

Xu Wu, **Chinese Cyber Nationalism: Evolution, Characteristics and Implications**, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007, 274 pp., US\$42.50 (hardcover).

Reviewed by  
Christopher R. Hughes  
London School of Economics and Political Science

In the introduction to his book, Xu Wu makes no bones about the fact that a work on China's Internet and nationalism is not just a smart idea, but is also quite a challenge. While Chinese cyber nationalism is not such a new topic as the author claims, this must be the most extensive account of its historical development and richest empirical survey of the sites, actors and systems that have shaped its current form and dynamics.

Some readers might be put off by the style of writing which comes across as something of a crusade to right the misperceptions that foreigners are alleged to hold concerning the rise of China. But the author's personal commitment which stems from his own firsthand experience as a journalist in China during the key events that catalysed the rise of the new nationalism, makes this more than just an academic account. His attitude on what he sees to be the injustices inflicted on China makes it a text that demonstrates in itself the complex emotions that have brought Chinese nationalism back to life since 1989.

The book's 15 chapters are divided into three bigger sections under the titles 'Evolution,' 'Definitions' and 'Reflections' — the first being the most interesting and useful section. 'Evolution' details an historical account of how a nationalist activity in Chinese cyberspace developed from an 'ivory tower' conducted by students at elite universities around the world, then spread to Chinese universities, and ultimately becomes a popular phenomenon. It is structured to show how events, such as the anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia and tensions with the United States and Japan have interacted with the spread of the technology to create what the author rightly claims is a new political phenomenon. In so doing, it is quite distinct from both the patriotism advocated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the popular nationalism in the broader population who are not involved in cyberspace.

The second part, 'Definitions,' might have been better served with placement nearer the beginning with considerably reduced text. This is because it contains rather lengthy discussion of theories of nationalism and general writing about China that is something of a distraction from the topic of the research and adds little to the author's main arguments.

The third section, 'Reflections,' is very interesting indeed because it consists of interviews with the main figures who have shaped Chinese cyber nationalism and also those policymakers who have to manage what has become something of a 'double edged sword' for the CCP.

Throughout the work, the author makes a bold attempt to investigate the trickiest of research problems, namely establishing whether nationalist activity in cyberspace really has an impact on the real

world of policymaking. While a causal link is often assumed by many writers on Chinese politics, Xu Wu gives ample evidence to show that the top leaders really do invest substantial time and capital in monitoring activity in cyberspace and use the Internet to measure public opinion. He also uses circumstantial evidence to build a convincing argument that policy has actually changed as a result of nationalist cyber activity. Sometimes this is reactive, as with the hardening of the attitude of the Foreign Ministry toward Jakarta after the wave of protest over the atrocities committed against ethnic Chinese citizens in the riots following the fall of the Suharto regime. But he also claims that cyber nationalism has become a resource for Beijing's diplomacy. The massive petition movement against Japan's attempt to gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2004, for example, gave the Foreign Ministry an extra card to play when lobbying the world to stop the bid.

The most intriguing insight made by the author, though, are the two possible ways in which the relationship between cyber nationalism and the CCP could evolve in the future. The first of these involves the incorporation of cyber nationalism into the current political system through a process of restructuring and absorption into the official doctrine. This process can already be seen to be taking place through the establishment of official websites, such as the *People's Daily's* Strong Nation Forum, and the monitoring and censorship of discussion.

The second possibility is that cyber nationalism could develop into an autonomous political movement that will force the CCP to share or yield its power. This eventuality would be made more likely if the CCP was to lose its nationalist credentials in a major crisis over territorial integrity or national sovereignty. Undoubtedly the most important factor, though, would be if the CCP was to become divided as a result of such a crisis and a part of the leadership were to align with the mass movement. The key factor deciding the outcome in this situation would be whether the military could remain neutral or decided to take sides. In either scenario, points out Xu Wu, Chinese cyber nationalism will play a substantial role in shaping China's future.

This book should be commended particularly for the way in which the author's arguments are well informed by accounts of how the various nationalist websites were established, interviews with key players and information about the way in which the authorities battle for control of this new phenomenon through a combination of regulation and persuasion.

The book would have benefited from a thorough editing, however. Much of the discussion of the theories of nationalism and broader questions of Chinese politics that is put into separate chapters throughout the book is less than convincing and tends to distract from the main arguments and empirical content. The author's rather emotional defense of his country also makes this read more like a nationalist text in places than a purely academic work. But, as said above, that is also part of its attraction.