major hegemon during China's Spring and Autumn period. However, the Duke's hegemonic activities were widely respected both in his own time and in later Chinese history. My conversations with many Chinese international relations scholars give me the impression that the US's superpower status has become more and more accepted in China after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

statements. The table shows that students who agreed with the statement that America's policy is based on America's national interest also tended to agree with the statement that America's China policy is to maintain US hegemony ( $r = .425$ ). Students who believed that America's China policy is aimed at opposing communism also tended to believe that America's China policy is still dominated by a Cold War mentality ( $r = .273$ ). Finally, students who agreed with the statement that America's China policy is based on America's national interest or hegemonic interest tended to strongly disagree with the statement that America's China policy is to help China's development ( $r = -.332$  and  $r = -.40$ ). The result shows that the five statements indeed fall under three types.

The average rating scores of the survey respondents to these five statements also confirm this typology. Students had rated very closely on the two statements under the "realism" and "enemy" type, but the ratings on different types of the statements are more divergent (Table 3).

Table 3 shows that most students disagreed with the notion that America's China policy is to help China's development (mean = 4.163, std = .978).<sup>27</sup> The two statements of the "enemy" type (that is, America's China policy is aimed at opposing communism (mean = 2.328, std = 1.035) and that America's China policy is still dominated by a Cold War mentality (mean = 2.660, std = 1.085)) are also not very popular choices. What the students favoured the most was a realism type of statement that America's China policy is based on its national interest (mean = 1.268, std = .594). The next is a somewhat negative realism type statement, that is, America's China policy is to maintain American hegemony (mean = 1.599, std = .875).<sup>28</sup> Obviously, even after the embassy bombing, radical anti-US nationalism was unpopular among the students in Beijing's most prestigious universities.

It is possible that while most students did not see the United States as an enemy, they still believed that China should take a more aggressive stand in international politics. If this were the case, we could still argue for the rise of radical nationalism among Chinese students. In the survey, a set of questions was designed to probe into the issue. The questions are headed by "At the current stage, China's most important national goal should be:" followed by eight statements,<sup>29</sup> which are "to develop a market economy," "to reform China's state enterprises and financial systems," "a fast economic development," "political stability," "to fight government official corruption," "political democracy," "a strong national defence capacity," and "to counteract international hegemony." The respondents were asked to rate each statement on a five-point Likert type scale choice ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

27. Even though there were still 222 or 18.5% of the respondents who did not reject this statement.

28. The difference between students' evaluation of the two "realism" statements is highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). In other words, "America's China policy is based on America's national interest" is the most favoured statement.

29. The eight statements presented here are not in the same order as they appeared in the survey questionnaire.

The eight statements belong to three types. The first three have a focus on China's economic development. The next three are on China's domestic politics. The last two are related to China's role in international politics. These are all possibly positively valued national goals under the Chinese context. Therefore, there is a significant positive correlation between any two of the eight national-goal statements. What is more interesting, however, is not the absolute value of students' rating on each statement but rather the relative weight that students put on each of these statements. Nationalism can be said to be at the centre of Chinese students' attention if the two statements on China's role in international politics, especially the statement "to counteract international hegemony," were most favoured.

The results show that all three economic issues related national-goal statements were most favoured by the students. They are followed by two domestic politics related statements – "to fight government official corruption" and "political stability." An interesting finding is that political democratization was ranked in seventh place out of the eight choices. This tells us why there were no frequent pro-democracy student movements in China in the 1990s as there had been during the late 1980s. What is particularly relevant to this article is that students had ranked "to counteract international hegemony" (mean = 2.162, std = 1.104) as the least important of the eight statements, much lower than their rating on the next less favoured "political democracy" (mean = 1.762, std = 0.928) statement ( $p < 0.001$ ). It seems that what Chinese students were most concerned about, even immediately after the embassy bombing, were China's economy and other domestic issues such as official corruption, not to go against the United States.

Table 4 shows that some of the ratings have a higher correlation than the others. Let us first pay attention to the correlation coefficients with values higher than 0.4. Students' ratings on all the three economy-related national-goal statements are highly correlated, which indicates that these statements are very similar to the respondents. Also, students' rating on the statement "to fight government official corruption" is highly correlated with their ratings on two other statements, "to reform China's state enterprises and financial systems" ( $r = 0.417$ ) and "political democracy" ( $r = 0.495$ ). An interpretation is that the students had seen political democratization and reforming China's state enterprises and financial systems as the most crucial steps to achieving a more clean and efficient government. It also implies that if official corruption becomes a primary concern among Chinese, the demand for political democracy will once again gain momentum as had happened during the 1989 Student Movement. Students' rating on the "political stability" statement is highly correlated with their rating on the statement of "a strong national defence capacity" ( $r = .516$ ). Clearly, those students who were more nationalistic favoured a more stable political environment in China.

The students' rating on the "to counteract international hegemony" statement does not have a very high correlation with their ratings on any other national-goal statements. Comparatively, however, this statement's



Table 4: Correlation Coefficients and Basic Statistics of the Eight Statements That Measure Beijing Students' Understanding of China's Policy Priority

<i>China's most important national goal is</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) fast economic development	1.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
(2) to reform China's state enterprises and financial systems	.455	1.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
(3) to develop a market economy	.465	.611	1.0	-	-	-	-	-
(4) to fight government corruption	.348	.417	.387	1.0	-	-	-	-
(5) to maintain political stability	.373	.305	.308	.223	1.0	-	-	-
(6) to strengthen China's defence capacity	.378	.223	.275	.324	.516	1.0	-	-
(7) to foster political democracy	.288	.374	.358	.495	.189	.267	1.0	-
(8) to counteract US hegemony	.221	.251	.265	.264	.291	.369	.354	1.0
Sample size	1,205	1,195	1,202	1,206	1,208	1,206	1,203	1,202
Mean	1.275	1.382	1.418	1.460	1.493	1.586	1.762	2.162
Standard deviation	.625	.698	.694	.837	.816	.791	.928	1.104

rating is more highly correlated with students' ratings on the statements of "a strong national defence capacity" ( $r = 0.369$ ) and "political democracy" ( $r = 0.354$ ). A close relationship between students' inclination to oppose international hegemony and their striving for a strengthening of China's defence capacity is only understandable. Attention should also be drawn to the existence of a close relationship between students' inclination to go against international hegemony and their desire for political democracy in China. The result suggests that today's Chinese nationalism has a pro-democratic nature, a point that is touched upon again in the next section.

### *Discussion*

Recently, a so-called rise of popular anti-US nationalism in China has attracted a great deal of media and scholarly attention. However, based on a survey of 1,211 students and interviews with 62 informants conducted in three Beijing universities about four months after the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, this study found that the anti-US demonstrations triggered by the embassy bombing were unrelated to the anti-US discourses developed in China during the 1990s, that Beijing students saw the United States more as a superpower than as an enemy, considered economic development as China's primary national goal, and placed "to counteract US hegemony" in the very last of the eight national goal statements that were provided. If one of these findings may still allow doubts, altogether they demonstrate that, at least among China's elite student population, a population that has always been at the forefront of Chinese politics in the 20th century, there is no domination of anti-US nationalism.

The appearance of several anti-US books in China in the 1990s is often considered a sign of the rise of popular anti-US nationalism. The reality is that the decline of communism as a ruling ideology in conjunction with the penetration of market forces have allowed Chinese public opinion to achieve a certain level of pluralism in many aspects of social life.<sup>30</sup> In China's publishing industry, one could see millions of titles on almost every topic in any major Beijing bookstore by the late 1990s.<sup>31</sup> Books on US-China relations represented only a minute portion of the total collection. Moreover, even on the topic of US-China relations, radical nationalistic writings were not really dominating. In any major bookstore in Beijing, there are books with more balanced accounts on the problems in

30. This kind of regime has been labelled by Linz and Stepan as post-totalitarian regime and by some China specialists as normal Asian authoritarian regime. See Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Overholt, "China after Deng."

31. The same is true for China's newspaper industry. Even at its peak the whole of China had only a little more than 200 newspapers before the 1980s. However, the number increased to 1,534 in 1991 and 2,200 by 1995. By the end of 1995, a total of 72 million copies were sold daily. See Yuezhi Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), p. 57.

US–China relations.<sup>32</sup> There are also books and articles that criticize radical nationalistic views.<sup>33</sup> Even books such as Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* and Bernstein and Munro's *The Coming Conflict with China* have been translated into Chinese and sold publicly.<sup>34</sup> Some anti-US books made a big splash only because their radical views created news value. This happens in the United States as well, where provocative books such as *The Coming Conflict with China* in general receive more attention than the more serious writings.

The previous section reported a relatively high correlation between students' inclination to go against international hegemony and their desire for political democracy in China. The pro-democratic orientation of today's Chinese nationalists can also be detected in nationalistic writings. Even Wang Xiaodong, a leading nationalist advocate, has argued in various contexts that it is impossible for citizens' sense of nationhood and national responsibility to develop fully in a country without human rights and political democracy.<sup>35</sup> During the interviews, we found that most informants had very ambiguous feelings towards the United States: they disliked some of the United States' foreign policies but they thought very highly of American democracy, greatly admired America's achievements, and wanted either to study in American universities or to work in American companies. A great admiration of the United States' political system plus other personal interests had prevented the development of anti-American feelings among Chinese students. The following quotes from some of the informants illustrate such an ambiguity:

Although the United States is not good in some aspects, I still look positively on their democratic system and the freedom [that their people enjoy]. (no. 3)

32. The following are some examples of the books that have provided more balanced analyses on US–China relations. Peng Deng, Xiaobing Li and Guoli Liu, *American Foreign Policy and US-China Relations* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000); Yufan Hao and Yandong Zhang, *An Invisible Hand: Views of American Leading Experts on U.S.-China Relations* (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 2000); Ge Su, *American China Policy and the Taiwan Issue* (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1998); Shulong Chu, *The Sino-U.S. Relations in the Post-Cold War Era* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001); Xuetong Yan, *Analysis of China's National Interest* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1997). The above type of books are mostly written by professors or senior researchers of China's major research institutes. Most of them had studied in the United States for many years. Some of them are currently still teaching at American universities. Their views have a much stronger impact on China's foreign policy formation because many of them also hold positions in some government think-tanks on US–China relations.

33. For example, *Strategy and Management* is a journal that frequently publishes debates between China's nationalists and liberals. For articles that attack China's nationalists, see Chen Dabai, "Minzu zhuyi de Zhongguo daolu" ("The paths of nationalism in China"), *Strategy and Management*, No. 40 (2000), pp. 98–104, and He Jiadong, "Zhongguo wenti yujing xia de zhuyi zhizheng" ("Debates between nationalists and liberals under the discourses of China's problems"), *Strategy and Management*, No. 43 (2000), pp. 101–111.

34. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Bernstein and Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China*.

35. See, for example, Wang Xiaodong, "Minzu zhuyi he minzhu zhuyi" ("Nationalism and democracy"), in Fang Ning, Wang Xiaodong and Song Qiang (eds.), *Quanguohua yinying xia de Zhongguo zhilu* (*China's Path under the Shadow of Globalization*) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 21–41, and Wang Xiaodong, "Dangdai Zhongguo minzu-zhuyi lun" ("On contemporary Chinese nationalism"), *Strategy and Management*, No. 42 (2000), pp. 69–82.

The United States has a wonderful democratic system and a very advanced economy.... It is an ideal system for the personal development of the American people. The problem is that the American government may not really wish that all the people in the world live like their citizens. They always place American interest on top of the other peoples' interest. (no. 19)

America is really a wonderful country. They are just like a giant to me. My problem is that Americans are too proud, ... and sometimes too imperious.... When they thought that you needed to be warned, they bombed you. They never cared about other people's feelings ... (no. 55)<sup>36</sup>

Militarily, politically or economically, the United States is a very powerful country while China is still a developing country.... China should focus only on economic development. As long as our economy is developed, the rest will all be fine. I do not really hate Americans. Political incidents are created by politicians. It has nothing to do with the people there.... The United States is a country that opens to all advanced things. We biology students all know that the United States is a very attractive place. Otherwise, how can we explain why so many Chinese students have gone to study in the United States? (no. 47).

During the interviews, several informants said that they were once worried that the demonstrations could inflame radical anti-US nationalism and hurt the development of liberalism in China. Other students spoke about their concerns that deteriorating US–China relations would hurt their career opportunities. A student quoted above (no. 47) even said that when he demonstrated in front of the US embassy, he worried much about being captured by journalists' cameras. He believed that such information, once obtained by the US visa office, could make it difficult for him to get a US student visa.

Due to such ambivalent feelings, the mood of the students changed quickly even as the anti-US demonstrations were still going on. As an informant (no. 41) told me, during the demonstrations, a very interesting change of slogans had caught the attention of many students. When the anti-US demonstration began, a popular slogan was: "Do not take GRE and TOFEL, but fight American imperialism with all our energy." However, the slogan soon changed to: "Take TOFEL but not GRE, and fight American imperialism in our spare time." By the end of the four-day demonstrations, the slogan again changed to: "Take both TOFEL and GRE, and fight American imperialism by entering its rear area." The change of the slogan shows that students' personal interests immediately gained the upper hand when they gradually overcame their anger about the embassy-bombing incident.

This article, however, does not argue that there are no anti-US sentiments in China. The survey shows that 38.2 per cent of the respondents had read *China Can Say No*, the most well-known anti-US book published in the 1990s. Among them, 7.4 per cent considered the book as very good and another 30.1 per cent as good. If those who had given

36. Here, by "warning" the informant refers to the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. There was another widely circulated rumour at the time, which said that the United States bombed the Chinese embassy because the US government hated China's opposition to the US-led NATO airstrike in Yugoslavia and wanted to teach China a lesson.

extremely positive evaluation of the book are regarded as radical nationalists and those who had positively evaluated the book are regarded as nationalists, then 2.8 per cent (the product of 38.2 per cent and 7.4 per cent) of the respondents were radical nationalists and another 11.5 per cent were nationalists. Some of these students, with their anti-US writings on the internet and their celebrations of the 11 September tragic event, are reasons for concern. When the broader picture is examined, however, it has to be concluded that radical anti-US nationalism does not enjoy popularity among China's elite students. These students are more interested in China's economic development than in a confrontation with the United States. They admire American's political system and economic achievement. They also have other personal interests to see a continuation of good relations between the two countries. The students' attitudes in the wake of the embassy bombing show that, as long as those "feeling hurt" incidents such as the embassy bombing do not happen often and as long as China and the United States are not at war, it is difficult for radical anti-US nationalism to achieve domination in China.