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**Historical Narratives and Trade Policy in the U.S.-China  
Relationship**  
歷史敘述與貿易政策下的中美關係



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## Abstract

The relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China has long been considered one of the most consequential bilateral relationships in the world. The history of the relationship is wrought with ups and down. This paper attempts to explain this variation by analyzing two historical narratives underpinning the relationship: an American narrative of unappreciated benevolence and a Chinese narrative of national humiliation. Currently, the two countries are embroiled in the trade war, a battle of escalating tariffs and economic aggression. This paper looks at the ongoing trade war through a constructivist lens and utilizes discourse analysis of speeches and statements in order to determine how narratives can help us understand the relationship. This paper finds that the prevalence of narratives in the U.S.-China relationship reinforces predilections towards selecting certain policy options.

*Keywords: historical narratives, unappreciated benevolence, national humiliation, U.S.-China relations, trade war*

## 摘要

中美關係是公認的世界最重要的雙邊關係之一。中美關係歷來多有波折。這篇論文試圖從兩個歷史因素的角度去分析兩國關係的起伏：美國方面的施恩沒有回報的觀點，還有中國方面的民族長期被壓迫的觀點。目前，兩國正在進行日漸升級的貿易戰，利用關稅和經濟政策互相施壓。這篇論文利用建構正義理論及分析兩國的演講詞和官方言論來詮釋歷史因素對中美雙邊關係的影響。這篇論文發現這些歷史因素非常有助於解釋中美兩國關係的走向。

**關鍵字：**歷史因素，師恩沒有回報，國恥，民族被壓迫歷史，中美關係，貿易戰



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## Chapter 1 Introduction

The U.S.-China relationship is often described as being the most important, or most consequential, bilateral relationship in the world. For decades now, there have been debates in the academic and policy worlds about how China's rise will affect the international system and the U.S. in particular. The bilateral relationship has been full of ups and downs, at times experiencing highs of friendship and growth while at others being dragged down by disappointment and mistrust. Despite the fact that both countries acknowledge the importance of the relationship and have made countless attempts to cooperate, the relationship is still often strained and the rhetoric negative. Why has it been so difficult for the U.S. and China to exit the cycle and maintain healthy relations? One complicating factor is the pervasive presence of particular narratives. Both China and the U.S. maintain narratives about the relationship that appear throughout the years and the state of the relationship. What is the power of narrative in international relations? What are the specific narratives at work in the U.S.-China relationship and what role do they play? This thesis takes the constructivist approach that narratives and identity are inescapably linked with the way states behave, and thus should be studied in order to gain insight into international relationships. It offers a supplementary perspective to traditional realist, liberal, and constructivist understandings of the U.S.-China relationship.

How do these historical narratives interact with trade policy, and what are the larger implications for the U.S.-China relationship? This thesis attempts to answer this question by establishing the constructed historical narratives and examining how these narratives have appeared in materials regarding trade policy in the currently ongoing U.S.-China trade war. Do narratives help perpetuate the trade war? This thesis finds that not only are the narratives present



in the trade war, but also that the purposeful continuation of these narratives helps perpetuate the conflict by reinforcing predilections towards selecting certain policy options.

Crucial to this study are the historical narratives themselves. Historical narratives have the power to shape, inform, and perpetuate a collective identity, such as a nation's identity. The power of identity to then determine how a country behaves cannot be underestimated, and that is precisely what this research seeks to investigate. While a narrative is at its core a story, it is also a critical way "in which we construct disparate facts in our own worlds and weave them together cognitively in order to make sense of our reality" (Patterson & Monroe, 1998). Narratives help shape and define the ways in which people view themselves and the world around them, and this extends to political relationships as well.

Two distinct narratives are explored in this paper. The first is the American narrative of unappreciated benevolence, which tells the story of a global leader whose generosity goes unappreciated and whose authority goes unheeded at times, leading to situations where it can be taken advantage of and harmed. Stemming from the concept of American exceptionalism, this narrative promotes the idea that the U.S. is a moral example and leader who bestows benevolence upon the rest of the world, but does not always receive the same kind of benevolent treatment in return. The narrative paints the U.S. as a benevolent hegemon whose efforts often go unnoticed or unappreciated, or whose benevolence creates opportunities for other countries, like China, to easily take advantage of it. The narrative is prominent in American discussions of the U.S.-China relationship, as well as in discussions of trade policy. The U.S. has long been critical of China's approach to trade, labeling many of its policies unfair and illegal.

The second narrative is the Chinese one of national humiliation and national rejuvenation. This linear narrative describes a China that was taken down in its prime by foreign

intrusions and subjected to countless humiliations. Now, China is rising back to its correct position of prominence and will no longer tolerate bullying or foreign interference. The Chinese narrative comes from China's "Century of Humiliation" (百年國恥), a defining period of time in Chinese history between 1839 and 1949 when Western powers and Japan intervened in China. This period of time is a great scar on a proud Chinese history, and marks a division in history, with many textbooks referring to before and after the Century of Humiliation (Kaufman, 2010). The resulting narrative is one of both loss and redemption: China suffered humiliation at the hands of foreign powers, but has ultimately overcome that struggle and has risen back to its rightful position of global prominence. The narrative has been adopted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and used to legitimize its right to rule by claiming that the CCP ended the period of humiliation and regained China's independence and dignity (Wang Z. , 2008). This narrative has colored cultural, economic, and political interactions between the U.S. and China for decades.

The primary scope of the thesis will be limited to the trade war between the U.S. and China. The foundations for this conflict were set in 2016 during Donald Trump's presidential campaign, and the trade war took off in 2018. As of this writing the trade war is still very much underway, though as of June 29 the countries agreed to continue talks and hold off on new tariffs for the time being. The ongoing nature of this conflict adds to the overall uncertainty regarding the future of the trade relationship, and indeed the overall relationship, between the U.S. and China. The trade war presents an interesting, modern-day case of the use of these particular narratives. Even the way the U.S. and China approach the trade war demonstrates the different assumptions embedded in their understandings of the relationship. For example, in May of this year President Trump referred to the trade war as "a little squabble with China" (Remarks by

President Trump Before Marine One Departure, 2019). The attitude conveys multiple aspects of the American narrative: the sense of American superiority, the inevitability of an American victory, and the parental view that allows the U.S. to brush off a major trade conflict with China as a “squabble.” Conversely, Chinese discourse around the trade war has gone the opposite route; the terms used to describe the conflict include “a new Long March” (新长征) (Xi, 2019) and “a people’s war” (人民戰爭) (王怡, 2019). These terms, undeniably much more intense than “squabble,” signify that for China, this conflict is a chance for it to take a stand and assert itself on its path to national rejuvenation. The term “new Long March” pulls from history and its name to show that China will not back down in this conflict, regardless of how long it takes. This commitment to a potentially long-term conflict stands in stark contrast to Trump’s “squabble.”

The organization of this paper is as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the methodology for this thesis, including the theoretical framework and data. Chapter 3 is a literature review that contextualizes this topic in the existing literature on U.S.-China trade and the political usage of narratives. It also provides an overview of the literature on the Chinese narrative of national humiliation and the concept of American exceptionalism, which is closely related to the American unappreciated benevolence narrative put forth here. Chapter 4 defines each narrative and gives examples of the narratives throughout the history of the U.S.-China relationship. Chapter 5 analyzes data from the recent and ongoing trade conflict under President Trump and President Xi, identifying the separate narratives in speeches and statements. Chapter 6 analyzes the interaction of the narratives with each other. The final chapter concludes with a discussion of narrative importance in international relations, implications for the relationship, and suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2 Methods

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework for understanding the interaction of historical narratives and policy is the international relations theory of constructivism. Alexander Wendt (1992) approaches constructivism as a way to explain aspects of international relations that realism and liberalism fail to explain adequately, specifically why states act the way they do towards each other. Constructivism answers this question by looking to the importance of intersubjective understandings, conceptions of self and other, and collective meanings in society. States, like people, commit to numerous identities that shape their interests and add a level of complexity and nuance to international relations that defies the rigid walls of other theories. Norms are often taken for granted, and their role in shaping behavior and identity overlooked. Constructivism goes beyond understandings of material power as the most important source of political influence to include the role of discursive power in determining state preferences and actions (Hopf, 1998).

Narratives are critical vessels through which people interpret the world and their place in it. Narratives are stories, accounts of events real or imagined. Jerome Bruner (1996) defines narratives as a sequence of events that carries meaning because of what has been chosen for inclusion in the narrative. No account of an event includes every detail, and the narrator's decisions about what to include reveal a lot about the norms and assumptions he/she carries. Narratives are not necessarily about conveying historical fact or political reality; they are about sharing a particular view of an event or relationship in order to make a specific point. Their power lies in their ability to influence actions and identity despite merely being constructed stories. Historical and political narratives follow the literary definition of narratives by involving

actors, events, and revealing information about the narrator's perspective. Narratives are worthy of social science research not in order to reveal an objective reality, but to analyze what meaning comes from the way events are recounted and understood by different actors (Patterson & Monroe, 1998). Roland Barthes (1975) writes:

There are countless forms of narrative in the world. First of all, there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories...Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds...Like life itself, it [narrative] is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural. (p. 237)

This demonstrates the pervasiveness of narratives in all areas of society, and the importance of narratives to human cognitive understanding.

Constructivism offers a lens through which to evaluate these factors when it comes to trust and mistrust in international relations (Kydd, 2005). Narratives are clearly an example of how states can hold different conceptions of the self and the other, and how collective norms and beliefs can become ingrained in a society. Not only do narratives reinforce existing norms and perspectives of the self and the other, but they can go a long way toward creating patterns or expectations of trust or mistrust between countries. This is critical in the U.S.-China relationship. The pervasiveness of certain historical narratives also echoes back to a constructivist understanding of international politics. Constructivism does not anticipate much change because

it sees existing identities and norms as being firmly rooted. This helps to explain why certain narratives have been so prevalent throughout different times and phases of state relationships. The difficulty of enacting change in the face of such ingrained identities helps shed light on why the U.S.-China relationship has remained strained despite many efforts from both sides to facilitate a true friendship. Through discourse analysis, this thesis uncovers narrative in high-level discussions of the trade war. This look into how narratives play a role in the conflict and the relationship contributes to the constructivist perspective on U.S.-China relations.

## 2.2 Data

This thesis focuses on the ongoing trade war between the U.S. and China, which began with tariffs levied in 2018. To establish the American and Chinese narratives, a much more inclusive span of history will be used. I will utilize publications, speeches, and policy statements from throughout this U.S.-China trade conflict, including the early discussions of trade tensions in 2016, to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the two narratives. In order to establish the narratives as consistent and pervasive storylines, I first look at events and interactions in the history of the U.S.-China relationship and provide a brief analysis of sources that demonstrate the narratives. The data analysis section of this paper focuses on the discussions of the trade tensions that have escalated into the trade war. The data analyzed here includes trade policies, relevant news articles, and speeches and statements from top officials justifying or explaining trade policy decisions over the course of the U.S.-China trade war. The Miller Center's archive of presidential speeches, the U.S. Department of State archive websites, the White House website, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China website,

and state-sponsored Chinese media outlets such as *People's Daily* or *Xinhua News Agency* are all sources of data for this project.

### 2.3 Research Limitations

This research faced some limitations and challenges. Going into it, there was the concern that The People's Republic of China is not a transparent government, and it is not always certain that open and accurate information will be available. However, because the nature of this thesis is not particularly sensitive, this was not a significant barrier to research. A noteworthy challenge in this project involved a language barrier. While this thesis utilizes both English and Chinese sources, it heavily relies on English-language sources. Many translated sources (Chinese to English) are used, and may not always be completely reliable, especially given the discourse analysis methodology. It is important to note that this could bias the project to a certain extent.

### Chapter 3 Literature Review

This chapter will cover existing literature that informs this topic. Specifically, it will address literature on the U.S.-China trade relationship, the political importance of narratives, and existing work on the American and Chinese narratives that drive each country's presence in international relations.

Traditional understandings of the U.S.-China relationship come from three main theories of international relations: realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism. Typically, realist understandings of the bilateral relationship focus on the inevitability of conflict stemming from power relations and power dynamics. Realists hold that the primary motivating factors in international relations are power, security, and national interest. With this understanding, the U.S.-China relationship is characterized by competition, mutual distrust, and insecurity. Realists also prescribe to the Thucydides's Trap, which is the idea that when there exists both an established power and a rising power, conflict lies ahead unless drastic steps are taken to avoid it (Allison, 2017). Liberal institutionalism, on the other hand, focuses instead on the role of institutions in facilitating peaceful relations between countries. They believe that conflict can be reduced through participation in international institutions and facilitation of greater economic interdependence. Thus, liberal institutionalists see the U.S.-China relationship as one that increasingly depends on institutions and greater integration to manage its conflicts. Finally, constructivism adopts the philosophy that social factors like identity play a role in shaping behavior. Constructivists believe that ideas, more than material factors, drive cooperation or conflict between countries.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to provide a slightly different angle on constructivism that can supplement the existing theoretical perspectives on the U.S.-China relationship. This



variation on constructivism uses discourse analysis to identify consistent narratives in the relationship and determine how they impact decision-making. This literature review provides context for this paper in terms of the U.S.-China trade relationship, trade tensions, and the separate narratives. This thesis aims to make a contribution by addressing some gaps in the literature and juxtaposing different narratives and topics in order to provide a fuller, more unique analysis. By looking to find the narratives in the statements surrounding the ongoing trade war, I hope to show that these historical narratives are still alive and active today and are worth studying in the context of international relations. In addition, while the study of narratives is not new, there is a noticeable gap in the existing literature when it comes to examining the American and Chinese narratives together. This paper endeavors to explore both of the narratives concurrently as well as the interaction between the narratives to provide a different take on a constructivist understanding of the U.S.-China relationship.

### 3.1 U.S.-China Trade

The bilateral U.S.-China trade relationship is characterized both by its great importance and by its conflictual nature. There is no question in the literature that the U.S. and China are important trade partners. They are major trade partners, with \$710 billion in goods and services trade in 2017 (U.S.-China Trade Facts, 2018). Over the past two decades trade has steadily increased, but so too have tensions over issues. Many of these issues stem from different conceptions of the trade relationship and different imbalances of the relationship. For example, Yasheng Huang (1999) writes that while the two countries have both increased in terms of economic importance to the other, the reasons for this importance are different. China is important to the U.S. economy because is the U.S.'s largest merchandise trading partner and its

biggest source of imports, provides low-cost goods that benefit the American consumer, and is the largest holder of U.S. Treasury securities (\$1.2 trillion as of April 2018) (Morrison, 2018). The U.S. has a vested economic interest in maintaining healthy trade relations with China. China has this interest as well, but it is motivated more by the U.S.'s international influence. The U.S. has power in international organizations like the WTO and the IMF and can impose restrictions and other consequences on China (Huang, 1999).

Conflict also exists because of differing perceptions of what the main trade issues are. This disagreement leads to misunderstandings, a lack of an accepted approach to issues, and other conflicts (Huang, 1999). To begin, China harbors resentment against the U.S. for discriminatory trade policies. It is widely recognized in the literature that the U.S. utilizes many discriminatory trade policies in its dealings with China. Chad Brown and Rachel McCulloch (2007) harken back to the American exceptionalism narrative by pointing out that the U.S. has played a paradoxical role in the development of the post-World War II system; it promotes non-discrimination in international trade but practices discriminatory policies itself. With regards to China, that has included the implementation of both implicit and explicit trade policies and the push for numerous antidumping investigations against China. In addition, they argue that existing China-specific considerations that go into U.S. trade policy are in part about fostering a political environment where China-bashing is useful and encouraged (Bown & McCulloch, 2007). Furthermore, the U.S. often disproportionately targets Chinese exporting firms for antidumping investigations. Between 1990 and 2003 Chinese companies faced the highest level of duties imposed of all targeted countries (Bown & McCulloch, 2007).

On the other hand, the major issues for the U.S. include the trade deficit, currency misalignment, and unfair trade practices. The U.S. sees China as engaging in many state-directed

and unfair policies that disadvantage its trade partners for its own benefit, and sees the large trade deficit with China as a direct result of these unfair practices (Roden, 2003).

### 3.2 Political Importance of Narratives

There is a body of existing literature that addresses the value and utility of political narratives. From domestic to international politics, there is widespread agreement that narratives can function as more than just historical stories or historical accounts. Many scholars hold the view that narratives are not merely accounts of historical events, but windows into the psychological perspectives given toward those events. For example, scientific narrative psychology purports that narratives are the vehicles of complex psychological ideas, and as such, can reveal a lot about psychological backdrops (László, 2014). This conceptual link between psychology and narrative is gaining more support as it is more widely acknowledged that there is a human tendency to understand the world through the narrative form (Shenhav, 2006). Other scholars, such as Kim Phillips-Fein (2018) and Hayden White (1980) explain this human tendency by arguing that the narrative form allows humans to endow their past with meaning, choice and reflection.

One key area of discussion is how effectively political narratives can express or represent political reality. Shaul Shenhav (2006) breaks down these possibilities into four categories of narrative capacity to represent reality: no capacity, episodic representation, chronological representation, and full representation. Shenhav holds that narratives should be carefully evaluated in order to determine their level of representative ability, but that it is certainly possible that one could represent reality. Others point out that narratives do not need to accurately portray reality in order to be invaluable tools of social science research. Indeed, it is

precisely because narratives offer a biased reality that they can reveal so much about actors' motivations, interests, and perspectives. According to Bruner (1996), while narratives might not always explain events accurately, they serve the function of interpretation, which is concerned with understanding situations beyond explanation. In this light, narratives are a crucial aspect of social science research because they speak volumes and add a different dimension to analysis of historical and political events and relationships (Patterson & Monroe, 1998).

A critical work in this area of scholarship is Yuen Foong Khong's book, *Analogies at War*, which examines the role of historical analogy in foreign affairs. A historical analogy is an inference that if two or more events occurring at different times agree in one way, they may also agree in another (Khong, 1992). Khong gives the example of Deng Xiaoping and the student protests at Tiananmen in 1989. Deng Xiaoping's decision to crush the demonstrations was driven in part by the fear that the stakes of not doing so were very high. The protest reminded him of the start of the Cultural Revolution, and the risk of the situation escalating to such an intense level convinced him that suppression was the best tactic. His book addresses how and why policymakers use historical analogies, and why they often use them poorly. Khong writes that analogies play a role both in forming and justifying policy decisions. Khong then details what he calls the Analogical Explanation framework. This holds that analogies help policymakers make decisions in six ways: by defining the nature of the situation, assessing the stakes, providing prescriptions, predicting chances of success, evaluating moral rightness, and warning about potential dangers (Khong, 1992). Furthermore, Khong writes that humans store multiple schema in their long-term memories and are apt to be attached to these historical lessons and memories. Khong's argument that knowledge structures like analogies are critical components of policy decision-making and understandings of reality is directly applicable to the argument that

historical narratives may function in a similar, if not identical, way, and supports the constructivist notion of the importance of these kinds of factors in understanding international affairs.

Johan Galtung (2001) put forth the Chosenness-Myths-Trauma (CMT) complex, which says that countries identify a chosen trauma and chosen glory as key elements in their group identity and transfer these factors to future generations. Zheng Wang (2014) applies this concept to the Chinese narrative, identifying the chosen trauma as the Century of Humiliation and the chosen glory as pre-1840 China. Wang then explains how he believes Chinese leaders have embraced different versions of the narrative of rejuvenation after humiliation. Other than Mao Zedong, who utilized a class struggle narrative, all Chinese leaders since Sun Yat-sen have utilized this narrative in some way. According to Wang (2014), in the 1980s Deng Xiaoping placed the emphasis on invigoration and the rise of living standards for the Chinese people. Jiang Zemin continued this narrative but deviated from Deng by placing intense blame on the West for China's past suffering. Hu Jintao furthered this form of patriotism and developed the idea of establishing harmonious relationships both domestically and internationally. Lastly, according to Wang, current leader Xi Jinping advocates the idea of the "Chinese Dream," which claims that rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the most important goal for China. Wang differentiates between these leaders and identifies multiple narratives: Chinese dream, humiliation, and rejuvenation. He argues that it is important for policymakers and China watchers to understand each of these narratives in order to grasp the goals of the current Chinese dream (2014). Although Wang differentiates between these narratives, I argue that they are merely different emphases on the same fundamental narrative. The foundation of each one is consistent—national humiliation at the hands of foreign powers and the rejuvenation of a great China.

Of course, there are also scholars who are critical of the ways in which historical narratives are shaped and used. For example, Andrew Norman (1991) is skeptical of the integrity of these narratives due to his concerns of historian bias. He asks whether a historical narrative can be meaningful if its structure is “imposed” upon the past by a historian, and whether the past in question had any kind of meaning before this projected narrative. Furthermore, he questions whether the past is even capable of having a plot, an element he states is necessary for the existence of a narrative (Norman, 1991). Norman’s concerns regarding the authenticity of historical narratives are interesting and valid, yet they do not diminish the political importance of established narratives. Regardless of where and how the narratives originate, they have political importance if they can be seen to affect political rhetoric, perspectives, or policy.

### 3.3 The American Narrative

An oft-discussed narrative that shapes the American domestic and international identity is American exceptionalism. This is the idea behind the origins of the U.S. as a country; the idea that the U.S. has a unique destiny and place in the world. American exceptionalism not only holds that the U.S. is fundamentally different than other nations, but also that it is superior to other nations and therefore has an obligation to lead the world toward American values (Nayak & Christopher, 2009). At the nation’s founding, this narrative of exceptionalism set the U.S. apart from Britain and the rest of Europe. It has continued to define the U.S. as a special country and to define and justify its international role as a moral leader and global hegemon. The narrative has persisted in the form of the idea that the U.S. is the greatest country in the world, and that its values are more true and progressive than those of any other country (Nayak & Christopher, 2009). This narrative has had the effect of shaping the American identity that colors

its foreign policy. The American narrative as it pertains to U.S.-China relations stems from this more general idea of American exceptionalism, continuing a bit further to involve aspects of unreciprocated benevolence. There is a gap in the literature when it comes to this specific narrative. Due to the connection this narrative has to American exceptionalism, it is useful to include that relevant literature here.

Much has been written about the idea of American exceptionalism. It is often credited with being a foundational part of the American identity, both domestically and internationally. The earliest writings of Puritan colonists identify their mission to be a moral beacon for the world, exemplifying the ideals that would later come to be called exceptionalism. These Puritan ideas were carried on through the Enlightenment and thus became associated with progress as well as God (McEcoy-Levy, 2001). For the Puritans, the exceptionalism story explains how they overcame persecution to achieve their goal of life with religious freedom. American exceptionalism is perhaps most well-known under the term “Manifest Destiny,” coined by John L. Sullivan as a way to justify the seemingly endless westward expansion of America (Nayak & Christopher, 2009). American exceptionalism has risen both from its own assertions and beliefs about its identity and from the observations of foreigners. In particular, there were two Frenchmen who early on noted the exceptionalism that characterized America. Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur described Americans as a “new people melted into one” at the creation of the U.S. (Lewis, 2012). Alexis de Tocqueville, to whom the term “American exceptionalism” is attributed, traveled to the U.S. in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and observed its distinguishing characteristics as the following: individualism, faith in democracy, and a certainty of living in an unbounded land (Lewis, 2012).



Other scholars have understood American exceptionalism through different lenses. For example, Peter Onuf (2012) puts forth the idea that what makes the U.S. exceptional is not its prided values, institutions, or origins, but rather its insistence upon the exceptionalism narrative throughout history. The fact that so many Americans believe in the idea of American exceptionalism and moral superiority is a more distinctive trait to Onuf than the other characteristics of America. The exceptionalism narrative can also be interpreted as exemptionalism. Harold Koh (2005) writes that because the U.S. believe its commitments to certain values (liberty, equality, laissez-faire economics, among others) render it immune from the forces that corrupt other nations, it can be exempt from the rules it imposes on others. He argues that this exceptionalism-turned-exemptionalism affects the role of the U.S. in its international engagements by justifying its self-exemption from some international laws, rules and agreements. He refers to this double standard as the U.S.'s willingness to be a "flying buttress" instead of a "pillar" of the international community, following the rules the majority of the time for political appearances instead of real legal obligation (Koh, 2005).

There are also a number of scholars who have pointed out problems with American exceptionalism and highlighted the downsides that come with embracing a narrative of superiority and exceptionality. Others have even questioned the validity of claims to exceptionalism. For example, Michael Kammen (1993) questions how "unique" and "exceptional" the U.S. really is, implying that it does not fundamentally differ from many industrialized nations and that any form of exceptionalism is rooted in the past. Alternatively, he suggests that the American identity might be better served by considering other meanings of "American" that can define national identity and national experiences (Kammen, 1993). Margaret MacMillan notes the implications exceptionalism can have for international relations,



writing, “Faith in their own exceptionalism has sometimes led to a certain obtuseness on the part of Americans, a tendency to preach at other nations rather than listen to them, a tendency as well to assume that American motives are pure where those of others are not” (2003). William E. B. Du Bois was a prominent American who also acknowledged the problematic side of exceptionalism. He understood the U.S. as in constant conflict between its ideological goals of freedom for all and its materialistic goals of private wealth and power. He described this as the “American Assumption,” where the best of America was built on the ideas of exceptionalism, but failed to cover up the issues of class and race buried in the foundation (Lewis, 2012). Andrew Bacevich (2008) sees the widespread acceptance of American exceptionalism as a primary cause of many American economic, political, military, and cultural conflicts. He argues that the endless pursuit of American values, principally freedom, results in too many impossible obligations, and so, the U.S. needs to put a stop to its imperial tendencies and “reassert control over its own destiny” (Bacevich, 2008).

Exceptionalism is the narrative that shapes the American identity. It serves as a justification for its domestic and foreign policies, validates its status as a global hegemon, and confirms (at least for Americans) the correctness and moral righteousness of their interests and values. Margaret MacMillan writes that American exceptionalism “has always had two sides: the one eager to set the world to rights, the other ready to turn its back with contempt if its message should be ignored” (MacMillan, 2003). This identity narrative informs the benevolent hegemon story that guides American interactions abroad. The benevolent hegemon story portrays the U.S. as a helpful and well-intentioned global leader whose interactions with other nations are always rooted in efforts to help the other party become better in some way. However, the narrative holds that these attempts are not always appreciated by the receiving country and the U.S. winds up

being taken advantage of and used. This is the narrative structure that colors the way the U.S. discusses its relationship with China, and its trade dealings in particular. The U.S. views itself as enacting fair and open trade policies with China, whereas China continuously disappoints the U.S. by pursuing “unfair” or illiberal policies and failing to conform to American values.

### 3.4 The Chinese Narrative

The narrative that has long defined Chinese identity and driven Chinese domestic and international politics is that of national humiliation. This narrative has its roots in what is called China’s Century of Humiliation, the period of Western and Japanese intervention in China between 1839 and 1949. The narrative purports that China, once a great power, was abused and humiliated at the hands of foreign powers, and that it must rise up to reclaim the power and respect it deserves. Key to the national humiliation narrative is the importance of escaping from humiliation and returning to China’s former glory as a global power. Christopher Ford refers to this idea as China’s Great Telos of Return, where China believes its history of humiliation at the hands of foreign powers is evidence of how it deserves more power and status now (Ford, 2015). The long-held Chinese view of the world maintained that China was the center of the earth and the highest form of civilization. A history of foreign abuses beginning in 1839 with the Opium War damaged that image and the resulting humiliation is now seared into the Chinese consciousness and identity. The narrative calls for national liberation as the way out of humiliation by returning to an independent China with a powerful international status. This goal has defined its approach to foreign affairs by making it sensitive to issues of intervention and hegemony (Zhang, 1999).

The national humiliation narrative once again became prominent in the 1990s, when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) needed to reestablish its political legitimacy after the setback of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. The CCP revived and encouraged the national humiliation narrative in order to reinforce its legitimacy as China's ruler and to remind younger generations of the imperialism and accompanying humiliation that came before them (Cohen, 2002). The CCP's core message at this time was that it was responsible for both lifting China out of its national humiliation and altering its fate (Wang Z., 2008). Since the CCP adapted the narrative for its own purposes, it raises questions as to the consistency of the narrative. To what extent is the current Chinese narrative of national humiliation a Chinese one, and to what extent is it a CCP conception? Can these two be equated as a consistent sentiment through history? I believe they can be, because while the CCP certainly has its own political purposes for pushing national humiliation, the fundamental concepts of the narrative pre-date the party. It has become a critical part of the Chinese national identity and impacts the way international relations are discussed and approached. In fact, Chinese discussions of international relations today are similar to those that took place during the Century of Humiliation (Kaufman, 2011). Therefore, it is originally and foundationally a Chinese narrative, but has also become a CCP narrative and tool by which the party sustains its political legitimacy. Due to the scope of this paper, apart from demonstrating the narrative's creation in Chinese history, the narrative I refer to is the CCP's rendering of the national humiliation narrative.

The narrative of national humiliation is a prominent topic in literature seeking to address the Chinese perspective to international relations or the motivations behind Chinese foreign policy. Many scholars recognize the importance of this narrative to China's identity. Paul Cohen (2002) gives numerous examples of the narrative appearing in advertisements, textbooks, and

articles. William Callahan also demonstrates how common the narrative is by citing evidence such as the frequent mention of national humiliation in Chinese history textbooks and curriculum, the memorialization of the slogan “never forget national humiliation” in songs and plays, and the implementation of a National Humiliation Day in China from 1927 to 1940 (Callahan, 2004). Callahan (2010) also identifies this narrative in both political and popular discussions. He writes that the success of the 2008 Beijing Olympics was framed in a way that told the domestic community a story of a triumphant return to greatness on the world stage under the guidance of the CCP (Callahan, 2010).



## Chapter 4: The Narratives and Historical Examples

In addition to understanding the U.S.-China trade relationship, it is also important to understand the specific historical narratives that this thesis examines. Narratives are stories with distinct plotlines and themes that inform understandings of history and establish expectations for the present and future. This section outlines both the American narrative and the Chinese narrative as the identity stories they are, draws upon historical examples to demonstrate the pervasive presence of the narratives, and highlights historical instances where the narratives interacted with each other. These historical moments will be analyzed from two viewpoints to see how they contribute to both narratives. Understanding how each narrative interprets the same historical moments is important to understanding the relationship and the interaction of the two narratives. This interaction will be discussed later on in this paper, in the context of the current U.S.-China trade conflict.

### 4.1 The American Narrative

#### 4.1.1 The Story

The American narrative outlined in this thesis stems from the larger, umbrella narrative of American exceptionalism. The idea of American exceptionalism holds that the U.S. is both different from and superior to other nations; as a result, the U.S. has a responsibility to guide the rest of the world. As a narrative, American exceptionalism is both a founding story and an identity story. It has its roots in the story of the Puritans overcoming persecution and setting out to be a moral beacon for the world. This idea of chosenness, that God's favor validates the American mission, defines American exceptionalism and the narrative that is to be outlined here.

Exceptionalism has been used in a variety of ways, but most commonly denotes the idea that the U.S. is unique, special, and tasked with spreading its universal values to the rest of the world.

The American narrative identified here, with particular relevance to U.S.-China relations, can be called either the unappreciated benevolence narrative or the benevolent hegemon narrative (Harding, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. It pushes the exceptionalism concept further to inform the way the U.S. interacts with other actors, defining and explaining its approach to international relations. Aspects of this narrative arise in the American approach to numerous other countries, but is nowhere as fully exemplified as in its approach to China. The unappreciated benevolence narrative follows, to a certain extent, the plotline of the Grimms Brothers' tale "The Ungrateful Son." The U.S. takes on a parental role in its relationship with China; it sees it as backwards, immature, underdeveloped, but brimming with potential. Thus, the U.S. adopts a protective, and at times condescending, parental role in its approach to China. It seeks to elevate China, while first and foremost benefiting itself, and sees itself as bestowing friendship and benevolence upon China. If and when China fails in some way to appreciate this benevolence, or acts in a way that opposes American values or subverts expectations, the "parent" becomes disappointed, upset, and punitive. Thus, this narrative has two sides: the parental side that looks at China with fondness, if perhaps also condescension, and the punitive side that sees an ungrateful, misbehaving China. The unappreciated benevolence narrative is cyclical; it describes the numerous ups and downs that a relationship can experience. Specifically, it follows periods of high engagement and hope in the U.S.-China relationship, as well as periods of disengagement

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<sup>1</sup> The title of "benevolent hegemon" or "unappreciated benevolence" is inspired by remarks by Harry Harding at the Distinguished Public Lecture series at the Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore on April 10, 2015, as well as from in his course on U.S.-China relations at National Chengchi University in Taipei, Taiwan taught in the fall of 2018.

and disappointment. These correlate to the ever-changing nature of the relationship as well; at varying times it can be characterized more by animosity, amity, or competition.

#### 4.1.2 Identifying the American Narrative

The great majority of the work involved with this thesis has been identifying both the American and Chinese narratives in the source materials. Thus, it has been important to define what constitutes the specific narratives. The American narrative of unappreciated benevolence can be divided into three main sections: establishing American benevolence, establishing American moral or technical superiority over others, and establishing American authority, paternalism, and disappointment. Different sources and examples may speak to just one part of the narrative or to multiple parts at once.

Benevolence towards other countries is often expressed as innate American fairness, a sense of wanting others to do well, and a focus on kindness and friendship as American motivations. Benevolence can also be expressed as charity, or as examples of the U.S. going out of its way to help another country even if there is no gain for itself. Moral and technical superiority can be found anytime American values are presumed to be universal and beyond reproach, or when the American model for doing something is treated as the only proper model. When it comes to China, this is often conveyed through a direct condemnation of a Chinese model, the assumption that China needs to follow U.S.-set rules or a U.S. model, or through the assumption that American motivations in its interactions with China are pure and just. Finally, the paternalism aspect of the American narrative can be seen in remarks that appear to be talking down to China, assuming Chinese naivety or immaturity, or treating China as something that needs to be taught. Paternalism also arises in situations where the U.S. is disappointed in China

and employs punitive measures, much as a parent would punish a naughty child. Therefore, statements that allude to some sort of Chinese wrongdoing or betrayal also fall into this category.

#### 4.1.3 Identifying American Non-Narrative

It is also important to identify non-narrative, and to take note of where non-narrative is used instead of narrative. In the U.S.-China relationship, non-narrative is often evident through expressions of friendship and a strong desire to cooperate. It can also encompass elements of shared history and deep-rooted respect. In addition, non-narrative includes technical discussions of trade. Sources that give trade statistics and facts, such as the United States Trade Representative, are almost always examples of non-narrative. My research has found that non-narrative is used quite frequently, especially in diplomatic situations where the two countries are speaking directly to each other. Joint press conferences, for example, when representatives from each country are in the same space, tend to rely heavily on non-narrative. This can involve expressions of admiration, a focus on non-sensitive issues or areas of agreement, or iterations of the importance of maintaining a strong bilateral relationship. Often, the latter is accomplished through emphasizing the great esteem the people of each country feel for the other. For example, at a state dinner in Beijing in 2017, President Trump's remarked to President Xi:

The people of the United States have a very deep respect for the heritage of your country and the noble traditions of its people. Your ancient values bring past and present together into the present. So beautiful. It is my hope that the proud spirits of the American and Chinese people will inspire our efforts to achieve a more just, secure, and peaceful world, a future worthy of the sacrifices of our ancestors, and the dreams of our children. (The White House, 2017).



The focus on commonalities, and the optimism for the future of the relationship are key elements here that make this statement an example of non-narrative. Non-narrative is used to emphasize cooperation and the forward-moving direction of the U.S.-China relationship. While some may point to these focuses as parts of other narratives, this research takes the position that not everything is narrative, and that the material described above constitutes non-narrative.

#### 4.1.4 Historical Examples of the American Narrative

Since the first Americans went to China in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, interactions between the two countries have exemplified this American narrative. This section includes some of the more prominent moments and issues in the U.S.-China relationship that demonstrate the American narrative.

One of the earliest important issues in the U.S.-China relationship was the opium trade. While most often associated with the British, the opium trade in China was not limited to just one country. In the 1820s American merchants were also bringing opium into China, and increased the amount they were trading in the mid-1820s and again in the 1830s by the same proportion as the British traders (Downs J. , 1968). Traditionally, American and other Western historians have characterized this period as one of U.S. support for the opening of China (Downs J. M., 1991). The U.S. often acknowledges the negative effects the opium trade, and subsequent Opium Wars, had on China only as the direct results of British actions. Part of the American view on the history of U.S.-China relations involves a sense of pride at this distinction from the British and other Western countries, a view that paints the U.S. as a friend to China instead of a European foe. Vice President Mike Pence's remarks on China in October 2018 illustrate this perspective: "When China suffered through indignities and exploitations during her so-called

‘Century of Humiliation,’ America refused to join in, and advocated the ‘Open Door’ policy, so that we could have freer trade with China, and preserve their sovereignty” (Pence, Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China, 2018). This view allows the U.S. to see itself as a benevolent actor during this part of history and abdicate any responsibility for the losses China suffered during this period. By focusing on the positive aspect of opening up China, the U.S. contributes to the narrative of American benevolence and goodwill toward China.

The first Opium War ended in 1842 with China being forced to grant Britain special privileges and the use of its ports. In order not to miss out on this opportunity to access the Chinese market, the U.S. sent Caleb Cushing on a mission to obtain the same rights that had been given to the British. Before embarking on the mission, Cushing spoke at a dinner at Faneuil Hall, addressing the significance of his China mission. He spoke of the superior advancement of the West, saying, “We have become the teacher of our teachers. I go to China...in behalf of civilization” (Haddad J. R., 2008). This patronizing tone is found in many of Cushing’s formal communications with China (Haddad J., 2013). Although here Cushing acknowledges China’s historical prowess, he also makes it clear that the U.S. has far surpassed China and possesses superior knowledge and values. This assumption that all the U.S. has to offer is beneficial and will bring China into civilization demonstrates the idea of American exceptionalism; American values, systems, and norms are immediately thought to be universal. The sense of duty that the words, “I go to China in behalf of civilization” convey illustrates the benevolence aspect of the unappreciated benevolence narrative. These words portray an America that is not only responsible for bringing its superior models to the backwards parts of the world, like China, but one that is also eager to do so. Cushing’s mission resulted in the signing of the Treaty of

Wanghsia in 1844. It was the first treaty between the U.S. and China, and awarded the U.S. all the advantages given to the British and assured that any new gains for the British would also apply to the Americans (Hunt, 1983). The U.S. has long promoted the idea that it was Europe alone who was responsible for the humiliation of China, but its eager acceptance of the treaty system and the advantages to be gained were certainly part of China's humiliation. John Fairbank writes, "This was an accident of history: that we Americans could enjoy the East Asian treaty privileges, the fruits of European aggression, without the moral burden of ourselves committing aggression. It gave us a holier-than-thou attitude, a righteous self-esteem, an undeserved moral grandeur in our own eyes" (Fairbank, 1970). Here, Fairbank succinctly explains how the U.S.'s tendency to distance itself from the injuries perpetuated by Europe against China is a self-deception that contributes to the American narrative of benevolence without wrongdoing.

The Open Door policy was a statement of principles initiated by the U.S. in 1899 and 1900. It was intended to preserve equal trade privileges among China's trade partners and Chinese sovereignty (Hay, The Open Door Note, 1899). The policy looked to control the scramble for spheres of influence in China and prevent the country from being divided up into colonies by ensuring that the different powers would have equal access to open trade ports. Secretary of State John Hay issued two notes, called the Open Door Notes, to other foreign powers interested in staking a claim in China. The second note, issued in July of 1900, defined the purpose of the Open Door Policy as to "bring permanent safety and peace to China, preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity, protect all rights guaranteed to friendly powers by treaty and international law, and safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese Empire" (Hay, 1900). This framing of the Open Door Policy

supports the perception the U.S. had of itself as a benevolent country; there is a clear focus on supporting and protecting China instead of on the motivating benefits this set of policies would bring the U.S. In 1900, President McKinley reiterated this in his annual message to Congress. In stating the U.S.'s approach to China and the Open Door Policy, he said:

The United States from the earliest days of foreign intercourse with China had followed a policy of peace, omitting no occasions to testify good will, to further the extension of lawful trade, to respect the sovereignty of its Government, and to insure by all legitimate and kindly but earnest means the fullest measure of protection for the lives and property of out law-abiding citizens and for the exercise of their beneficent callings among the Chinese people (McKinley, 1900).

President McKinley's words depict the U.S. as a benevolent hegemon that acts out of a sense of kindness and concern for the Chinese that stems from the American people themselves. His statement also focuses much more on an innate American interest in Chinese success than on American commercial interests, despite the latter being a crucial part of the Open Door Policy. In order to build up support for the Open Door policy among the American public, the Asiatic Association and the *Journal of Commerce* started a campaign to push the merits of the policy. This campaign involved emphasizing the importance of the Chinese market for U.S. commercial interests and the idea that the U.S. government and the American people had responsibilities to the Chinese (Campbell, 1941). This appeal to obligation serves as another example of the benevolent hegemon narrative; it illustrates both the American paternalistic sentiment toward China and the conviction that China would undoubtedly benefit from American involvement.

Finally, even the use of the phrase "open door" as the title of the policy contributes to this narrative. Eric Blanchard (2013) takes a constructivist and cognitive approach to understand how

the use of an “open door” as a metaphor impacted the U.S.-China relationship. He finds that this metaphor helped strengthen a paradigm of the U.S. and the West as the bringers of civilization and China as a place both stagnantly backwards and full of potential. He also argues that the imagery of the open door implies a reality where the U.S. must step in to hold open the door for China because China is incapable of doing so on its own, or being its own doorkeeper. Finally, he points out that the American charity implicit in this metaphor acts as a statement of an anti-imperialist American identity, even as some of the U.S.’s actions proved otherwise (Blanchard E. M., 2013). Thus, Blanchard’s analysis of the open door metaphor contributes to the idea of the benevolent hegemon narrative by demonstrating how the U.S. truly saw, and continues to see, itself as a generous global leader eager to usher China into civilization. All of the above examples highlight the ways in which the U.S. saw itself as genuinely helping China out of paternalistic kindness and friendship. The narrative’s impact on the American view of China and American obligations to China helped encourage the U.S. to pursue the Open Door policy instead of following along with a potential partitioning of China by European powers.

In 1946, the U.S. and China signed a five-year Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation. This treaty affirmed peace, friendship, and cooperation between the two parties by establishing trade rights for both countries. On paper, it established reciprocal rights for an equal trading relationship. While the U.S. was by far the principle beneficiary of the treaty, its technical fairness allowed it to be considered an equal agreement in the U.S. In the Congressional hearing regarding this treaty in 1946, the treaty was repeatedly referred to as being based on the “principle of mutuality” (Congressional Hearing, 1948). Furthermore, Senator Alexander Smith of New Jersey raised concerns regarding the actual equality of the treaty, asserting that while the U.S. would certainly want more freedom to explore China, it would not

welcome similar exploration of its own resources. The subsequent discussion easily dismisses these concerns as unlikely to happen in the actual situation (Congressional Hearing, 1948). This reveals a core American assumption; that even behind an emphasis on mutuality, there is an underlying notion that other countries are not the equal of the U.S., and that the U.S. is not beholden to the standards and expectations it has of others. This sentiment is echoed through the many exclusionary immigration policies the U.S. put in place to keep the Chinese out, despite a strong American interest in, and assumed right to, exploration in China.

Alongside merchants and traders, missionaries also made up a large portion of the early Americans in China. Where merchants claimed to be interested in opening and modernizing China, missionaries looked to transform the Chinese nation into one of the Christian faith. Beginning in the 1830s, American Christian missionaries began to arrive in China with the hopes of bringing their faith and values to the Chinese people. Most missionary work took the form of medical assistance and education; through these Western techniques missionaries hoped to access the spirit of the Chinese and convert them to the Christian faith (Hunt, 1983). This desire to educate and convert the Chinese people demonstrates both the benevolent paternalism and blatant superiority America felt for towards China. Furthermore, in his book *Chinese Characteristics*, Arthur H. Smith wrote that despite a handful of potential similarities, and in addition to numerous flaws, the U.S. and China were completely different, with “the face of China...always and everywhere towards the darkness of the remote past” (Smith, 1890). Thus, there was a prevailing idea that Americans went to China to affect change, not to change themselves. Carol Chin refers to the missionaries as beneficent imperialists who were “secure in the superiority of their American-ness and the magnanimity of their Christianity...they did not pause to consider the possibility that Chinese culture might have some value” (Chin, 2003).

China, then, was a place to be saved from itself by the generosity of the U.S., a platform upon which American benevolence could be demonstrated.

The Boxer Rebellion was a large reaction against the foreign presence in China, and in particular the Christian missionary presence, that took place from 1899 and 1901. Growing frustration among the Chinese regarding the perceived foreign invasion of their country intensified into violent anti-foreign, anti-Christian outbreaks in northern China. The Boxers, as they came to be known, were strongly anti-Christian and went after Chinese Christians and missionaries in an effort to push the foreign presence out of China (Plante, 1999). The American reaction to the Boxer Rebellion came in two parts. First, there was shock and outrage at the violence, and Western media used this to paint a demonizing picture of the Chinese. Jane Elliott (1996) analyzed the coverage of the Boxer Rebellion in many British, American, and English-language newspapers in China. Elliott's research found that there was a high rate of emotional adjectives used to describe the Chinese in American newspapers, such as words like "cruel," "decayed," "murderous," "sinister," and so forth (Elliott, 1996).

The second face of the American reaction was one of perseverance in the face of adversity. There was an intentional decision not to give up on China, a decision that China's potential was not gone, despite the demonizing way it was described and viewed by many. This doubling-down, so to speak, is evident in an article by John Barrett. In 1900, John Barrett (1900) wrote an article entitled "America's Duty in China" that begins, "Christendom is staggered by the crisis in China. But America's duty is definite; her path is plain." With this, and the rest of the article, Barrett tasked the U.S. with rising to meet the daunting China challenge with Christian and moral heroism. He reinforced the idea of China both as an unprecedented challenge for American Christians and as a place that desperately needed America's assistance.



He wrote that despite anti-missionary sentiment in China, “the forces of Christianity...cannot consider now for a moment the possibility of retreat and defeat” (Barrett, 1900). These statements, and his article as a whole, illustrate the paternal attitude the U.S. held toward China and the uniquely strong pull it felt to improve China by remaking it in its own image. They also show that even in moments of disappointment, the U.S. still senses and acknowledges a dogged faith that China can be saved. Here, the narrative helps reinforce this American desire to remain engaged with China, as opposed to cutting ties.

I skip through history now to what was perhaps one of the greatest disappointments for the U.S. in the U.S.-China relationship: the events at Tiananmen Square in June of 1989. In the month and a half leading up to June 4, student protesters had begun to gather at Tiananmen Square in Beijing to call for democratic reforms. For a while, the peaceful protests were allowed to continue, bolstering hope among the student protesters and the spectating world that political change in China would occur. This optimism gained confidence as the protests gained public support and received extensive media coverage thanks to the large international media presence in Beijing preparing for the Sino-Soviet reconciliation. Some officials did go to the square to meet with students, further fueling the domestic and international belief that reform was on the way. In the U.S., the media presented a cheery picture, which raised American hopes for China’s chances of democratizing (Suettinger, 2003). However, the widespread attention and high hopes proved futile when the Chinese government declared martial law and ordered troops to clear the square early on the morning of June 4, 1989. The actual number of casualties is unknown, but many believe it to be in the thousands (Nathan, 2001).

The American reaction was one of grave disappointment and outrage. The public decried the CCP’s handling of the situation, and protests took place around the country (Suettinger,



2003). Members of Congress called for punitive measures to be taken against China, such as tariffs, cessation of support for World Bank loans, the withdrawal of the American ambassador, and a cessation of military cooperation, among others. Some members, such as Senator Jesse Helms, even called for a full reconsideration of the U.S.-China relationship (Suettinger, 2003). Some punitive measures were taken, such as the suspension of military sales, various sanctions, and loan restrictions, but they were weak and temporary; most of the sanctions had been removed or weakened within a year (Skidmore & Gates, 1997). Moral outrage and bitter disappointment that the Chinese government had chosen not to embrace democracy and other Western values fueled Congress and the public to call for swift and harsh action against China.

The president, however, took a more conciliatory approach and emphasized continuing to nurture the U.S.-China relationship. President H.W. Bush issued a statement on June 5, 1989 condemning the CCP's actions, but also reaffirming the U.S. commitment to the bilateral relationship. He said, "The United States cannot condone the violent attacks and cannot ignore the consequences for our relationship with China, which has been built on a foundation of broad support by the American people" (Bush G. H., 1989). Yet even as he condemned China, he continued on to emphasize the importance of maintaining an American relationship with China. The president's journal entries during this period revealed his struggle to balance defending what were seen as American values with preserving trade and other interests, in one moment emphasizing the necessity of standing up for human rights, and in the next stressing the importance of maintaining a strong bilateral relationship (Bush & Scowcroft, 1998). He appealed to the American sense of responsibility for China, arguing, "When you see these kids struggling for democracy and freedom, this would be a bad time for the United States to withdraw and pull back and leave them to the devices of a leadership that might decide to crackdown further" (Bush

G. H., 1989). With this, he directly appealed to that paternalistic, benevolent American self-perception that is part of the unappreciated benevolence narrative. Thus, the narrative again helped reinforce and justify the American commitment to engaging with China, as opposed to enacting harsher punishments or cutting ties.

Another event that exemplifies the narratives is the collision of two planes over the South China Sea in 2001. On April 1, 2001 an American E-P3 surveillance plane and a Chinese F-8 jet fighter collided over the South China Sea, resulting in the crashing of the Chinese jet and the death of the Chinese pilot, while the American plane was able to land on Hainan Island, where the crew members were detained by the Chinese. Chinese President Jiang Zemin, Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, and Spokesman Zhu Bangzao all called upon the U.S. to take full responsibility for the accident and make a formal apology to the Chinese government and people (Gries & Peng, 2002). American refusal to do so on the grounds that they were not responsible for the collision led to days of gridlock and negotiation as the U.S. tried to get its crew home. China continued to demand an official apology, and while the U.S. expressed regret for the situation and the death of the Chinese pilot, it did not acquiesce, and voiced its belief that the Chinese pilot was the cause of the collision. Eventually, a letter from Ambassador Joseph Prueher to Foreign Minister Tang in which the U.S. offered two “sorries,” one about the pilot’s death and one for the EP-3 entering China’s airspace without verbal clearance (Kan, et al., 2001). China took this as a formal apology, publicized it as a Chinese diplomatic victory, and released the American crew. The U.S., on the other hand, continued to claim innocence, with Secretary of State Colin Powell stating, “There is nothing to apologize for...we did not do anything wrong” (Gries & Peng, 2002). This incident is one example of the American attitude of moral superiority and righteousness that contributes to both the American and Chinese narratives.

The twenty-first century saw huge changes in the U.S.-China relationship, largely due to rapidly growing Chinese economy. A host of changes in China contributed to growing unease among many Americans regarding the increasingly competitive bilateral relationship. These changes included the following: in 2007, China announced an 18 percent increase in defense spending, in 2008, China became the largest holder of U.S. treasuries, and in 2010 China officially surpassed Japan to become the world's second-largest economy, with predictions circulating that it would overtake the U.S. economy by 2027 (CFR Timeline, 2019). All of these developments sparked apprehension and debate in the U.S. about the increasingly unequal-seeming relationship. China's growth into a more formidable presence prompted a change in how the U.S. approached the relationship. One of these changes under the Obama administration was the Pivot to Asia. Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State at the time, introduced this policy focus in an article in *Foreign Policy* in October of 2011. Clinton explained the pivot as a focus shift away from the Middle East and towards the Asia-Pacific. She framed it as a rejection of those who called for the U.S. to adopt isolationist policies, stating instead that the U.S. would be a leader in Asia in economics, security, and human rights. Specifically, the pivot intended to focus on: "strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening our working relationships with emerging powers, including with China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights" (Clinton, 2011).

Although the Obama administration spoke in favor of a rising China, there is little doubt that the goals of the new foreign policy focus were motivated by concerns over China's increasing power and influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, the refocus on the Asia-Pacific was in large part a rebalancing act trying to assert America's influence and presence over

China's. When directly asked about China, President Obama consistently spoke of welcoming a rising China, but he also stressed the growing responsibility China had to "play by the rules of the road" and the U.S. responsibility to "send a clear message to them...in terms of accepting the rules and responsibilities that come with being a world power" (The White House, 2011). This emphasis demonstrates the American narrative by showing the willingness of the U.S. to accept only things that align with its presumed-universal values. The U.S. welcomes a strong China that will advance the same goals and not try to change the U.S.-led international order.

Statements like those of President Obama serve as firm reminders that the U.S. has its eye on China and will not tolerate misbehavior, and impose the sense of a parent/child dynamic onto the U.S.-China relationship. Proposed in line with the pivot was the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a multilateral trade agreement of which China was not a part. The Obama administration's remarks on the TPP took a similar tone as those above. In 2016, then Secretary of State John Kerry promoted the TPP by appealing once again to American responsibility and moral supremacy, arguing that the U.S. does not want to "cede the playing field to countries and actors who don't care about high standards, who would rather ignore the rule of law, and who would prefer if the United States of America took a back seat in the Asia-Pacific" (Kerry, 2016). To whom could the administration be referring to here, other than China? Additionally, in his 2016 State of the Union Address, President Obama made a push for advancing American leadership in Asia through the TPP, saying, "With TPP, China does not set the rules in that region, we do" (Obama, 2016). This statement makes it clear that the Pivot to Asia and the TPP were at least in part about countering China's rise and controlling China's regional reach. Both of the above comments serve as another example of the exceptionalism that is central to the American narrative because they presume that the U.S. is the only player who can and should lead the

world correctly. They also communicate the American mistrust of China and the belief that China is too misguided or misbehaving to take on a greater leadership role.

Beginning in 2012, tensions began to rise between the two countries on the issue of trade. A major catalyst for this was the U.S. trade deficit with China rising to an all-time high of \$295.5 billion in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Already a longtime sensitive issue in the relationship, this new jump brought extra attention and pressure to the trade area of the relationship. One way that these tensions made themselves known was through an increase in the complaints the U.S. brought against China in international forums such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). Specifically, in March of 2012, the U.S., European Union, and Japan requested consultations with China under the dispute settlement system regarding China's rare earth export limits (World Trade Organization, 2012). The concern of the U.S. and other parties was that Chinese export restrictions violated WTO rules and disadvantaged others. President Obama spoke on the issue the day after the request was issued, explaining the U.S.'s actions as intended to level an unfair playing field and counter Chinese policies that interfered with the free market. He also asserted that China was refusing to follow rules it had agreed to when it had joined international institutions like the WTO (Obama, Remarks by the President on Fair Trade, 2012). There are countless instances of the U.S. accusing China of breaking the rules of trade and thereby disadvantaging, or even taking advantage of, the U.S. for its own gain. The Obama administration prided itself on being tough on trade enforcement with China because of the high rates at which it brought antidumping and enforcement cases against China. As of 2016, the U.S. had brought more WTO challenges against China than any other country (The White House, 2017).

The punitive measures taken through the WTO are one example of the parental side of the American narrative. Disciplinary actions are taken in an attempt to change unwanted behavior. Another aspect of the parental part of the narrative is the American determination to maintain the relationship. The U.S. often emphasizes the importance of engaging with China, despite hard times and challenges. During the Obama administration, National Security Advisor Susan Rice put it succinctly:

If we sought to punish China by cancelling meetings or refusing to engage them, we would only be punishing ourselves....And determined, constant engagement is necessary to manage our differences. If America chose to remove itself from China, we would only ensure that the Chinese are not challenged on the issues where we differ and are not encouraged to peacefully rise within the international system that we have done so much to build. (Rice, 2015)

Rice's remarks show that the American refusal to give up on China stems from both paternalism and a sense of overall superiority. The U.S. has an obligation to guide China; abandoning it would deprive China of the chance to improve and integrate into the American-led international order.

The transition to the Trump administration brought even more strained trade relations between the U.S. and China. Donald Trump has been an outspoken critic of China and its practices, spouting inflammatory rhetoric about the dynamics of the U.S.-China relationship since the early days of his 2016 presidential campaign. Indeed, the now president's views on China and American policy towards China are likely among the most consistent that he holds. China, especially trade issues with China, factored heavily into the 2016 presidential election. It was a subject of everything campaign-related, from televised debates to campaign rallies to

Twitter. Trump's campaign announcement speech in June of 2015 mentioned China sixteen times, largely to condemn it for manipulating currency, profiting at the expense of the U.S., and for taking advantage of the U.S. without consequence (Trump, Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech, 2016). The presidential campaign that followed was chock-full of references, some quite colorful, to unfair Chinese trade practices.

Most notably, during a campaign rally in Indiana, Trump intensified the language he used to describe China's actions when he declared that the U.S. "can't continue to allow China to rape our country...it's the greatest theft in the history of the world" He continued on to explain, "I'm not angry with China. I'm angry at our leaders, because they are grossly incompetent and they shouldn't have ever been elected to do this job" (Trump qtd. in Gass, 2016). This sentiment that China cleverly takes advantage of the U.S. because weak American leadership has allowed it to is a recurring theme in Trump's rhetoric both on the campaign trail and as president. It is a consistent and unique employment of the American narrative; it also looks down at a childlike China and gives adult-level responsibility to the U.S. Although Trump often praises China as smart or not to blame for taking advantage of the U.S., he juxtaposes this quasi-praise with heavy criticism of the U.S. for sleeping on the job and allowing China to misbehave. This is a clear continuation of the parent/child dynamic between the U.S. and China. This rhetoric does not approach the two countries as equals; the assumption is that China will misbehave unless the U.S. enforces the rules. Trump's campaign focus on trade issues with China continued into his presidency, and continues to be a major foreign policy concentration today. U.S.-China trade tensions have increased steadily under the Trump administration, culminating in the ongoing U.S.-China trade war.



## 4.2 The Chinese Narrative

### 4.2.1 The Story

The Chinese narrative can be called the national humiliation narrative. What I present here as the Chinese narrative is not new; the concept that national humiliation and national rejuvenation are key to the Chinese identity have long been part of the literature, and is often referenced in literature regarding the Chinese identity and Chinese politics. The national humiliation narrative can be divided into two parts: national humiliation and national rejuvenation. These parts combine to form the linear story that informs China's past, present, and future. The narrative details China's past and lays out a path for its future. It holds that China was once a great civilization that suffered unjust treatment at the hands of imperialist foreign powers during the "Century of Humiliation (百年國恥)," or the period of foreign intervention in China that took place between 1839 and 1949. Now, China must rise back to a position of global prominence and respect. This rise will be complete when it has achieved national rejuvenation (民族復興戰略). Thus, the storyline takes on a linear format: ever since the period of humiliation, China has been working toward this ultimate goal of national rejuvenation. China's rise will be considered complete when it has reclaimed losses from the period of humiliation, returned to its rightful position of high global standing, and successfully demanded respect from the international community and other states, especially those foreign powers that interfered in China during the Century of Humiliation. This narrative influences the way China interacts with other countries by providing a constant backdrop to interactions and events. China is sensitive to situations that could be seen as another country attempting to humiliate, control, or patronize China.



#### 4.2.2 Identifying the Chinese Narrative

The Chinese narrative of national humiliation to national rejuvenation is usually quite easy to identify in official statements. This is due in part to the great prevalence of key phrases, such as national humiliation and national rejuvenation, as well as recurring concepts, such as respect for sovereignty, different models or paths, and imperialism. The Chinese narrative is used for two different purposes: establishing humiliation or victimhood and establishing the necessity of respect for sovereignty or different models. National humiliation and victimhood are established through discussions of history, mention of past foreign aggressions and mistreatment, and increased sensitivity to perceived slights. Narratives, being stories, are rather emotional ways of remembering history, interpreting present events, or predicting the future. As such, one thing to look for when identifying the Chinese narrative is an unusually sensitive take on an event. For example, the history of national humiliation makes China more likely to have an emotional response to instances of perceived intrusion, bullying, or condescension. The importance of respect for sovereignty and different models is identified through mentions of respect and equality. When Chinese statements call for the U.S. to stop imposing its own will or way of doing things upon others, this part of the narrative comes through.

#### 4.2.3 Identifying Chinese Non-Narrative

Chinese non-narrative takes the same form as the American non-narrative discussed earlier. When Chinese statements show non-narrative, they also embrace discussions of cooperation, shared goals, and optimism about the future of the bilateral relationship. Non-narrative from the Chinese side also appears primarily in diplomatic settings, such as when representatives of both sides have gathered together. Also similar to American expressions of

non-narrative, Chinese non-narrative avoids mentioning sensitive topics or issues in the relationship, focusing instead on positive people-to-people sentiments and messages of friendship. At the same state dinner that was mentioned earlier as an example of American non-narrative, President Xi said the following:

It is my firm conviction that China-U.S. relations face limited challenges, but boundless potential for growth. With perseverance, we can surely write a new chapter in the history of China-U.S. relations. With perseverance, our two great nations will definitely make new contributions to mankind. (The White House, 2017)

This statement embodies non-narrative through its “boundless” optimism for the future of the relationship.

#### 4.2.4 Historical Examples of the Chinese Narrative

This section covers some of the same historical events previously mentioned in the section on historical examples of the American narrative, now showing the Chinese perspective and how the same events can support multiple narratives. Many of the instances the U.S. points to in order to demonstrate its benevolence and long history of friendship toward China are also used to prove national humiliation in the Chinese perspective.

In the early interactions between the West and China, the Chinese did not differentiate between European nations and the U.S. Chinese accounts from this period tend to refer to these countries more generally as barbarians or foreigners. A letter from Emperor Qianlong to King George III illustrates the Chinese attitude towards these foreign nations leading up to the Opium Wars. In response to a 1793 British request to send an envoy to control the country’s trade with China, Emperor Qianlong wrote, “How can our dynasty alter its whole procedure and system of

etiquette, established for more than a century, in order to meet your individual views...As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things...have no use for your country's manufactures. This then is my answer to your request to appoint a representative" (Qianlong, 1914). In response to additional requests from the British, he wrote, "If other nations, following your bad example, wrongfully importune my ear with further impossible requests, how will it be possible for me to treat them with easy indulgence?" (Qianlong, 1914). A few things are evident from these excerpt. First, the letter establishes China's indifference to the West. The West did not have anything that interested China; thus, China permitting foreign nations to engage in trade and other activities was considered to be an act of benevolence since it did not benefit from the interaction. Second, the letter communicates Chinese frustration at the West's attempts to impose itself upon China. China did not believe it needed to change then in order to accommodate the whims of the West, and the same is true in Chinese thought today. Finally, these excerpts show the Chinese concern that making certain allowances for one foreign country would lead to many more trying to obtain the same privileges in China. Given that this is precisely how the U.S. eventually gained a strong foothold in China, this was an apt concern.

Despite Chinese resistance to a foreign presence in their borders, foreigners flocked to China, many in the form of merchants. Opium was one of the major goods brought into the Chinese market. The opium trade and the Opium Wars brought destruction to China, and are still widely regarded as significant events in the national humiliation story. The end of the first Opium War ended with the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, which forced China to open its ports to foreign trade, lose Hong Kong to the British, and pay large amounts of compensation. In China, this treaty became known as the First Unequal Treaty (不平等條約) due to the concessions it forced upon China and its marking of the beginning of the Century of Humiliation (Kalipci,

2018). Added to these concessions later were similar forced agreements with other countries, such as the U.S. and France. On July 3, 1844 a document was signed establishing official relations between the U.S. and China, which included a treaty that gave American commerce all the advantages already given to the British (Hunt, 1983). Despite American claims that the opium trade and the plethora of problems it brought to China was exclusively a British venture, the U.S. was also involved in the trade and benefited greatly from the results of the Opium Wars. These gains for the U.S. were a direct result of the British exploitation of China during the Opium War; thus, the U.S. was not so far-removed from China's Century of Humiliation as Pence's aforementioned remarks would suggest, and was in fact a direct beneficiary of early Western exploitation of China. The unfair treatment from this period has not been forgotten; indeed, the concept of unequal treaties still arises in issues between the U.S. and China today. For example, on May 6, 2019 People's Daily posted an article online regarding activity in the South China Sea entitled, "美对华提出「不平等条约」但现在是 1840 年?" ("The U.S. Demands an "Unfair Treaty" with China. Is it 1840 Again?" (梅新育, 2019). The use here of the phrase meaning "unfair treaty" harkens back to this First Unequal Treaty in a direct equation of past mistreatment with the present.

The Open Door policy, which was created by the U.S. in order to prevent China from being carved up by European nations, also contributed to the Chinese feeling of humiliation at the hands of the U.S. Despite its outward appearance as a set of policies intended to preserve and protect Chinese sovereignty, the motive lying beneath the surface was to enable American commercial interests in China. A China that had been carved up by European powers would be disadvantageous for American trade. The Open Door policy did serve to protect China's sovereignty, but Pence's claim that the Open Door policy was intended to preserve Chinese

sovereignty out of a kind of friendship or moral position is misleading. The policy served American trade interests in China first and foremost. Hu Sheng (1985) argues that its role in preserving Chinese sovereignty was primarily a way to ensure a predominant trade position in China for foreign powers and for the U.S. to further its own imperialist agenda in China. This view is still commonly held in China today. An editorial published in China Daily on November 2, 2018 argues that the U.S. would have been just as imperialist as Europe from the beginning had it been capable; since it was not yet strong enough, it resorted to the Open Door Policy to protect its commercial interests in China instead, and never had China's interest at heart (Bin, 2018).

On paper, the 1946 Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation established reciprocal rights for an equal trade relationship, but it realistically only benefited the U.S. The signing of the treaty caused outrage in China, fervent talk of national humiliation, and radio reportings that signing the treaty had betrayed the country's sovereignty (Orlean, 1948). To the Chinese, the principles of reciprocity and equality the treaty embodies are included merely as formalities, because the state of the situation at the time was such that benefits would only be able to go one way. China at that time had no real ability to invest in the American market or carry out the other rights that the treaty afforded the U.S. in China, thus making the equality laid out in the treaty negligible (Wang D. , 2005). The treaty and the Chinese reaction to it are good examples of the differences in perspective that caused mistrust: a "fair" treaty to one is imperialist and unfair to another. While the U.S. saw this treaty as another step in a constructive and productive bilateral relationship, China saw it as another imposition by a foreign power.

Christian missionaries traveled from the U.S. to China in order to bring both their faith and their Western concepts of civilization and development to the Chinese people. While the

majority of these missionaries were well-intentioned and believed they were only bringing positive developments to China such as Western medicine and education, not all Chinese saw their presence in the same benevolent light. To begin, the presence of American missionaries existed because of rights and agreements extracted from China with force. This tied missionaries to China's period of humiliation, since they would not have been able to proselytize had China not been forced into allowing foreign countries numerous rights within its borders. The Boxer Rebellion between 1899 and 1901 encapsulated the anti-missionary, anti-Western, anti-Christian sentiment felt in much of China. The Boxers connected the idea of expelling foreigners from China and reviving China, believing that China's struggles with poverty were the result of foreign interference (Qizhang, 1987).

On November 20, 1900 1901, Wu Ting-Fang addressed the American Academy of Political and Social Science in a speech entitled, "The Causes of the Unpopularity of the Foreigner in China" (Wu, 1901). He attempted to explain the strong anti-foreigner sentiment that lay behind the Boxer Rebellion by gently and diplomatically outlining the many ways in which foreigners had denigrated China since their arrival. For example, when discussing the role of missionaries, Wu acknowledged the positive results of their presence (translation work, education, medicine, philanthropy, among others), but also pointed to instances of interference in Chinese systems, overzealousness in conversion, condemnation of all things Chinese, and unfair treatment. While Wu was careful not to excuse the Boxers' violence, he endeavored to contextualize it in the problematic treatment of the Chinese and their growing frustrations (Wu, 1901). Both the events of the Boxer Rebellion and Wu's speech reveal how foreigners generally, and missionaries in particular, were viewed as intrusive and unwelcome. The powerlessness of

the Chinese to control the foreign presence within their borders due to unfair treaties and the imposed will of other countries contributes to the narrative of national humiliation.

The twentieth century was fraught with many ups and downs for the U.S.-China relationship. The Chinese Civil War saw the U.S. back the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek, who eventually lost and fled to Taiwan. This led to several decades of very limited relations between the U.S. and China (PRC). After the two countries established formal ties in 1979, engagement between the two began to increase, and the cycle of U.S.-China relations swung up towards hope and optimism. Then, towards the end of the twentieth century, the student democratic protests at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, and the Chinese government's crackdown on June 4 threw a wrench into the relationship. Congress and the American public heavily condemned the Chinese response to the peaceful protests at Tiananmen, and bemoaned the Chinese government's decision not to embrace democracy. China's government faced considerable criticism at this time, much of it coming from the U.S.

Five days after the square was forcibly cleared, Deng Xiaoping issued a public speech regarding the events at Tiananmen. In this speech, Deng steadfastly defended the use of force, praised the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and mourned their casualties, criticized the government's enemies as wanting China to be dependent on the West, and responded to international criticism, particularly American criticism. "What qualifications do they have to criticize us?" he asked, going on to say, "The U.S. berates us for suppressing students. But when they handled domestic student unrest and turmoil, didn't they send out police and troops, arrest people and shed blood?"<sup>2</sup> (Deng, 1989). The unapologetic tone of the speech was a staunch

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<sup>2</sup> Deng's comments came in the wake of a secret visit from U.S. National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, who went to China after the Tiananmen incident bearing assurances that the U.S. would not seriously consider isolating China. Deng had this information when he made these comments; thus, they can be seen as comments made to save face, not to communicate aggression.



rejection of the protesters' demands and the Western political model of democracy. In addition, calling the U.S. hypocritical in its reproach of China said that China refused to be held to a different standard than the U.S. held itself to. This stands as a confrontation of the American narrative, through which American "exceptionalism" and presumed superiority allow that very thing to happen. Deng's speech was a rejection of many things, including foreign attempts to once again influence China, a Western model of political development, and Western criticism of Chinese government decisions. Through these rejections, it is clear that China was standing up to potential further national humiliation and claiming to be carving its own path towards greater economic and political development. It can be read as an act of defiance against an unwelcome, imposed parental presence. Aspects of the narrative encourage the Chinese government to choose this more defiant approach over a more conciliatory one.

The April 1, 2001 collision of an American E-P3 surveillance plane and a Chinese F-8 jet fighter over the South China Sea exemplifies the Chinese narrative of national humiliation due to the heavy focus the Chinese placed on receiving an American apology. Many believe this demand for an apology had much to do with saving face on the international stage, which links back to China's sensitivity to perceived slights and humiliations (Gries & Peng, 2002). The Chinese government insisted that the collision was entirely the fault of the American plane, which it said had violated aviation rules and entered China's airspace without permission. At a press conference soon after the event, Spokesman Zhu Bangzao stated that the incident constituted a direct violation of Chinese sovereignty, because the U.S. had long been sending aircraft to the Chinese coast to conduct surveillance activities against the wishes of Chinese authorities (Cheng & Ngok, 2004). Bringing the issue of sovereignty into discussions of the incident demonstrates Chinese concern about foreign countries overstepping once again, and a



dogged determination not to allow that sort of humiliation to reoccur. Furthermore, the American refusal to apologize read as very arrogant to the Chinese, and seemed to embody distasteful American hegemonic behavior (Cheng & Ngok, 2004). The angry Chinese claim to both victimhood and the right to an apology exemplifies how national humiliation permeates into many parts of the U.S.-China relationship. China's refusal to see history repeated directed how it dealt with this event. The government's hard stance in insisting upon an American apology was a statement that China was on its way back to prominence and would not allow other countries, especially the U.S., to take advantage of it anymore.

The U.S.'s "Pivot to Asia" approach to the Asia-Pacific became a focus of American policy following a 2011 *Foreign Policy* piece by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. This foreign policy focus involved increasing U.S. engagement with the Asia-Pacific on all fronts. China's response to the pivot, including the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a proposed trade agreement between twelve countries from which it was quite pointedly excluded, was muted but indignant. The early official reaction was reserved; with statements coming from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supporting regional economic integration efforts generally, though expressing some doubt as to the feasibility of the TPP (Glaser & Billingsley, 2012). Numerous articles in *People's Daily* accused the U.S. of trying to contain China's rise through the new policy focus, with some even arguing that the "TPP [was] superficially an economic agreement but contain[ed] an obvious political purpose to constrain China's rise" (Ding & Ji, 2011). This perspective demonstrates the lack of trust China has in the U.S.'s motives, as well as China's determination not to let other countries, especially the U.S., interfere in its journey to "national rejuvenation." Additionally, many believe that the Belt and Road Initiative unveiled under President Xi Jinping in 2013 is a Chinese-led alternative to the TPP. If it is seen from that

angle, it demonstrates the part of the Chinese narrative that is determined to see China rise of its own volition and through embracing its own model, not the American one that has been imposed upon it.

In 2012, Xi Jinping became General Secretary of the Communist Party and Chairman of the CPC Central Military Commission. Though the Chinese Communist Party made use of the national humiliation narrative since its founding, Xi doubled-down on it, focusing primarily on the importance of national rejuvenation to the Chinese dream. In his first public address following these appointments, Xi outlined the Chinese struggle in modern history and the failure to attain national rejuvenation. Turning to the CCP, he said:

After the founding of the CPC, it has rallied and led the people, it made great efforts and turned the poor and backwards China into a new China...the great revival of the Chinese nation has thus embraced a bright prospect never seen before. Our responsibility is to rally and lead the whole party...working hard for the great revival of the Chinese nation, so that we will stand rock firm amongst nations of the world, and make fresh and greater contribution to mankind. (Xi Jinping's first public address, 2012)

Xi's statements paved the way for his assertive arrival as a global leader; his use of the narrative as shown in the above quote insists firmly on the goal of national rejuvenation, whereby China will take its place as an equal among other nations. Since 2012, Xi has consistently promoted the idea of a "Chinese dream," one that involves the renewal of the Chinese nation. More specifically, this dream involves the realization of national rejuvenation by following a path of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Full text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress, 2017). Thus, Xi's arrival as China's leader has also contributed to the use of the national humiliation narrative.

China's perspective on the escalating trade tensions with the U.S. since 2012 has largely been one of indignation, especially regarding the large number of investigations the U.S. has brought against it. The U.S. harbors a lot of frustration at China for behavior it sees as breaking international rules, disadvantaging others, and implementing protectionist measures. China, on the other hand, takes issue with American intervention and what it sees as an irrational adherence to a zero-sum mentality (Wang Y. , Speech at the Opening of Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations in 2018 , 2018). The WTO action the U.S., EU, and Japan took in 2012 to try to halt Chinese export restrictions of rare earths minerals was not welcomed by the Chinese. China denounced the WTO lawsuit as "rash and unfair," claiming that its restrictions on rare earths exports were in line with WTO regulations and were only in place to account for concerns over environmental impact and long-term supply (Alessi, 2012). To China, U.S. complaints and lawsuits against China are seen as discriminatory competitive measures that have more to do with bullying than with abiding by international rules.

## Chapter 5: Analysis of Narratives

The trade war is an ongoing conflict between the U.S. and China that began in 2018 and continues into the present day. The conflict has manifested as a series of escalating tariffs on the goods from the other country. Thus far, talks aimed at coming to a deal have failed. As of this writing, the two countries have agreed to restart talks following the G20 Summit in Osaka. The following chart illustrates the escalation of the trade war up until May 2019.



Figure 1: Escalation of the U.S.-China Trade War (Buchholz, 2019)

Throughout the back-and-forth volleying of tariffs and periods of negotiation, high-level discussions of the trade war have utilized and exemplified the narratives considered in this paper. Under what conditions are the narratives present in the U.S.-China trade war? What form do the narratives take, and what role do they play? Do they perpetuate and deepen the trade war? Presented in this chapter are selected statements from the dialogue around the U.S.-China trade war that demonstrate one or more parts of the American and Chinese narratives.

## 5.1 Data Analysis: United States

### 5.1.1 Establishing American Benevolence

Critical to the unappreciated benevolence narrative is the belief that the U.S. is benevolent to others. At times this is an unspoken, implied assumption, and at others it is explicitly stated. The earlier look at historical examples of the narrative demonstrated times when the U.S. expressed its belief in its own benevolence. Does this also occur in the current trade war? The trade war, and the trade tensions leading up to it, is littered with references to the U.S.'s giving and generous spirit. During his remarks in Manila at the 12<sup>th</sup> East Asia Summit in November of 2017, President Trump stated, "the United States is open for trade, but we want reciprocal trade. [The United States] is very giving, and they don't get in return" (Remarks by President Trump in Press Gaggle, 2017). In a similar vein, he has made multiple references to how the U.S. has helped China change and progress. For example, in 2018 Trump said both, "We helped rebuild China. Someday they'll say thank you" (Remarks by President Trump at Foxconn Facility, 2018) and also, "Look, we have rebuilt China...we're like the piggybank...we have rebuilt countries, like, massively" (Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, Members of Congress, and Members of the Cabinet in Meeting on Trade, 2018). Both the content and repetition of these remarks indicate the American belief that it has selflessly helped China many times, and is in fact responsible for much of China's successes.

On May 9, 2019, President Trump spoke of American benevolence towards China and towards the world more generally when asked about the progress of trade negotiations. He stated, "China rebuilt their country because of us. They couldn't have done what they're doing. They're building a ship every three weeks. They're building aircraft like you've never seen. Fighter jets."

(Remarks by President Trump on Ending Surprise Medical Billing, 2019). Here, the U.S. again takes credit for China's growth and success, implying both benevolence and a sense of Chinese indebtedness. Trump's choice of examples to highlight China's new status includes aircraft, ships, and fighter jets, all objects that denote power and strength. Thus, he is crediting the U.S. with China's newfound power. Later in these same remarks, Trump referred to the benevolence the U.S. gives to the world more broadly through military protection, stating:

And we protect them, and we protect them beautifully. We're the power. We're the most powerful nation... We now have, by far, the strongest military in the world. But we defend countries... And you know what? I don't mind not getting paid. If there's a country that's been horribly treated, and lots of bad things are happening and they're not a rich country. (Remarks by President Trump on Ending Surprise Medical Billing, 2019)

While these comments ultimately lead to the idea that the world is taking advantage of the U.S., they first help establish American kindness in its role as global protector. Furthermore, Trump's remark that he does not mind helping disadvantaged, poor countries is meant to further advance the idea of American benevolence. The U.S. protects everyone, but does not begrudge it when help is truly needed.

Vice President Mike Pence's remarks on the administration's China policy, delivered in October of 2018, contribute heavily to the benevolence portion of the American narrative. First, as already mentioned earlier in this paper, he claimed that the U.S. did not participate in China's Century of Humiliation. In fact, Pence stated that America "refused to join in" on the humiliations China endured during this time, and instead "advocated the 'Open Door' policy, so that we could have freer trade with China, and preserve their sovereignty" (Pence, Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China, 2018). By emphasizing

protection of Chinese sovereignty as a primary motive of the Open Door policy, Pence colors the Open Door with benevolent American intentions. From the American perspective, the Open Door was about protecting China and also about furthering economic interests in China by ensuring access to markets. Pence's remarks above show that it is this protective part, or benevolent part, that the U.S. uses as a lens through which to look its interactions. Pence airbrushed history in this way quite a few more times in this same speech. For example, he said that American missionaries "brought the good news to China's shores" and referred to them as a completely positive presence that promoted education. He also stated, "America ensured that China became a charter member of the United Nations, and a great shaper of the post-war world" (Pence, Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China, 2018). By crediting the U.S. with China's entry into the international system, Pence also implies a level of Chinese dependency on the U.S. in order for it to progress.

More recently, Vice President Pence spoke at the 2019 Munich Security Conference, where he mentioned the then-ongoing negotiations with Beijing regarding the trade war. Though he stressed the many issues in the trade relationship, he also expressed a sense of American benevolence towards the situation through the following statement:

China has an honored place in our vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific if it chooses to respect its neighbors' sovereignty; embrace free, fair, and reciprocal trade; and uphold human rights and freedom. The American people want nothing more, and the Chinese people and the entire Indo-Pacific deserve nothing less. (Pence, 2019)

This demonstrates the benevolence inherent in the U.S. on both the government and personal levels, according to the narrative. Pence's remarks embrace the idea that the U.S. wants to see China succeed; that while this desire is not without conditions, it is a truth of the American

identity to want to see a thriving China. Furthermore, the statement that it is the sincere desire of the American people to see China prosper. The American narrative assumes that this goodwill towards China is an innate part of the American identity and perspective on China.

### 5.1.2 Establishing Moral or Technical Superiority

Another dimension of the American narrative is that the U.S. is morally and technically superior to China in every way. As with other aspects of narratives, this superiority is an underlying assumption of the American narrative, and so it is more often implied than it is explicitly stated. For example, it is present even in the above quote from Pence's remarks at the 2019 Munich Security Conference. Pence's reference to China's "honored place in our vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific" implies that if China plays by U.S.-set rules, it has a chance to fit into the American vision for the world. The implicit understanding here is the incontrovertible supremacy of American values and systems. In other words, the highest to which China can aspire is the approval and acceptance of the U.S., which can then permit China to peacefully exist within the American plan for the region.

One of the primary ways much American discourse establishes a sense of superiority over others is by emphasizing its commitment to fair and reciprocal policies. When the U.S. asks China for this kind of respect, it is always implied that the U.S. already perfectly facilitates these kinds of policies and is above reproach. Often, this is done through reiterating the American desire for fairness in its relationships and agreements. Pence's speech called multiple times for a "relationship grounded in fairness, reciprocity, and respect for sovereignty" (Pence, Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China, 2018). Because American requests for respectful and reciprocal relationships with China are always asking for China's



behavior to change, it is implied that the U.S. already approaches its relationships with the goals of fairness and mutual benefit. The U.S. does not detail how it will change to become more fair in its transactions and communications with China because it is assumed that the spirit and values of the U.S. render change unnecessary.

In this same speech, Pence gave an unflattering overview of China's moral record, citing persecution of various religious and ethnic groups, use of "debt diplomacy" to expand its influence, support of corrupt regimes, treatment of Taiwan, implementation of a surveillance state, and lack of respect for human rights to demonstrate China's moral inferiority to the U.S. By contrast, Pence promised that the U.S. would defend its interests and expand its influence "from a spirit of respect built on partnership, not domination" (Pence, Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China, 2018). This comparison paints China as a morally corrupt, misguided place as opposed to the superhero-like U.S. that aspires to share its benevolence and spread its positive values. The superiority of the U.S. model is also displayed here through describing the U.S. way of expanding influence as respectful and partnership-based. Therefore, it can also be inferred that the expansion of the American influence is considered a positive thing, since it comes with no questionable motives.

On May 14, 2019, during a briefing held on the South Lawn, President Trump was asked if he believed himself to be winning the trade war. Trump answered, "Yeah, we're winning it. You know what? You want to know something? You want to know something? We always win. We always win" (Remarks by President Trump Before Marine One Departure, 2019). Putting aside Trump's rather unconventional manner of speaking, the confidence in and insistence on an American victory speaks to the exceptionalism attitude. This is in line with the U.S. assumption that it represents universal values which will prevail globally. The U.S. does not conceive of the

trade war as something it could lose, because of its faith that the values it champions, including fair and free trade, will ultimately emerge triumphant. This confidence, regardless of whether it is justified or not, undoubtedly has influence over American policy decisions in the trade war. If the U.S. is not concerned that a trade war could result in unacceptable losses for itself, or at worst, defeat, it is more likely to continue to push for policies that escalate scale of the trade war and draw out its duration.

### 5.1.3 Establishing Authority, Paternalism, and Disappointment

The narrative of unappreciated benevolence and all its parts is not unique to the Trump administration; it has long been a critical part of the way the U.S. sees itself and its place in the world. Many other American leaders and officials have embraced the narrative. What is unique about Trump's use of the narrative, however, is one of the ways in which he communicates the paternalism side. Trump has repeatedly stated that he does not blame China for taking advantage of the U.S. in terms of trade. One example of this comment is when he said it during a cabinet meeting in April of 2018. He said, "China has been taking advantage of the United States for many years...and they have really done a number on this country. And I don't blame China. I blame the people running our country. I blame Presidents, I blame representatives, I blame negotiators" (Remarks by President Trump at Cabinet Meeting, 2018). Often, the American narrative is apparent because it is placing full blame upon China or another country, and taking a tone of righteousness for itself. Trump's style here still encapsulates the paternal attitude of the narrative; it just does it in a slightly different way. By saying that China is not to blame for its unfair treatment of the U.S. and placing blame on incompetent American decision-makers instead, Trump creates the sense that China has been an errant, wayward child left without

supervision. Where it but for better management, or parenting, China would not have been able to get away with bad behavior. It is important to note that China's behavior is still considered wrong; Trump's blaming of American leaders does not remove blame from China. This approach presumes that China has a lower level of maturity and morality than the U.S., and therefore cannot be held quite as responsible, similar to a parent-child relationship.

During remarks made on May 9, 2019, President Trump reiterated the ways in which others take advantage of the U.S. and justified his decision to use tariffs as punitive tools. He stated, "I happen to think that tariffs for our country are very powerful. You know, we're the piggybank that everybody steals from, including China. We've been paying China \$500 billion a year for many, many years" (Remarks by President Trump on Ending Surprise Medical Billing, 2019). His statements connect American benevolence with disappointing treatment from other countries. American kindness only serves to turn it into the world's "piggybank," resulting in American losses. He connects this to his decision to confront China with tariffs because of the imbalance in the trade relationship, which Trump here equates with a payment imbalance that can begin to be corrected through the use of tariffs.

Continuing the earlier discussion on American benevolence in protecting other countries, Trump also expressed how this protection leads to others taking advantage of the U.S. He stated, "But when we defend the richest countries in the world, and they don't pay us for what we do, and frankly, they go back into closed meetings and they laugh at the stupidity of the United States for doing it...So, really, the word is 'not fair.'" (Remarks by President Trump on Ending Surprise Medical Billing, 2019). Trump clearly lays out how benevolence (in this case through military protection) can easily turn into a losing situation for the U.S. due to the tendency of others to exploit such favors. Trump's statements here take issue with the lack of appreciation for

American benevolence; indeed, he sees ridicule where he believes there should be gratitude. This is a clear example of the unappreciated benevolence that defines the American narrative. It is then not a big jump to understand how this underlying assumption in the narrative works to guide certain policy decisions. Since the American narrative believes that others, like China, will not hesitate to take advantage of American help, it guides policymakers to be more pessimistic and cautious. In the context of the trade war, this means that the U.S. is more likely to strongly consider policy options that do not leave room for China to continue to gain at the U.S.'s expense. For Trump, this means increasingly high tariffs to hopefully pressure China into complying with U.S. demands.

President Trump announced plans for tariffs on \$50 billion worth of imports from China in June of 2018. His announcement phrased the policy as one meant to “encourage China to change the unfair practices identified in the Section 301 action with respect to technology and innovation” (Trump, 2018). His indication that the tariffs were initially intended to be a tool of gentle enforcement resonates with the paternal attitude the U.S. holds toward China. When China promised to respond in kind instead of giving in to the U.S.'s demands, Trump expressed disappointment that his disciplinary warning did not work, stating:

China apparently has no intention of changing its unfair practices...This latest action by China clearly indicates its determination to keep the United States at a permanent and unfair disadvantage, which is reflected in our massive \$376 billion trade imbalance in goods. This is unacceptable. (Trump, 2018)

Not only does this statement establish that China is intentionally disadvantaging the U.S., but it also communicates a sense of disappointment at this Chinese refusal to comply with American demands. Disappointment is used here to convey a sense of parental reluctance, yet

determination, to continue enforcing the rules until the child behaves. In other words, until China complies with the U.S.'s demands, it must be taught through punishment.

In September of 2018, the Trump administration announced another round of tariffs on \$200 billion of Chinese imports. In addition, Trump's statement on the decision threatened tariffs on \$267 billion in other imports if China took retaliatory action. He justified the tariffs with the following:

For months, we have urged China to change these unfair practices, and give fair and reciprocal treatment to American companies. We have been very clear about the type of changes to be made, and we have given China every opportunity to treat us more fairly. But, so far, China has been unwilling to change its practices. To counter China's unfair practices, on June 15, I announced that the United States would impose tariffs of 25 percent on \$50 billion worth of Chinese imports. China, however, still refuses to change its practices—and indeed recently imposed new tariffs in an effort to hurt the United States economy. (Statement from the President, 2018)

Both the content and tone of the quote above demonstrate a highly paternalistic attitude, as well as a sense of authority disobeyed. It furthers the paternalism side of the narrative through both its tone, similar to that of a stern lecture, and its content, which clearly lays out China's wrongdoing and the unavoidable punishment that must follow. Trump highlights American patience in providing opportunities for China to change its behavior in order to show that the U.S. is not acting irrationally by levying more tariffs against China. Instead, the U.S. believes China is bringing this upon itself by rejecting opportunities to adjust its trade behavior and play fair.

For most of 2019, the two governments have been engaged in trade talks aimed at resolving the trade conflict. Reports of varying degrees of optimism emerged from both sides

throughout the early part of 2019, and at many times deals were said to be forthcoming. It was widely believed that the trade tensions were coming to an end. Even as recently as May 1, official sources from both sides reported productive progress (Blanchard & Daly, 2019). However, despite the repeated optimism, talks between the U.S. and China aimed at coming to a deal failed, and the tariff battle resumed in early May. The U.S. has blamed China for the resumption of the trade war, with United States Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer saying “Over the course of the last week or so we have seen an erosion in commitments by China. Really, I would use the word reneging on prior commitments” (qtd. in Politi & Mitchell, 2019). Here, the parental air of condescension that often graces U.S. statements regarding China makes another appearance. The implication that China’s obstinance and unreliability are the only obstacles to cooperation paints China as an irrational, rebellious actor at odds with American attempts to enforce order and stability.

## 5.2 Data Analysis: People’s Republic of China

### 5.2.1 Establishing Humiliation or Victimhood

Due to the fact that the national humiliation narrative is so present in Chinese communications of both history and contemporary events, it is often implied as a backdrop to international relations discussions. When it is explicitly stated, it is expressed as being a factual part of history. National humiliation is as much a fact of modern Chinese history as any specific event. Politician Dai Bingguo stated, “China suffered enough from hegemonism, power politics and bullying by Western Powers since modern times” (Dai, 2016). With this statement, Dai establishes both the history of humiliation, and implies that China will no longer accept this kind of treatment. By asserting that the West has long bullied China, Dai affirms the Chinese narrative

and Chinese identity. No room is left for other interpretations; China's suffering is considered to be completely objective.

The White Paper on China-U.S. trade frictions attempts to contextualize the trade war within China's history of humiliation by foreign powers. Chinese discussions of the U.S.'s international presence in general often perpetuate the idea of the U.S. as the intrusive aggressor and China as the victim. Chinese discussions of the trade war also treat the U.S. as the antagonist and the cause of the conflict, but treat China more as a purely reactive player instead of a victim. This falls in line with the linear trajectory of the Chinese narrative; once a victim, China is now rising and will not allow others to push it around anymore. The White Paper, released in September of 2018, approached the conflict as follows:

Since taking office in 2017, the new administration of the U.S. government has trumpeted “America First.” It has abandoned the fundamental norms...rather, it has brazenly preached unilateralism, protectionism and economic hegemony, making false accusations against many countries and regions—particularly China—intimidating other countries through economic measures such as imposing tariffs, and attempting to impose its own interests on China through extreme pressure. (State Council PRC, 2018)

This introduction to the trade conflict shows that China still perceives the U.S. as the foreign aggressor who attempts to bully other countries in order to impose its own will. Other remarks in the White Paper further contribute to the historical backdrop of national humiliation that is a core principle of the Chinese narrative. For example, it referred to U.S. accusations against China as “disrespectful” and “an insult to China's efforts to push for...advances.” Later on in the White Paper, China claimed a commitment to “safeguarding its national dignity and core interests” (State Council PRC, 2018). These references to dignity and respect acknowledge the history of



national humiliation. The frequent Chinese use of words like “dignity” reveals a fixation on the past plotline and the determination not to see history repeated.

Official Chinese statements establish this sense of victimhood not only in history, but also in the present. In early June of this year, China released a second White Paper on trade issues with the U.S., specifically regarding the trade war and the failure of the talks that occurred in the earlier part of 2019. Among its many accusations against the U.S., the document claimed, “Trumpeting “America First”, the current US administration has adopted a series of unilateral and protectionist measures, regularly wielded tariffs as a “big stick” and coerced other countries into accepting its demands” (The State Council Information Office of the PRC, 2019). Reference to U.S. policies and tariffs as “big sticks” and “coercion” establishes a clear picture of the U.S. as the aggressor trying to impose its will on others. While this document points to the “America First” mindset of the Trump administration in particular, this portrayal of the U.S. and its motives echoes the discussions of history. Additionally, the second White Paper reiterated the disrespect American accusations of unfair trade behavior and economic aggression brought to the Chinese government and people. The focus on the disrespect associated with these accusations, rather than the accusations themselves, stems from the history of national humiliation and the desired future of national rejuvenation. China’s experiences with disrespect during its period of humiliation add to the importance of respect now; thus, the repeated mentioning of “disrespect” in the White Paper is a demonstration of narrative.

Following the release of the second White Paper, Chinese Ministry of Commerce’s Spokesperson Gao Feng spoke at a press conference. Over the course of answering many questions about the document and the American response, Gao painted China out to be a victim of a U.S.-led trade war. “Finally, China does not want a trade war, but it’s not afraid of one. If



the US is determined to go down the road of escalating trade friction, we will take necessary countermeasures to safeguard our national and people's interests. Thank you" (Gao, 2019). China consistently points to the U.S. as the instigator in the trade war, presenting itself as an unwilling participant. In this way, the narrative is at work to show that the U.S. is trying to make China a victim once again. The difference this time, of course, is that China will stand up for itself with "necessary countermeasures" instead of caving to American bullying.

Reiterations of national humiliation and U.S. aggression in the trade war are found in numerous editorials in state-sponsored media outlets as well. Discussions of the trade war on in these outlets are littered with references to U.S. bullying<sup>3</sup>. In *China Daily Global* in June 2019 Ma Zhaoxu wrote:

The United States has launched a trade war against China, who has no other choice but to take necessary countermeasures. Claiming "America First", the United States has adopted a series of unilateral and protectionist measures, wielding a "big stick" of tariffs to force its own will onto others. This is sheer trade bullying and does harm the world. The US side is entirely responsible for the severe setback in China-US trade talks. (Ma, 2019)

Ma's argument repeats the refrain that the U.S. does not want a trade war; it is a victim of U.S. interests and is only involved to the extent that it has to be in order to stand up for its own interests. This view of China's role in the trade war as merely to push back against U.S. aggression sets the stage for certain policy tendencies. For example, China is more likely to continue to choose policies that "balance" U.S. actions so that it does not cave to new humiliation or appear as the assailant.

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<sup>3</sup> For more Chinese editorials mentioning U.S. bullying, see the following: "Commentary: China fights U.S. trade bullying with 'Long March' spirit," *People's Daily*, May 26, 2019; "Commentary: U.S. bullying cannot stop China from achieving rejuvenation," *People's Daily*, May 20, 2019; "China will try fair methods before resorting to force," *People's Daily*, May 16, 2019.

### 5.2.2 Establishing Respect for Sovereignty or Different Models

A common refrain in Chinese dialogue is that the U.S. clings to a zero-sum view of the relationship that fosters too much competition both in terms of political influence, power, and economic path. Because China resists the American path to development, one of its key requests from the U.S. is a respect for different models of development. Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated:

China intends to stay on the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, keep to peaceful development, and pursue win-win cooperation with all countries. We hope the United States will abandon the zero-sum mentality, see China's development in a more positive light, and broaden the room for mutual benefit. There is no need to create rivals" (Wang Y. , 2018)

This is a polite but firm refusal to cave to U.S. pressure to adopt American values and models. It states that China does not need the U.S. to advise it on its path to national rejuvenation.

In additional commentary on Vice President Pence's 2018 speech on the administration's policy towards China, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying advised the following:

Our advice for the relevant country is that instead of pointing fingers at others, it would be better to match its deeds with its words and truly treat all countries, big or small, as equals, respect the right enjoyed by other countries to choose the development path in light of their natural conditions and make substantial contributions to the development of developing countries. (Hua C. , 2018)

Here, China takes a clear stand against American accusations and asks the U.S. to respect China's development choices. It argues that different stages and conditions require different

development paths, and asks the U.S. not to continue assuming that only one way, the American way, is acceptable. In doing this, this statement asks that the U.S. respect China's sovereignty and China's embrace of an alternative model. In addition, referring to China as a developing country distances it from the U.S., strengthening the argument that China has no reason to listen to the U.S. or follow its model. Because it is in a different category, and at a different stage in development, it has to follow a path that is best for its particular position. Since that position is not identical to that of the U.S., the U.S. should not have authority over China's decisions.

The Chinese narrative's conclusion, or ultimate goal, is national rejuvenation. This is attained when China has shaken off its history of humiliation by foreign powers and risen back to a position of prominence. This position must also be recognized by other countries, specifically the former aggressors, and China must be treated as an equal. Discussions that establish this goal of national rejuvenation are often connected to discussions where the Chinese demand respect for sovereignty or different models from the U.S. It is precisely this respect that would constitute equal treatment; so long as the U.S. insists on the moral and technical superiority of its own model, and attempts to impose it on China, it is not respecting China. An editorial in Xinhua News illustrates this point. On May 19, 2019 Li Xia wrote:

But the U.S. trick of exerting extreme pressure to deter China won't work. These obstacles will only make China stronger. Its journey toward national rejuvenation is unstoppable. The Chinese economy is a sea, not a small pond. The impact of the trade bullying measures of the United States will be overcome. Arduous efforts are still required. But let it be clear that no outside forces can stop China from reaching the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. (Li, 2019)

This strong stance is becoming more and more common in state-sponsored news outlets like Xinhua. The U.S. is still portrayed as a bully, but China's reaction has changed and there is a strong focus on Chinese pushback against the bullying.



## Chapter 6: Analysis of Interaction

The previous chapter provided an analysis of some of the statements from the ongoing U.S.-China trade war that demonstrate either the American narrative of unappreciated benevolence or the Chinese narrative of national humiliation. Although these separate narratives stem from different countries and perspectives, and can stand on their own as lenses through which to view the U.S.-China relationship, much of their value as analytical tools comes from the interaction between them. In this section, the objective shifts from identifying the narratives in the trade war to examining how they work off of each other. The question now becomes: what is the effect of one narrative on the other? How do the narratives of unappreciated benevolence and national humiliation, as described and exemplified throughout this paper, influence and sustain each other? How is it that Trump responds to a Chinese characterization? How do the Chinese respond to a Trump characterization? This has been hinted at and mentioned already, but this section delves a little deeper into this interaction.

### 6.1 American Response to the Chinese Narrative

The U.S. rejects much of the Chinese narrative. It excludes itself from China's victimization and humiliation storyline, as notably demonstrated in Vice President Pence's speech on China. Pence asserted that the U.S. played no role in China's Century of Humiliation; rather, the U.S. had prevented additional humiliation by introducing the Open Door Policy (Pence, 2018). With this, Pence effectively dismisses the Chinese narrative from having any validity when applied to U.S.-China relations. The national humiliation narrative is grounded in the belief that China experienced humiliation at the hands of Western powers, the U.S. included.

A rejection of the applicability of the narrative to the U.S. is essentially a rejection of the Chinese perspective to history and to the present-day trade war.

One recent example of the American response to the Chinese narrative as it has been put forth in the trade war is the response to the White Paper China issued on June 2. This document, discussed earlier, assigned blame for the trade conflict to the U.S., accused it of bullying behavior, and stated that U.S. actions hurt itself, China, and the global community more broadly. The American response, released by the U.S. Trade Representative and the U.S. Department of Treasury, is as follows:

The United States is disappointed that the Chinese have chosen in the “White Paper” issued yesterday and recent public statements to pursue a blame game misrepresenting the nature and history of trade negotiations between the two countries...It is important to note that the impetus for the discussions was China’s long history of unfair trade practices. Our negotiating positions have been consistent throughout these talks, and China back-pedaled on important elements of what the parties had agreed to. One such position was the need for enforceability, a position necessitated by China’s history of making commitments that it fails to keep. But our insistence on detailed and enforceable commitments from the Chinese in no way constitutes a threat to Chinese sovereignty. Rather, the issues discussed are common to trade agreements and are necessary to address the systemic issues that have contributed to persistent and unsustainable trade deficits.

(USTR and the U.S. Department of Treasury, 2019)

The above. response illustrates the American position of disappointment in China, consistency in the face of Chinese illogicality, and a refutation of Chinese accusations. Notably, it is also one more in a long line of American statements that refer to China’s “unfair trade practices.” This

unfair treatment, or China's misbehavior, is clearly one of the critical issues for the U.S.

American repudiation of Chinese accusations and claims shows that the U.S. does not see the Chinese narrative as valid. Thus, the response is one of dismissal and assertion of the American narrative instead, whereby the U.S. is merely trying to uphold standards of fairness and equality and facilitate cooperation with China.

## 6.2 Chinese Response to the American Narrative

China responds to the American narrative in two principal ways. The first way is through directly rejecting and refuting American accusations and portraying itself as being forced to engage in conflict with the U.S. One example of this can be found in Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's response to Vice President Pence's aggressive October 2018 speech on China. Hua commented:

The relevant speech made unwarranted accusations against China's domestic and foreign policies and slandered China by claiming that China meddles in US internal affairs and elections. This is nothing but speaking on hearsay evidence, confusing right and wrong and creating something out of thin air. The Chinese side is firmly opposed to it...we firmly safeguard our sovereignty, security and development interests. It is very ridiculous for the US side to stigmatize its normal exchanges and cooperation with China as China interfering in its internal affairs and elections. China always follows the principle of non-interference... We urge the US to correct its wrongdoing, stop groundlessly accusing and slandering China and harming China's interests and China-US ties, and take concrete actions to maintain the sound and steady development of China-US relations. (Hua C. , 2018)

Hua's response to Pence's accusations shows that China does not consider the American perspective valid, and sees the U.S. as trying to force conflict where there does not need to be any. In the above statement, China is portrayed as focused on its own development and committed to the betterment of U.S.-China relations.

When it comes to the trade war, China often deflects responsibility for the escalating situation by portraying the situation as the U.S. forcing China to engage. While China does not desire conflict, American economic aggressions force it to defend itself. On June 15, 2018 the U.S. announced that it was levying additional tariffs of 25 percent on \$50 billion of high-technology goods from China on the grounds that China continued to steal intellectual property and technology. In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang claimed, "China doesn't want a trade war. However, confronted by such a short-sighted act that hurts both the U.S. itself and others, China has no choice but to fight back forcefully" (Lu, 2018). Retaliatory and comparable tariffs against American goods were subsequently announced. This statement shows that China sees its role in the trade war as merely to respond in kind, whereas the U.S. is the clear aggressor.

To provide another example, Foreign Minister Wang Yi discussed the trade war at a Chinese foreign policy symposium in late 2018, saying:

Facing the negative moves from the U.S. side, including the trade frictions it provoked, China has worked firmly and resolutely to defend its national interests, dignity and right to development, safeguard the rules-based multilateral trading system and seek solutions through dialogues based on mutual respect, equality and good faith. (Wang Y. , 2018)

This comment reiterates that the U.S. is entirely to blame for the trade war. China does not take responsibility for the conflict, and sees itself as merely reacting to American aggression.



The second way China responds to the American narrative is by criticizing the U.S. and accusing it of things such as hypocrisy, malicious intent and complete self-interest. Last September, China released a White Paper on the U.S.-China trade frictions. The majority of this White Paper is a direct criticism of U.S. economic aggression and hypocrisy. First, the paper criticizes the U.S. for trying to blame other countries for its domestic problems, arguing that it is an American government failure to establish redistribution and reemployment mechanisms that causes high unemployment, not the practices of other countries. The following is a passage from the White Paper:

Since taking office in 2017, the new administration of the U.S. government has trumpeted “America First.” It has abandoned the fundamental norms...rather, it has brazenly preached unilateralism, protectionism and economic hegemony, making false accusations against many countries and regions—particularly China—intimidating other countries through economic measures such as imposing tariffs, and attempting to impose its own interests on China through extreme pressure. (State Council PRC, 2018)

This passage was discussed earlier as an example of how China establishes victimhood in the U.S.-China dynamic. It is also a good example of interaction between the narratives. In this case, China uses the U.S.’s own words against it to prove its hypocrisy and to cast doubt on its fitness to be the global hegemon. The White Paper points to the Trump administration’s own mantra of “America First” to show that the U.S. is not Accusing the U.S. of abandoning fundamental norms is a direct rebuff of the exceptionalism side of the American narrative. China claims that instead of being a beacon of morality, the so-called shining city upon a hill, the U.S. fails to uphold fundamental norms and values and is only interested in its own gain at the expense of others. By calling out the U.S., China positions itself as a country unwilling to take further abuse

at the hands of a U.S. that bullies instead of leading by example. China's claim that other countries are suffering from U.S. treatment and hypocrisy shows that China sees itself as standing up to the U.S. both on its own behalf and on the behalf of others. This further demonstrates the interaction of the two narratives, as the national rejuvenation side of the Chinese narrative is present in China's decision to take a strong stance against U.S. treatment and U.S. hypocrisy, or alternatively, U.S. paternalism and exceptionalism.

This document continues to reprove the U.S. for its unfair hypocrisy in international trade. It argues that "the incumbent administration emphasizes a 'fair trade' that is not based on international rules but 'America first,' or the protection of America's own interests" (State Council PRC, 2018). The paper goes on to accuse the U.S. of not complying with the very international economic order it helped to build. "The new U.S. administration has abandoned its international commitments, and provoked international trade friction around the world...it has shaken the foundations of the global multilateral trading regime" (State Council PRC, 2018). Both of these examples denounce the U.S. as a hypocrite, one that pretends to lead a fair, rules-based international system while really only looking to further its own interests. This is of particular interest because of its connection to the exceptionalism/exemptionalism portion of the American narrative. The American narrative holds that the U.S. can be exempt from some international rules because of its leadership role and general superiority over other countries. It does not need the constraints of the rules to govern its behavior. Here, China points out that perhaps this attitude of exemption actually gives the U.S. leeway to undermine the system to no one's benefit but the U.S. itself.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying echoed these accusations of American hypocrisy in a comment responding to Vice President Pence's critical speech on China. Hua said,

“Our advice for the U.S. is to buy itself a mirror and take a look at itself...instead of exploiting human rights and religious issues to interfere in China’s internal affairs” (Hua C. , 2018). This direct accusation of hypocrisy shows the heavy skepticism the Chinese hold for the American narrative. Key concepts like exceptionalism and benevolence are appraised with raised brow. China’s urging for the U.S. to reevaluate itself is a way for it to question the U.S.’s authority over itself or the international community, and suggest that it take a less intrusive stance on the affairs of others. Not only do Hua’s remarks voice skepticism about the U.S.’s own conduct, but they also question the authenticity of the U.S.’s commitment to human rights. The remarks accuse the U.S. of exploiting human rights to interfere in China’s affairs; thus, the implication is that the U.S. uses its core values as covers for other, more self-serving intentions.

Earlier this year, amid U.S. concerns that the Chinese telecom company Huawei threatened American national security, the U.S. Department of Justice brought charges against Huawei and its CFO Meng Wanzhou. China cited grave concerns about the charges:

For some time, the U.S. has been using national power to tarnish and crack down on specific Chinese companies in an attempt to strangle their lawful and legitimate operations. Behind such practices are deep political intentions and manipulations. We strongly urge the U.S. to stop its unreasonable bashing on Chinese companies including Huawei, and treat them objectively and fairly. (Geng, 2019).

As in the former example, this statement demonstrates the disbelief China holds regarding the moral and technical superiority the U.S. claims. By accusing it of acting on impure motives with regards to Huawei, China undermines the U.S.’s lofty position found in its own narrative. In a way, these comments are designed to unveil the man behind the wizard, hinting that when the

U.S. is closely examined, one finds its national interests and greed driving policy instead of the benevolence and moral leadership it claims.

Earlier this month, on June 6, 2019, China's Ministry of Commerce released a second White Paper on trade issues with the U.S. Much of the document deals with U.S. accusations against China in order to refute them and turn the blame back upon the U.S. For example:

Turning a blind eye to the nature of the economic structure and the stage of development in China and the US, as well as the reality of the international industrial division of labor, the US insists that China's "unfair" and "non-reciprocal" trade policies have created a trade deficit in bilateral commercial exchanges that constitutes "being taken advantage of", leading to unilateral imposition of additional tariffs on China. In fact, in today's globalized world, the Chinese and American economies are highly integrated and together constitute an entire industrial chain. The two economies are bound in a union that is mutually beneficial and win-win in nature. Equating a trade deficit to being taken advantage of is an error. The restrictive measures the US has imposed on China are not good for China or the US, and still worse for the rest of the world. (State Council PRC, 2018)

Clearly, this document directly responds to the American belief that China has been taking advantage of it for years. Pointing to differences in development stage and systems, China argues that issues of American concern such as the trade deficit are misplaced and misunderstood. With this, China argues that the standards promoted and created by the U.S. are not universal; in fact, they ignore important factors such as different stages of economic development and structure. In addition, the White Paper argues that American actions in the trade war are detrimental for everyone. This connects to a theme in Chinese responses to the U.S. narrative: The U.S. is not

superior to others, it does not know better than anyone else, and it does not act benevolently. By making these statements frequently, China both counters the American narrative of unappreciated benevolence and strongly suggests that the U.S. is not fit to be a global leader.



## Chapter 7: Conclusion

This paper attempts to establish the presence of two distinct narratives in the U.S.-China relationship, determine the nature and form of their presence in the current trade war, and analyze the interaction between the two narratives. Over the course of this work I have helped establish an American narrative, referred to in this paper as the unappreciated benevolence narrative, and contributed to existing delineations of the Chinese national humiliation narrative. Ultimately, this thesis offers a unique angle on both the trade war and the study of historical narratives. It puts forth an assessment of historical narratives in the trade war, which is not a perspective that is come across in current discussions of the conflict. This work also studies the American narrative of unappreciated benevolence and the Chinese narrative of national humiliation concurrently in order to better understand how they interact with each other. I find that the narratives are not just things of the past; they are still present in official, high-level discussions of the trade war today. This is particularly noteworthy because trade is not the area where one would most expect to find the narratives. They are easy to spot in discussions of human rights or political systems, but I chose to look for them in discussions of trade to see if they permeate into other topics as well. The fact that they are present in the trade war, despite the basis of trade discussions being rooted in technical issues, speaks to their pervasiveness. In addition, they appear to play a role in the trade war, serving to further each side's agenda, support conflict, and reinforce perceptions of the self and other that exist within the narratives.

Not only are narratives present in the relationship and conflicts that arise between the countries, but they also offer a different way to understand the bilateral relationship. This research finds that narratives reinforce certain tendencies in the relationship. The invocation of narratives helps push decision-makers towards certain policy options over others. Because

narratives are deeply-ingrained frameworks of understanding that come with plotlines, they help point to certain actions and responses. This is similar to Khong's Analogical Framework, which states that historical analogies influence policymaking by providing set recommendations for decisions (Khong, 1992). In this case, it is historical narratives instead of historical analogies. Because the narratives are part of deeply ingrained understandings of the U.S.-China relationship, they inevitably guide the way policymakers think about the relationship and about how to respond to conflict. However, the findings here do not show that narratives function exactly as analogies do under Khong's framework. While they perform a similar function, they do so to a lesser extent than analogies. Khong argues that analogies can act as cognitive devices for arriving at policy decisions. This research shows that narratives can encourage or help solidify pointing to particular policy choices, but it does not go so far as to claim they are also cognitive devices.

In the context of the U.S. and China, this finding is significant because it helps explain the cyclical nature of the relationship, as well as why certain reactions and policies are chosen over others. Because these narratives can be an intrinsic part of American and Chinese understandings of the relationship, sensitivities trigger certain responses. For example, American statements or actions that cause China to feel infringed upon or bullied immediately invoke the national humiliation aspect of the Chinese narrative. In order to avoid a repetition of the Century of Humiliation, China is likely to gravitate towards reactive, potentially aggressive policy choices instead of conciliatory ones. Similarly, if the American narrative is invoked because it feels like its authority is going unheeded, or its benevolence unappreciated, it jumps into an aggressive, punitive mode in an attempt to regain control and discipline the misbehaving party. The flip side of this narrative also leads to policy decisions for the U.S.: the benevolence feature

maintains a sense of hope that China will come around, and that the U.S. must continue engaging with it, similar to how parents do not give up on children when they behave poorly.

From this, it is easy to see how the U.S. and China might get locked into the observed cycle of relations, where the state of relations oscillates between cooperation and high engagement to tension and conflict. The current trade war provides an interesting case study where policies and accusations are lobbied back-and-forth. It offers an opportunity to watch the narratives interact with each other, and prompts one to wonder if the U.S. and China can ever escape the cycle, because clearly, the trade war is a cycle of sorts. It may even be an unproductive cycle; the U.S. has been heaping punitive tariffs on China for a year and yet the always forthcoming deal has yet to appear. One thing seems clear: understanding this cycle and the factors that contribute to it can only help further understandings of the U.S.-China relationship. Perhaps with this increased understanding, ways of progressing the relationship and escaping the cycle will become clear.

This research could benefit from a wide variety of additional work. Future research could continue to examine the two narratives at the same time, perhaps more in-depth or at different points in the U.S.-China relationship. There is a lack of literature that explores both narratives at once, and there are surely many interesting ways to deepen understandings of narratives in general, and these narratives in particular. Furthermore, it would be interesting to ascertain if these narratives are consistent outside of elites and officials. Do discussions of the U.S.-China relationship in other communities also draw upon the narratives? Do the narratives change or stay consistent for different audiences? Future research could also look for the narratives in other trading relationships. For example, does the unappreciated benevolence narrative also appear in American discussions of trade with Mexico or 1980s Japan? Finally, do understandings of



narrative provide any positive mechanisms for handling conflict between the U.S. and China that can be extracted from historical cases? Research into these questions could contribute to the study of narratives and of U.S.-China relations.

Where does this research suggest the U.S.-China relationship is headed? What does it say about the trajectory and longevity of the trade war? As mentioned above, it appears that the cyclical nature of the relationship and the consistent invocation of narrative could keep the relationship and the current conflict rather stagnant. If current trends continue, the trade war has neither a clear resolution nor a clear end date. However, it also seems clear that there is potential for change and progress within the relationship. The narratives may perform a certain function now by reinforcing preexisting notions and tendencies, but that is surely not the only role they can play. Furthermore, the narratives could change. If and when China reaches its goal of national rejuvenation, does its national humiliation survive and continue to have purpose? Does the American narrative of unappreciated benevolence still hold if China rises to a level where it is much more difficult for the U.S. to justify its superiority and parental claim? Perhaps with an increased understanding of how the American narrative and the Chinese narrative interact with each other we can develop more effective communication within the relationship. After all, both the U.S. and China recognize the importance of maintaining a constructive relationship between the world's two largest economies. Surely there is more to be gained from a cooperative relationship than one based solely in competition and tit-for-tat trade wars.

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