Nationalism and Great Powers
Literature Review

Nationalism is a both a gift and a curse. Like any human endeavor it has a bright side and a dark side. However, no great power has arisen without its influence. Whether one looks at German Unification, America’s Manifest Destiny, or China’s current territorial disputes nationalism always plays a role. Or does it? Looking at nationalism in two cases, Post WWII Germany and present day China, we will see if nationalism is truly a required component in the rise of a great power. However, before doing that a review of relevant concepts to both cases is necessary. The Chinese cases is relatively straight forward, but the German case is gets very complex.

Before diving into the case studies there are a few things that must be covered. The first is defining what a great power is. The definition of a great power is a nation that has exceptional military and economic strength, and consequently plays a major, often decisive, role in international affairs.\(^1\) Few would dispute that China is a great power, but some could with Germany. After all, Germany’s military is not an active force on the world stage. Germany’s military has been restricted as a result of WWII. Therefore, it might be best to classify Germany as a caged great power because Germany does exert considerable influence in the EU and plays a large role in the UN. However, testing that is jumping queue because another term needs to be define and its definition is trickier.

Nationalism is present in every nation. The term’s basic definition is spirit or aspirations common to the whole of a nation. Basically, every nation in order to be a nation has some form of nationalism that is simply a requirement to be a nation. However, we are looking at nationalism in a nation’s strategic thought. In other words how nationalism affects foreign

\(^1\) Dictionary.com
policy which can markedly affect the behavior of a rising great power. The most common way how nationalism plays out is territorial expansion. However, there are other ways such as revanchism, which often takes the form of territorial expansion, but doesn’t have to necessarily. Common examples of territorial expansion would be America, under President Polk and Prussia under Bismarck. Examples of revanchism would be France after the Franco-Prussian War or Serbia during the disintegration of Yugoslavia. These concepts play a significant role in strategic thought one, but there are underlining principles as to why.

A work from Dov Levin and Benjamin Miller explains the underlining principles of how nationalist movements can affect strategic thought. The most common way is through the desire to bring the nation under one roof or under its own roof. Levin and Miller define their ideas as internal and external incongruence. Internal incongruence is defined as multiple national groups (ethic groups) existing within one state. External incongruence is when a national group is spread across multiple nations or a territory of historical significance is outside of the nation, which holds that territory as important. Either case can lead to nationalist movements that can override strategic thought as defined by political elites. America is a prime example of both.

America can be classified as example of both cases. The problem of internal incongruence came into existence and eventually led to America’s War for Independence, which was not a desired outcome among many of America’s political elite or even the general population, but came to be seen as necessary. Note the Olive Branch Petition in which moderates still sought George III to be a mediator because many still saw him as the best hope to prevent tyranny in the colonies— despite all the Patriot propaganda saying he was the driver of tyranny.
In the case of external incongruence, the Mexican-American War is a prime example. Many of America’s political elite, such as Daniel Webster and Henry Clay, disapproved of the war. However the America public did not and Polk was able to use popular sentiment to override elite opinion. The popularity for the war can be attributed to Manifest Destiny, which was spurred on by the fact that Americans made the demographic majority in territories target by Polk in the war. In both of these cases America benefited considerably. In fact both of these wars could easily be defended as necessary for America to become a great power. Returning, to Levin and Miller they showed the example of Greece, during the Thirty Days War with the Ottoman Empire. Greece’s leader was reluctant to go to war with the Ottomans, but the general population’s nationalism forced his hand. Nationalist movements can generate pan-nationalism, which can force a nation or allow a nation to try its hand at territorial expansion. The issue of external incongruence will play a significant role in China’s rise, and the issue of elite support as well. However, there is a flip side to this coin of transnationalism. Anthony D. Smith explores such as concept in his book *Nations and Nationalism in A Global Era*.

Movements of pan-nationalism such as “Greater Serbia” or “Greater Albina” can be classified as attempts to make super-nations, but the counter to a super-nation is the supra-nation. Smith in Chapter 5 of his book went into great detail about both of these subjects. Using the current European Union (EU) project he explored what exactly that project means to its various proponents and opponents. To sum it up best, Pan-Europeanism sees Europe as a new form of nationalism creating not only political and economic convergence, but cultural convergence.

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5 Merry 72-76
6 Merry 76
7 Levin and Miller 235, the prize by the way was the island of Crete, but Greece lost that war.
throughout Europe, thus creating a super-nation. On the other hand there is the vision of the European Union as a supra-nation, or federation. In this sense Europe transcends nationalism, by making a political and economic union, but without cultural convergence. Therefore, ethnic identity remains, but the individual sovereign states are dissolved. Smith is quick to point out the fragility of such as supra-national states. He pointed out the cases of the West African Federation and the union of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. These movements didn’t even get off the ground before falling apart. Smith was also quick to point out the failure of super-nations like the United Arab Republic or the union of Singapore and Malaysia. The question that begs to be asked is what does this have to do with great powers and their rise?

The answer to that question is simple Germany in the Post-WWII Era has bought in extensively to the EU. This occurred for a variety of reasons, but the fact is that this has dominated German foreign policy. It is important to understand the difference between a super-nation and a supra-nation & which version of Europe does Germany embrace. As we shall see Germany after WWII was a battleground to define German national character, which was deemed as needing either a total rewrite or extensive editing. In other words it boils down to what Brendan Simms said, about France’s views on European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community “In effect, Paris wanted to Europeanize Germany, before it Germanized Europe.” That is what understanding super and supra nationalism will help us do. Did Germany embrace a sense of Europeanism – possibly replacing German nationalism – or is it just using the EU as a vehicle for greater power on the world stage? If it is the latter is that

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8 Smith 141  
9 Smith 142  
10 Smith 119  
11 Smith 119 & 120  
12 Simms 411
dream driven by nationalist causes or simply a natural consequence of its economic and geographic position? This is what we will take a look at in the first case study.

German Case Post WWII

Taking theory and bring it to practice is a necessary end, so it is here. We first will look at Germany Post WWII and its struggle to rebuild after Nazism up to the construction of the Berlin Wall. This is an interesting case because nationalism should in theory be frowned upon. Also it is a case were the nation was under occupation and therefore subject to considerable foreign scrutiny, which led to Germany’s partition. To simplify the study we’ll take a look at West Germany because this was the Germany that won the Cold War. However, East Germany did have an effect on shaping West Germany’s foreign policy. However, before dipping into this some important stage setting is required.

Europe as whole after WWII was going through some radical changes. The biggest one and arguably where all other changes stem from was its loss of autonomy. The competition for control between the USA and Russia lead to some massive changes. First was that both superpowers cultivated greater integration within their spheres of influence. Second was that Europe did not take this loss of control passively. In Eastern Europe there revolts against Soviet control, but in Western Europe there recognition for the need to integrate, too an extent. Third Europe as whole increasingly looked inward. This where Germany comes into play, one it was one of the few areas where the USA and the USSR did not respect one another’s spheres. In addition, Britain and France both saw Germany as a means to reassert some measure of European independence via integration. The coming pages will demonstrate this particularly in West Germany.

13 McNeill page 600
West Germany after the Second World War can be best summed up by Konrad Adenauer the first West German Chancellor when he said “Our task was to dispel the mistrust harbored against us everywhere in the West. We had to try, step-by-step, to reawaken confidence in Germans. The precondition for this… was a clear, steady, unwavering affirmation of identity with the West.”  

This is the best summary of West German foreign policy and even German policy today. This goes a long way to explain why German nationalism did not become a force in West German strategic thought. There was another reason why nationalism was not a major factor.

If the Adenauer quote demonstrates anything it is that the West German political elite distrusted German nationalism as a political tool, but concessions were also a critical part in Germany’s refusal to flirt with nationalism. Nationalist sentiments were used both by the US and Russia in an attempt to secure all of Germany. In 1946, Stalin played the German nationalist card with the goal to get all of Germany under communism. Stalin did a few things he held out on the transfer of Stettin to Poland and the abolition of Prussia & he unified the German socialist and communists in his area of occupation. After this the Russians began to make direct appeals to German unification to the German people, provided it was under their banner. This was important because it forced America’s hands in West Germany.

Adenauer may not have been keen on embracing nationalism, but America’s concession probably did not hurt his calculations. After all American concessions led to him gaining power in the first place. America pursued a policy of denazification in Germany notably bringing in democracy and a liberal economic agenda to Germany. However, thanks to Stalin they also

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14 Kempe page 92
15 Simms 394
16 David
included a number of concessions to stem any nationalist resurgence. They removed American reparation demands, pushed a policy of German self-determination, and most importantly of all began it force the consolidation of the British, French, and American Zones of Occupation into one entity.\(^{17}\)

However, Adenauer had many problems in his new state the key problem being the issue of sovereignty. Every power was weary of a possible resurgence in German power. Thus, there were checks that Adenauer had to overcome. Again, Cold War dynamics came to the rescue, but again it came with a price of no nationalistic foreign policy goals. Case in point would be West Germany’s rearmament, which could be argued to be a nationalist goal. The evidence will demonstrate to the contrary of that assertion. Domestically, West German politicians were against rearmament. Gustav Heinemann, the interior minister, resigned because he feared rearmament hurt the odds of reunification and the Marxist Social Democrats derided the plan for entrenching the partition.\(^{18}\) It can be seen that Germany did have a measure of nationalist sentiments, but they did not significantly affect policy because rearmament went full steam ahead. In fact rearmament embodied not, so much as nationalist movement, but a return to a level of normal sovereignty coupled with a greater show that nationalism was out of German foreign policy.

Adenauer’s biggest task was not so much German reunification as it was reasserting German sovereignty. The Cold War may have forced the Allies to consolidate a new German state, but rearmament was not necessarily on the table. When the communist threat became apparent there were two requirements for West Germany democratization and European integration. German rearmament was no different in this case. In exchange for greater

\(^{17}\) Simms 395 & 396
\(^{18}\) Simms 416
sovereignty Germany went in even more on European integration first with the European Defense Community – which failed thanks to France – then with NATO.\(^{19}\) This trend continued on the international stage, even today. How does Germany’s reunification play in?

Until the establishment of the Berlin Wall the USA and the USSR had been competing to see who could get all of Germany. It was clear that by the time of Khrushchev East Germany was failing. All things considered Germany’s struggle to settle its duel character was decided by economic factors and not a nationalist drive. The West German economic miracle not only put Germany back on the map, but placed East Germany in terminal decline. The decline can be seen because in 1949 alone more than 2 million East Germans left for West Germany.\(^{20}\) Things got, so bad that Ulbricht, leader of East Germany finally got permission to close the boards and build the infamous Berlin Wall in an operation coded as Rose.\(^{21}\) Overall, the Berlin Wall was a stopgap measure to prevent the collapse of East Germany and German reunification under America’s terms. German reunification would happen it would just be further down the road.

Since Germany was clearly not following a nationalist foreign policy. Is it possible that Germany was following a new sort of nationalism, Europeanism? It is doubtful. One Adenauer’s state goal – as quoted earlier – was to reestablish trust in Germany from her Western partners. Two, even today people, as noted by Anthony Smith, have considerably stronger ties to traditional nationalism and even political elites closely guard their nation’s sovereignty from the European Union’s encroachment.\(^{22}\) A better question that should be asked is Germany a qualified Great Power?

\(^{19}\) von Klemperer 163  
\(^{20}\) Simms 428  
\(^{21}\) Kempe 340  
\(^{22}\) Smith 139 & 140
It may be recalled that a great power has significant economic and military might. Germany does have significant economic clout as shown by the fact that it is Europe’s largest economy.\(^{23}\) On the military front Germany has been extremely reluctant to use its military. Domestic challenges where Adenauer’s greatest hurdle during rearmament.\(^{24}\) Despite all of this Germany does command a strong military. In fact it is eightieth strongest military power in the world by one organization’s measurements.\(^{25}\) Germany does not use its military might rather its political clout in the EU. This can be shown with the recent bailout for Greece and in the current European Migrant Crisis.

Overall, Germany is an example of a great power where nationalism did not play a role in strategic thought in the realm of foreign policy during its rise. It is clear that Germany overall was encouraged not to embrace nationalism through a combination of reasons. One, German political elites distrusted the concept after WWII. Two, Cold War dynamics prohibited it from reforms. Three, German leaders gave up nationalist goals such as reunification in exchange for returning to some level of normal sovereignty.

China’s Rise

The rise of China and its interactions with nationalism are more traditional than Germany’s. Still China has a complicated relationship with nationalism even if the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) uses it as a source of legitimacy. China is playing a balancing act stroking nationalist sentiments, but keeping it on a tight leash. This in turn is layered by a shift, over the years, in which aspects (nationalism or economic performance) the CCP uses a primary

\(^{23}\) Lynn
\(^{24}\) von Klemperer 3
\(^{25}\) Global Firepower
source of legitimacy. Earlier in China’s rise it was the economy, but nowadays nationalism takes a greater stage, but with important restrictions.

Despite the CCP’s international revolutionary ideology China has been using nationalism since roughly since the death of Chairman Mao. This was a move forced by internal factors. Namely, Mao’s failed economic policies of collectivization and political instability wrought by the Cultural Revolution. In Deng Xiaoping’s own words China moved to “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. This move would have fundamental implications, especially after Deng managed to secure his hold on power. Perhaps Deng went for reform to save his own hide, after Tiananmen Square (1989) or perhaps he had been a closeted reformer since 1974.

Regardless, of which narrative one picks Deng became a pro-reformer of the CCP and its leader. Simply, put Deng recognized that China was on the path of self-destruction, and the CCP was going with it. He ushered in a policy called “Reform and Opening Up” (1979). This was when China’s rise began to happen. It also happens to parallel when the CCP began to change the source of its legitimacy from Marxism to economic growth and nationalism.

“Reform and Opening Up” was originally a move to dismantle totalitarianism. “Reform and Opening Up” removed the vast controls that the CCP had on individual Chinese lives. Yet, this did not necessarily mean a release on the economic controls, that could have been implied, but in words of Hu Yaobang – a CCP official and Deng supporter – “But deeds, rather than

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26 Kissinger’s On China 321
27 Christensen 171
28 Kissinger’s On China 322.
29 Kissinger On China 331. This begs the question of why Kissinger and Christensen seem to be in opposition about Deng intentions. I would note that they don’t disagree about Deng being a reformer out of pragmatism (On China 321-330), rather they disagree when he became one. I think for simplicity’s sake Christensen probably used Tiananmen Square as a definitive turning point in Deng’s behavior. Deng and when he truly embraced reform was not within the scope of Christensen’s work, rather the consequences of the reforms.
30 Kissinger’s On China 404
words, are important.”31 Granted that quote was ripped out of context, because Hu was speaking about restoring Soviet ties. It will become clear that this quote might as well be a policy statement about China’s relationship with nationalism.

As noted earlier China was fixing to remove totalitarianism. However, that did not mean the CCP was giving up on autocracy. In the aftermath of Tiananmen Square the CCP maintained control, but it faced international isolation. When China’s new leader arose Jiang Zemin the foreign policy goal was not to pursue nationalist goals. Instead, Jiang’s goal was continued economic growth through greater global integration.32 Nationalism only emerged as issue during the Clinton Era largely because of the actions of Taiwan.

The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis was a significant development in Chinese foreign policy. Both Kissinger and Christensen agree that Taiwan held the blame for starting the crisis by pursuing an increasingly overt campaign for international recognition as an independent nation.33 Yet, it demonstrated a significant issue for China that was a lack of military reform. During the course of the Crisis Jiang stroked Chinese nationalism by saying “The great People’s Republic of China will never be bullied, the great Chinese nation will never be humiliated, and the great Chinese people will never be conquered.”34 Clearly, a nerve got hit and allowed for the CCP to equate the nation and the party as one in the same. Still, economic growth was the priority and the military reality favored the United States; so the Crisis was defused without bloodshed. The whole case though was a reminder that in cases like Taiwan nationalism would take front and center stage.

31 Kissinger’s On China 391 the whole quote is “We note that Soviet leaders have expressed more than once the desire to improve relations with China. But deeds, rather than words, are important.”
32 Kissinger On China 451
33 Kissinger On China 472 and Christensen 192
34 Kissinger On China 477
Still nationalist statements did not become the driver in China’s foreign policy. In response to America’s response in the Taiwan Crisis China pursued a constructive foreign policy. Interestingly, Christensen and Kissinger disagree as to why this occurred. Kissinger asserts that China was merely continuing with the same plan of economic development via global integration. Christensen on the other hand asserts that it was because of a robust US military presence that China stayed on the straight and narrow. The claim that a disagreement is present can be laid down because Kissinger never states that China’s international calculations changed as a result of the Crisis, but Christensen asserts that it did. The disagreement needs to be addressed because in a certain light it could represent a preemptive attempt by China to exert a nationalist foreign policy.

It is necessary to look at Kissinger’s statement and its meaning. Kissinger’s silence seems to indicate that China’s foreign policy suffered no change. Before the Crisis China’s goal was greater economic integration in the world. After the Crisis was over Kissinger makes no mention of the US’s security presence, but instead talks about how China increased economic cooperation with regional partners, which is a logical step in the process of economic globalization. In addition it is a common theme throughout On China and The China Challenge that Taiwan is a redline in China’s eyes so that any action that seeks to separate Taiwan from China formal must be met seriously. Christensen on the other hand seems to contradict himself on two occasions. He asserts that China lacked the military capabilities to militarily seize Taiwan. So with that in mind how could China serious threaten a nation like Japan? He also quotes a Chinese scholarly work by Zhang and Tang Shiping which states “China has pursued a strategy of maintaining amicable relationships with its neighbors and stabilizing its periphery to

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35 Kissinger On China 478  
36 Christensen 195
hedge against the bad times in Sino-U.S. relations… [If] China adopts a moderate approach, most regional countries would be reluctant to adopt a policy of hard containment…” It seems safe to say that America’s military presence, unlike how Christensen asserts, was just beating an already dead horse. Both from the mouths of Chinese scholars and officials China wanted good regional relations either as a countermeasure to American attempts at containment or for economic growth. If one or both reasons are applied China’s end goal is the same, do not rock the boat with nationalist claims.

China’s policy started to change under Hu Jintao’s leadership. Overall, China pursued economic growth and cooperation with her neighbors. China also pursued a policy of military reform.37 Of course, this particular policy would have greater ramifications as it bore fruit. In addition, the US and China continued to follow the understanding about Taiwan in the form of the “one-China” policy.38 It is really after the Financial Crisis of 2008 that China has become more assertive on issues of nationalist significances.

In 2008 the world was rocked by the Financial Crisis. Both Kissinger and Christensen note that China began to embrace a nationalist fervor.39 Still, China is playing a careful game. The CCP’s primary concern is for the survival of the party. It is clear China’s people and scholars expect a more assertive China and China’s actions demonstrate that.40 However, Kissinger and Christensen also agree that China’s policymakers are cautious. Kissinger notes that China recognizes that America will have a significant role in the foreseeable future.41 Christensen quotes State Councilor, Dai Bingguo when he proclaimed that China’s people

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37 Kissinger On China 504
38 Christensen 210
39 Christensen 242 Kissinger 506
40 Kissinger On China 504
41 Kissinger World Order 232
should temper their expectations.\textsuperscript{42} All of this talk has been occurring, despite recent developments in the South China Sea. Even in an atmosphere that has a more assertive China, her nationalism is still being carefully checked, so as not to risk the CCP survival.

Survival of the CCP is China’s main domestic and foreign policy concern. Even as the CCP moves into a more assertive nationalist direction the CCP is careful to moderate nationalism’s pull. However, it is clear though that China has been shifting over the years to embrace a more nationalist foreign policy aiming to protect what it perceives as its sovereign territory. Therein lies the most dangerous aspect of China’s case. The people do perceive that China has sovereignty over the disputed territories, which means the more nationalist rhetoric that gets tied to a territorial dispute the harder it is to back down. Nowadays, China has reached a closer level of military parity with the US and its regional allies, so it is easier to miscalculate and turn a crisis into a war.

Conclusion

Nationalism is force to be reckoned within foreign policy. How much is hard to say. It is clear from both case studies that nationalism played a part. However, as the preceding literature, at the start of this paper, noted political elites use it as a tool. Nationalism is a dangerous tool that can quickly get a life of its own. On the other hand it is not necessary for a nation in order to become a great power.

Germany after WWII was the best example of a nation not needing nationalism to become a force on the global stage. Germany’s role in global politics was cultivated by the need to combat the communist threat in Europe, but Germany’s partners also sought to check any

\textsuperscript{42} Christensen 4
attempts at national resurgence. This was done in two ways by promoting European integration in exchange for a return of normal rights associated with a sovereign nation and by the continued presence of a competition between the USSR and the USA for dominance in the Cold War. All of this was bolstered by the German elites who profoundly distrusted nationalism in the aftermath of two world wars. On the other hand China demonstrates how nationalism can affect a nation’s rise.

In China political elites have been playing a potential deadly game with nationalism. After Mao’s passing the CCP change its source of legitimacy from Marxism to economic growth and nationalism. Over the years China has shifted its focus from the former to the latter. This creates a dangerous situation because territorial dispute can quickly call into question the right for the CCP to rule over China.

Since nationalism is so dangerous and is not necessarily needed for a nation to become a great power what motivates nations to use it on the international stage? There are two big differences between the German and Chinese cases. One, Germany has no outstanding border disputes, but China does. Two, Germany is a democracy while China is an autocracy. Just having one of the two instances can encourage political elites to foster nationalist ambitions. When you have both it is an even more seductive tool to use.
Works Cited


<http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=germany>. 43


43 I was hesitated to use this resource, but it complied its information from other more reliable sites.


