

**Chinese Cyber Nationalism: Evolution, Characteristics, and Implications, by Xu Wu (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books, 2007), pp.xi+265. ISBN: 0-7391-1817-X (cloth); 0-7391-1818-8 (paper).**

As I write this review Chinese cyber nationalism is rising again by exploiting the possibilities of modern communications technology. The internet in particular is offering Chinese activists the opportunity to grow in confidence and articulate to a global audience their concerns with the way China is perceived by the international community. Disruption to the relay of the Olympic Torch, together with Chinese accusations of bias and distortion in the “Western” media, are dominating discussions in chat-rooms, internet fora and discussion sites, while allegedly anti-Chinese media, such as CNN are under attack from Chinese hackers. Xu Wu’s new study of *Chinese Cyber Nationalism* is a valuable discussion for anyone seeking to understand present controversies and locate them in their historical context. The analysis not only charts the evolution of the internet in China, but also maps the processes of interaction and participation that the internet has encouraged. Xu Wu’s study is as much the examination of the constant negotiation between the Chinese government and cyber activists as it is a timely intervention in debates about the political consequences of new communications technology.

The use of the internet in the present crisis is unique compared to the case-studies Xu Wu addresses in that cyber nationalism is today penetrating the non-Chinese language web. Social network sites such as My Space and Facebook are fast becoming the site of choice for China’s cyber nationalists, especially as most of them are ‘self exiled’ students abroad. Much of the content of Wu Xu’s volume will resonate with observers following current events: in writing about these Chinese students overseas, Xu describes their nationalism in the following way:

Emotionally, it was more personalized, more natural and stronger than the domestic-born nationalism. Technically, it was well-informed, advanced, and well-organized, thanks mainly to the Internet technology and online community. Unlike previous communication technology, the Internet could carry this heart-pumping nationalism back home in a heartbeat. (p.23)

It is essential we do not discount too hastily other means of mobilisation and communication to which the internet adds value. Currently living in Sydney's Chinatown I spotted Chinese-language posters strategically located in Chinese shop and restaurant windows advertising protests against alleged anti-Chinese bias in the 'Western media'. I have also overheard conversations between Chinese discussing their participation in gathering to support – 'protect' - the Australian-leg of the Olympic Torch relay. In the age of the internet and mobile phones, posters and oral agitation (always central to Chinese communist propaganda) still play a surprisingly dominant role in communication.

Nevertheless, one would be unwise to ignore completely the contribution of the internet to the creation of a new Chinese nationalism. Xu Wu here builds upon the intellectual foundations of Peter Hays Gries who, in his 2004 study of *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics and Diplomacy*, documented the processes of transformation the internet has unleashed in state-society relations. By means of a comprehensive examination of a series of case-studies, both Xu Wu and Hays Gries reveal how the Chinese government is often as apprehensive about the possible consequences of disorderly Chinese cyber nationalism as it is concerned about the mobilisation of popular opinion against the regime. Thus the state and the new nationalists are engaged in a constant negotiation about their role, responsibility and

liability in potentially sensitive subject areas, particularly when the internet allows the distribution of news, information and opinion that the Chinese government would rather contain. Concerning Indonesia, for example,

China's official media carried no news about the violence against Chinese ethnicity ...during May, June, and early July in 1998. However, the eyewitness reports and the bloody pictures began to surface on China's online sphere immediately after the event. The mounting public anger online stood in sharp contrast to the government's low-key ambiguous approach. ... In the overseas Chinese online community, the response was fast and furious.' (p.39

In addition to the historical perspective, Xu Wu approaches the subject from a distinctly theoretical perspective, namely Habermas's 'Public Sphere'. Many have endeavoured to apply this framework to China and have come unstuck by the nuances of the theory (it is, after all, a bourgeois public sphere that Habermas describes), but Xu Wu manages to leap over the seemingly permanent hurdles and neatly combines theory and empirical research. But for this reviewer the book's most stimulating discussion concerns the development of Chinese 'hacktivism' and information warfare. The non-military development of Chinese information warfare, but the eventual assimilation of techniques by the military, lends credibility to the claim of a massed army of cyber warriors ready and willing to serve the Chinese nation when required. The distinction between military and non-military is increasingly blurred, which creates its own set of problems for both victim and perpetrator of information warfare.

There are problems: A more diligent proof-reading would have been appropriate to avoid silly and annoying lapses in grammar; Xu Wu confuses information warfare and public diplomacy (p.25), a serious error that only serves to irritate those of us working in this area; he falls into the common trap of conflating propaganda and lying (p.124) when even Goebbels knew that ‘Good propaganda does not need to lie’; China did not re-take its UN seat because China never lost it; Britain did not have to return Hong Kong in 1997 because only the New Territories were leased for one hundred years (p.132); and when Portugal offered Macao to the Chinese in the 1970s, the PRC turned it down.

Problems aside, *Chinese Cyber Nationalism* is a thorough examination of a timely issue and deserves wide-reading by those seeking to understand how and why the internet is today the preferred medium of communication and mobilisation among Chinese nationalists.

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