Chapter 3

The Propaganda Effect?
The Chinese Media and National Identity

What role do the media play in the construction of an individual’s sense of national identity? Many scholars have addressed this question, but relatively rarely has systematic empirical evidence been brought to bear on it. Many theorists, such as Karl Deutsch (1966), have observed that communications media constitute the fundamental avenue through which states engage in nation-building. Conversely, due to the rise of cable television and the internet, media in recent years are often characterized as forces that work against monolithic national identities, instead segmenting such identities while at the same time bringing about a less nationalistic and more cosmopolitan identity (e.g. Barker, 1999). Scholars remain divided on the question of the overall impact of the media on national identity. This chapter’s main aim is to empirically address this question at the individual level in the case of China. Overall, the findings presented here suggest that communications media serve not only to strengthen an individual’s national identity, but to shape the meaning of this identity as well.

Two Conceptions of the Media

Theoretical expectations of the effect of media consumption on national identity can go in two opposite directions. First, many scholars have argued that national media, along with the educational system, is one of the most powerful instruments states have for the construction of national identity. This basic idea has been expounded upon in numerous ways in many now-classic works on nationalism (Deutsch, 1966; Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1991). Sometimes such
effects are direct and obvious, and can be attributed to successful propaganda efforts. However, scholarship has often pointed out that, even for societies in which media are free from government control, subtle streams of nationalism work to promote national identity. Benedict Anderson (1991) pointed to the construction of national identity as it occurred subtly through newspapers, and other studies have continued to find these undercurrents in contemporary newspaper coverage of topics that are seemingly unrelated to nationalism (Brookes, 1999; Billig, 1995). Deutsch (1966) earlier expressed a similar idea when he developed the idea of national consciousness, which he defines as “the attachment of secondary symbols of nationality to primary items of information moving through channels of social communication, or through the mind of an individual” (p. 146). The bottom line here is that, as media are ‘nationalized’, so too do they ‘nationalize’ an individual’s sense of identity and loyalty. In other words, whether deliberately conceived and executed by propagandists or simply unconsciously imagined through subtle subtexts of the nation, consumption of media builds and maintains a particular conception of national identity.

Contrasting with this ‘nationalist’ conception of the media are those whom we might call ‘globalists’, who emphasize the liberative or globalizing effects of media, and especially of more recently developed media, such as cable television and the internet.¹ For example, Barker (1999) argues that television produces a medium through which ideologies compete, and that television audiences actively interpret televised messages rather than passively receive them. Moreover, as is especially true in the developing world, television programming is often internationally imported, resulting in increased exposure to foreign (usually Western) cultures and behaviors. Therefore it may be that media consumption reduces on one’s sense of national identity, instead replacing this identity with global identities segmented not by nation but by markets. Garnham

¹ The labels ‘nationalist’ and ‘globalist’ here are my own, as is responsibility for any inaccuracy attributed to them.
(1993) succinctly expresses this idea: “the growth of an increasingly integrated global market and of global media systems appears to be undermining...the nation-state” (p. 251).

The tension between these two streams of thought has carried over into scholarly treatments of Chinese media. Currently it is unclear whether the overall effects of communications media are constructive or destabilizing of national identity. Many scholars, such as Brady (2008), still see the Chinese media fundamentally as an instrument of state policy. After all, the party-state has retained the overall institutional structure of its propaganda apparatus. In the past, however, propagandists had more ideological tools at their disposal to legitimate the party-state, namely Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. However, if Brady’s conception of the Chinese media today is accurate, and if nationalism is now the fundamental legitimating ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (as claimed by Fitzgerald, 1996; Zhao, 2005; and Shirk, 2007), then we should expect this propaganda effect to work primarily through nationalism, and media consumption should play a powerful role in the construction and maintenance of an individual’s national identity.

The findings of previous research have supported a nationalizing conception of the Chinese media. For instance, Tang (2005), using survey data from the 1990s, found that media consumption is weakly correlated with nationalist sentiment and, more strongly, with regime support. Findings from other methods of scholarly inquiry also accord with the general direction of these hypotheses. Fu (2009) found that nationalist messages saturated practically all Chinese media content related to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Other studies of media content have found similarly nationalistic themes in all sorts of media, and far earlier than the 2008 Olympics. For instance, Chang et al. (1994), using content analysis of both China Central Television (CCTV) and the official CCP newspaper People’s Daily, found two persistent themes that occurred
throughout news stories far more often than any other themes: national development and economic reform. Among domestic news in particular, “the leading picture since the late 1970s has been China’s drive toward a market-oriented economy and modernization efforts” (p. 59). With nearly all of China’s news focusing on changes at the national level, the nation becomes the ‘subject’ of the news. Seeing the news as a story being told, it is clear that the nation is the main character. The authors argue for a framework in which the news is considered a form of social knowledge rather than an economic product (p. 54), but one need not adopt this perspective to conclude from their work that the news media are potent shapers of national identity.

In another example of content analysis, Chang (2002) compares CCTV’s domestic news with its international news and concludes that the latter is presented as far more conflictual:

In the domestic setting, the news is largely anchored by central government officials in action, burgeoning institutions and ongoing social progress that assure a sense of a normal, stable, and communal world. In the foreign context, the world is filled with news of a few powerful countries and hot spots, which projects a contested geopolitical landscape overshadowed by anomalies, uncertainty and volatility among nations (Chang, 2002, p. 282-3).

This observation also points to the profound effects news media can have on how an individual’s conceptions of the world and the nation are formed.

Hillman (2004) also uses discourse analysis to identify media mechanisms that build up national identity and national sentiment. He specifically examines People’s Daily in the wake of the 1999 accidental US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Hillman identifies four prominent themes in the newspaper’s coverage of this event, all of which use strong nationalist frames: nation-building and national unity, nationalist appeals to the past, nationalist appeals to Greater China (including the overseas Chinese community), and a pitting of China against the
West. This is not just a phenomenon of official media outlets like *People’s Daily*. Cheng and Ngok (2004) examine several other Chinese newspapers in the wake of the bombing and reach a similar conclusion: “in the 1990s, unofficial, voluntary nationalism in China reached a new peak, and the Chinese authorities consciously managed this nationalism to maintain domestic solidarity and stability” (p. 101). The bottom line is that national identity is constructed through the media—whether official or unofficial—and ultimately used to generate state support.

Then again, returning to the globalist stream of thought, there are also reasons to expect the opposite. For instance, James Lull (1991) argues that television, through its transmission of Western cultural practices, has served to accelerate the decline of traditional Chinese values, thus blurring the line between Chinese and Western values. Hong (1998), focusing on reform-era party policy that allowed an increase in imported television, makes a similar argument. These particular claims apply specifically to television, but since television is by far the most popular source of news and information for most Chinese, and that similar arguments can be made about the advent of the internet in China, this caveat becomes less important. In any case, this logic turns on its head the conception of the media as a nationalizing force.

Thus far our treatment of the concept of national identity has been somewhat loose, and it is essential at this point to formulate a more fleshed out conception. In this chapter two elements of national identity are examined: 1) the strength of attachment to one’s national identity, the straightforward and familiar idea of how important one’s national identity is to oneself; and 2) the constitutive norms (Abdelal et al., 2006) of the nation, a concept which calls for elucidation.

In formulating hypotheses about how media consumption will affect the content of national identity, Abdelal et al.’s (2006, p. 696) notion of the constitutive norms of a group identity—the norms that determine who counts as part of the group—is useful. Townsend’s
Discussion of Chinese culturalism provides an example of how the constitutive norms of the nation can vary, and how they might be affected by the state through the media. Culturalism represents a constitutive norm of Chinese identity in that it identifies criteria that determine who ‘counts’ as Chinese: culturalism claims that being Chinese is a cultural, rather than ethnic, identity. Thus ‘Chineseness’ is determined not by descent or blood ties, but by common customs and culture.

It is a commonplace in both the academic literature and in the western press that, since the beginning of the reform era, and especially since the events in Tiananmen Square in June 1989, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has witnessed a shift in its legitimating ideology. Over this period the party has increasingly promoted Chinese nationalism as a legitimating ideology in an effort to replace the old legitimating ideologies of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (Whiting, 1983; Strecker Downs and Saunders, 1999; Zheng, 1999; Wan, 2003). Moreover, the CCP retains a large degree of control over the Chinese press and still uses it to propagate this new legitimating ideology (Brady 2008). Scholars have also noted that the CCP has promoted a neo-Confucian sense of national identity which emphasizes Chinese culture and customs, and downplays ethnic or descent-based elements of Chinese identity (Fitzgerald, 1996; Townsend, 1996; Zhao, 2004). The distinction between cultural and ethnic constitutive norms is important because a cultural identity, unlike an ethnic one, can be learned and adopted by other groups, and this idea is indispensable in the party-state’s effort to legitimate its rule over areas and peoples that are often seen as ethnically other-than-Chinese, such as Tibetans, Uyghurs, and even Taiwanese. These observations lead us to our first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** News media use will be positively correlated with constitutive norms that define Chinese national identity mainly in cultural—rather than ethnic or racial—terms.
In addition to the content of national identity, we are also interested in variation among individuals in the strength of their psychological *attachment* to this identity. This, combined with the above observations, leads us to our second hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** As news media use increases, so will the strength of one’s attachment to national identity.

These two hypotheses both stem from the ‘nationalist’ theory of the media, which as discussed above, conflicts with the ‘globalist’ perspective. Thus we could just as easily formulate alternative hypotheses stemming from globalist theory, expecting the reverse effect of media.

While the above hypotheses are both concerned with media effects on individuals, we are also interested in broader systemic considerations. Specifically, do we expect media exposure to have the same effects in countries with different media systems? In Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm’s (1956) classic work on relations between the press and the state, the authors point to two diametrically opposed models of the press. In the *authoritarian model* the state controls the media in order to preserve the political status quo; in the *libertarian model* the press is free from state influence. Both of these models are ideal-types, but close-fitting cases can be found in the real world. The U.S. corresponds most closely with the ideal-type of the libertarian model of the press, while China approximates the authoritarian model. At the very least, it is established that Chinese media are more state-controlled than U.S. media. Combining this once again with the observation that the CCP actively promotes nationalism through the media, we arrive at our third hypothesis:

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2 These authors’ categorization of models of the press has received criticism on the grounds that it ignores the interference of market forces in the press (see Campbell, 2004), but that critique is not particularly relevant to the task at hand here.

3 In the past, China would qualify under the authors’ typology as a *communist model*, but the Chinese system today seems to better fit the authoritarian model. In any case, the theoretical distinction does not affect our expectation of the difference between the two cases.
Hypothesis 3: *The link between news media use and national identity will be stronger in China than it is in the United States.*

It should be noted that, unlike the first two hypotheses, this one has little to do with the tension between media nationalists and media globalists, but is instead designed to determine the difference between differently structured systems of media and society.

Another concern of this chapter is the type of medium through which information is transmitted. The three above hypotheses all deal with the media in general, but which types of media are more effective in transmitting national identity? We shall hypothesize here that:

Hypothesis 4: *The relationships established in hypotheses 1 and 2 will be stronger for television use than for use of print media.*

The first reason for such an expectation is that television is by far the most common source of information for the Chinese public, with newspapers following as a distant second (see Figure 3.1 below). Secondly, there are many reasons to believe that messages conveyed through television are more powerful than those conveyed through print. This is not only because of the instant impact of television images, which are more readily absorbed and interpreted than the printed word (and require no literacy), but also because television proceeds at its own pace, demanding the viewer to keep up. By contrast, the newspaper reader can take in information at his or her own speed, pausing to question a particular message or rereading an article to clarify ambiguities. Neither the television viewer nor the radio listener is given these opportunities, which makes these media particularly powerful avenues for conveying subtler and more implicit messages. Messages about who counts as Chinese are nearly always subtle and implicit, as are messages meant to strengthen the bond between individual and nation. Finally, especially when compared to newspapers and the internet, television in China is still largely under the ownership
and supervision of the state. The most-viewed network, CCTV, which broadcasts nineteen channels, is owned and operated by the state.

**Data and Measures**

To test the above hypotheses, the 2005 wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) is a valuable resource. Since this wave of WVS includes China and the United States, it allows for a cross-national comparison that is required by the third hypothesis. It will also prove useful for testing hypotheses 1, 2, and 4, as the China sample is large and intended to be representative of the Chinese population. The WVS in China was conducted through Peking University from March into May 2007. The survey was administered door-to-door, and researchers used “GPS/GIS Assistant Area Sampling”, a technique designed to address sampling problems due internal migration (Landry and Shen, 2005). The sample was stratified on the basis of the seven official regions of China, and then post-stratified on the basis of age, gender, and level of education. As a result, the sample of 1,991 completed interviews is roughly representative of China’s population as a whole (Shen and Yan, 2007).

The WVS also contains useful measures for media use and national attachment. What is most fortuitous is that it includes questions that can be treated as measures of the perceived constitutive norms of the nation, measures which are integral for testing the second hypothesis. A set of questions asks respondents what requirements are important for someone to be a citizen of China: having ancestors from China, being born on Chinese soil, adopting Chinese customs, and obeying Chinese laws. These questions provide an especially valuable tool to measure a person’s idea of who ‘counts’ as Chinese.

For a measure of cultural constitutive norms of the nation, the latter two of these items are combined into an additive index. Thus the first component of this index is a respondent’s
evaluation on a three-point scale of the importance of “adopting the customs of my country”, while the second component is the respondent’s evaluation of the importance of “abiding by my country’s laws”. The resulting five-point index is termed culturalism, and serves as the dependent variable for cultural constitutive norms. Respondents who have a particularly cultural idea of what it means to be Chinese have a high score on this index. The distribution of this variable is seen in Figure 3.1.

![Figure 3.1. Frequency Distribution of Culturalism in China, by percent](image)

In addition to measures of constitutive norms, the survey also contains items that can be used to measure the strength of one’s feeling of identification with the nation. These include how proud one feels to be Chinese, and to what degree one sees oneself as a citizen of China. Similarly to the first dependent variable, these measures are combined into an additive index that serves as an indicator of the intensity of one’s sense of national identity. For these two items the

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4 The two elements in this additive index are significantly correlated: Kendall’s Tau-b = 0.47.
question wordings are “how proud are you to be Chinese?”, and “I see myself as a citizen of China,” with each eliciting a response on a four-point scale.\(^5\)

Other items from the survey also aim to serve as indicators of nationalist sentiment more broadly, such as how willing a respondent is to die for his or her country, and the priority a respondent gives to fighting world poverty as opposed to solving similar problems within China’s borders. However, other elements besides national identity, such as approval of violent conflict resolution and exclusivism, find their way into such measures. While other measures were available, the two used here are the most valid measures of the concept of attachment to national identity developed above. The resulting two-part additive index is termed *national attachment* and its distribution is shown in Figure 3.2, alongside the same measure in the U.S.\(^6\)

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\(^5\) These two items are also significantly correlated, although not as strongly as for the *culturalism* index: here Kendall’s Tau-b = 0.31

\(^6\) One intuitive name for this variable would be *national identity*, but I refrain from using this name on the grounds that identity is a broader and richer concept than can be measured on a single numerical scale. Indeed, the concept of constitutive norms is just one indicator of the variety of meanings that can be attributed to such a complex psychological concept as a group identity. Given the many meanings of national identity *national attachment* seems a more accurate name for this variable, which is one’s level of attachment to his or her Chinese national identity, regardless of what that identity means to them.
Figure 3.2 presents an interesting comparison of levels of national attachment in China and in the U.S. It appears that Americans are much more strongly attached to their national identity than are Chinese. This simple comparison alone casts some doubt on Western fears of belligerent Chinese nationalism. But although national attachment is not as strong as it is in the U.S., it is still relatively high, and Figures 1 and 2 show that both cultural constitutive norms and national attachment in China are noticeably skewed in the high direction. However, this skewing does not constitute a serious methodological difficulty, as indicated by the skewness statistic in each case (-0.35 and -0.33, respectively). By comparison, national attachment is strongly skewed in the U.S. sample (-1.30), indicating that using regression to explain its variance may be problematic.

For the purposes of our key independent variable, the WVS also contains many questions on media use. Each of these questions is dichotomous, asking the respondent whether she or he, “used [the following] last week to obtain information”: newspaper, print magazines, books, internet or email, broadcasts on TV or radio, or in-depth reports on TV or radio. Because they are yes/no answers, these measures are relatively blunt. However, each of them does provide a rough indication of those who are more exposed to information through media and those who, by comparison, are not. If the week prior to taking the survey is unrepresentative of a respondent’s long-term media consumption pattern, then this sort of measurement error is at least randomly distributed throughout the sample, still leaving us with reliable measures.

Figure 3.3 displays the percent of respondents who answered ‘yes’ to each of the six items in both China and the U.S. While both countries’ most popular form of informational media is television/radio, Americans look to newspapers, magazines, and the internet far more

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7 According to most measures in the latest wave of the World Values Surveys, the U.S. and China rank first and second, respectively, among all surveyed countries in levels of nationalism.
frequently than Chinese do. In fact, media use is higher in the United States than China by every one of these six measures.

![Figure 3.3. Percentage of respondents who have used certain media in the last week](image)

When combined into an additive index, these items can provide a more sensitive measure of exposure to informational media. This index is termed *media use*, and will serve to test all three hypotheses. Figure 4 displays this variable’s distribution in both China and the U.S. The most notable characteristic of the figure is the vast difference in the average amount of media use between the two countries: the modal score in the U.S. is five out of a possible seven, whereas in China it is only three out of seven.8

With measures established, we can now examine the relationships between our dependent variables and media use. At the bivariate level, *media use* is significantly and positively correlated with both *culturalism* ($r = .11$) and *national attachment* ($r = .15$). These are certainly not strong correlations, but they are both statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, indicating that the

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8 It should also be noted that for China, this measure is more skewed than the dependent variables. This skewing is in the negative direction, indicating a low overall level of media exposure. However, as the skewness statistic (0.70) does not surpass 0.8 in absolute value, so it does not present serious problems for analysis. Thus it is best to leave the variable as is rather than to collapse categories or to make any other transformations in an attempt to avoid this skewness (Bourke and Clark, 1992, p. 69 [cited in Lewis-Beck, 1995, 16]).
expected relationships, although weak, do exist at the bivariate level. The third hypothesis would lead us to expect that the correlation between media use and national attachment would be nonexistent or at least weaker in the case of the U.S. We do see a positive correlation, but it is considerably weaker, with $r = 0.05$. Furthermore, this correlation does not achieve conventional levels of significance ($p = 0.07$). Thus the bivariate relationships indicate some support for the first three hypotheses. The next step is to subject these relationships to statistical controls through multiple regression analysis.

**Multivariate Regression**

In building a statistical model to explain attitudinal variables such as culturalism and national attachment, it is important not to specify attitudes as explanatory factors. Were we to do so, we would be regressing attitudes on attitudes, making the specification of causal relationships nearly impossible, since it is not clear which attitudes come first.\(^9\) With this caution in mind, we can proceed to develop a model that uses attributive characteristics and behaviors to explain both culturalism and national attachment.

Age is one obvious variable that must be included as a control, since younger people consume more media.\(^10\) Since the effects of age on national identity may be nonlinear, both age and $age^2$ are included in the model, allowing the model to accommodate a U- or inverted-U-shaped relationship with age. Theoretical expectations for this relationship vary. On one hand, because of the patriotic education campaign of the 1990s, which has explicitly adopted a nationalistic educational project in order to legitimate the state (Zhao, 1998), we may expect the young to be the most attached to their national identity, and to be more committed to the

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9 Such a model would most likely be overspecified, negatively affecting the significance of many of the model’s variables.

10 Age is correlated with media exposure, with $r = -0.25$. 
government-sponsored culturally-constituted Chinese identity. Conversely, we may expect a life-cycle effect in which older generations, due to their long-term exposure to socializing influences, demonstrate higher scores on both dependent variables. A third alternative is to accept and combine both of these hypotheses, which would result in the middle-aged generation being lower on both counts than older and younger cohorts.

Gender is another obvious candidate for inclusion in the model, although its expected relationship to the dependent variables is not clear. One could theorize that men will demonstrate a stronger attachment to national identity than women on the vague grounds that nationalism and xenophobia are seen as masculine traits, but here we will remain agnostic about a hypothesis and simply include gender as a dichotomous control variable.

Given that media use is likely to be higher for wealthier respondents, it is useful to control for socioeconomic status so we can separate the effects of class from the effects of media. Thus, a five-point measure of self-reported socioeconomic status is included as a control in the model. An individual’s level of education is another clear choice for a control variable. Again, however, theory points both ways. It makes sense to expect that as one becomes more educated, one becomes less attached to a national identity, especially an identity based on loyalty to the state. In the Chinese case and elsewhere, college students and intellectuals have routinely served as the vanguard of political opposition, so much so that the party-state has historically looked down upon intellectuals as “the old stinking ninth” class (chòu lǎo jiǔ) (Goldman, 1999).

However, not all education leads to opposition, and one could even hypothesize, in light of the post-Tiananmen “patriotic education campaign”, that education may have the reverse effect on loyalty and attachment to Chinese national identity. It may well be that these two mechanisms are both at work, in which case education’s effect may be nil in both national attachment and
The dependent variables are both ordinal, rather than continuous, variables. Thus ordered logistic regression is technically the proper method for testing our model. However, because of the flexibility and the ease of interpretation of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, I present
the results of OLS estimation in Tables 3.1 and 3.2. Ordered logistic regression was also performed, and the results do not differ in any meaningful way. In addition to this robustness check, I also strengthen the tests of the first and second hypotheses by two other means. First, I use robust standard errors, and second, I cluster by province. The results of these checks are not shown, as they do not differ in any notable way from the results presented here.

Table 3.1. OLS Regressions (China)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Cultural Constitutive Norms</th>
<th>National Identity Attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media use</td>
<td>0.109***</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age^2</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.023†</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE Class</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov. Worker</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Memb.</td>
<td>-0.034†</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.705***</td>
<td>(0.066)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N                   | 1771            |         | 1590       |
| R^2                 | 0.015           |         | 0.032      |

***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05; †p<.10
Source: 2007 China Survey, 2005 Wave of WVS

Table 3.1 displays the results of the OLS regressions performed on both dependent variables among the 2007 China sample of the WVS. The left side of the table shows regression on culturalism. The first thing to note in this model is the significance of the media use coefficient, indicating support for the first hypothesis. It appears that despite the presence of the control variables, media consumption’s positive relationship with cultural constitutive norms remains robust. The substantive effect of media exposure can be inferred as well: as media use rises from its minimum to its maximum, a respondent’s score on culturalism will increase.

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13 These tests are achieved by the robust and cluster options in STATA 10. All combinations of all three robustness checks were performed on the tests of the first and second hypotheses, with little to no difference in results: both hypotheses are supported just as strongly in all cases.
approximately 12%. This is not an overwhelmingly strong effect, but it is just as strong as the bivariate correlation prior to adding the statistical controls. Although the first hypothesis is confirmed, the performance of the overall model urges us to interpret this finding cautiously. The R-squared is quite low, with only 1.5% of variance in the dependent variable explained. *Media use* is the only variable to achieve conventional levels of significance, while only two others (*female* and *party member*) approach this mark.

The right half of Table 3.1 presents results of the same model applied to the other dependent variable, *national attachment*. Here, we can see that the second hypothesis is supported: the effect of media consumption on *national attachment* is positive and significant, even when other factors are taken into account. Looking again at the standardized coefficient, the effect is similar in magnitude to that of the first regression, with *media use* accounting for about 13% of the variance explained by the model. For this dependent variable, however, the model’s performance as a whole is better, with an R-squared that indicates that 3.2% of variance is explained. We can also see from the rightmost column that age is responsible for most of the variance explained by the model (adding up the standardized coefficients, over 69%). Interpreting this substantively, it appears that the informal hypothesis conjectured above is correct, and the relationship is U-shaped: the youngest and oldest people in the sample have a stronger attachment to national identity than do the middle-aged.

To test the third hypothesis using multivariate regression, the same model was used to predict *national attachment* among the 2006 United States sample of the WVS. The results of this regression are presented in Table 3.2. If the third hypothesis is correct, then we would expect no relationship between *media use* and *national attachment* in the U.S. As Table 3.2 indicates, this is indeed the result, with the coefficient for *media use* not even approaching
statistical significance. This is true despite the overall improved performance of the model (R-squared = 0.077) when compared to the same model’s performance in the China sample. Other notable findings in the American context include the importance of education, which substantially reduces national attachment, and religiosity, which has the opposite effect.

Table 3.2. OLS Regression: National Identity Attachment (U.S.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef.</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Std. Coef.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media use</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.004*</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>0.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age$^2$</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>-0.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.143***</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>-0.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE Class</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov. Worker</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Memb.</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0.061***</td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>0.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.802***</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N 1120
R$^2$ 0.077

***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05; †p<.10

It should be noted here that while this is a valuable test of this particular hypothesis, it is not by any means a stringent test of the theory behind it. First of all, the United States is the prototypical example of the libertarian model of the press, and when comparing the U.S. to China the effects of the vastly different traditions of the press and media seem almost too obvious. Second, a more rigorous test of this theory would include more cases than two. After all, although it seems intuitive to surmise that the difference we have found is due to the different media systems, there are many other differences between the U.S. and China that may be driving this result. One such alternative explanation is that higher levels of overall media exposure in the U.S. wash out the impact of media use on national attachment among the population. Or perhaps the difference in types of media that are used in each country explains the difference in
media’s effect between the two countries (see Figure 5). Including a broader set of country cases would help to ease suspicions of alternative explanations, but this goes beyond the scope of this chapter and this book.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{lccccc}
\hline
Variable & \multicolumn{2}{c}{Cultural Constitutive Norms} & \multicolumn{2}{c}{National Identity} & \\
 & Coef. & SE & Std. Coef. & Coef. & SE & Std. Coef. \\
\hline
Media use index & 0.109*** & 0.000 & 0.118 & 0.085*** & 0.000 & 0.134 \\
TV/Radio broadcasts & .043** & 0.014 & 0.074 & .059*** & 0.010 & 0.144 \\
TV/Radio In-depth Reports & 0.049*** & 0.012 & 0.098 & 0.049*** & 0.009 & 0.142 \\
Newspapers & 0.013 & 0.015 & 0.023 & 0.018† & 0.011 & 0.048 \\
Magazines & 0.038* & 0.016 & 0.059 & 0.014 & 0.012 & 0.032 \\
Books & 0.030† & 0.016 & 0.049 & 0.005 & 0.011 & 0.011 \\
Internet & 0.033 & 0.020 & 0.042 & -0.008 & 0.014 & -0.017 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Controlled effects of different types of media on Chinese national identity}
\end{table}

***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05; †p<.10

Note: The coefficients, standard errors, and standardized coefficients here are produced by substituting each variable for the media use index in Table 3.1. See Table 3.1 for the control variables. Source: 2007 China Survey, WVS.

To test the fourth hypothesis, the overall media use index was removed from the model and replaced by each constituent component. Table 3.3 presents the coefficients for each of the separate types of media.\textsuperscript{15} The results support the hypothesis that television is the strongest driving force behind the relationship between media consumption and national identity. Neither exposure to newspapers, books, nor the internet showed any statistically significant effect on either dependent variable. Magazine readership does show an observable effect on cultural constitutive norms, but has no effect on national attachment. Nor is its effect on constitutive norms as strong or as statistically significant as either measure of television/radio consumption.

\textsuperscript{14} Another critique of this test is that the severe skewing of the dependent variable in the U.S. sample makes this an unfair test. However, the higher R-square in the U.S. case stands as evidence against this critique: if the null result is due to the skewed dependent variable, then we would expect the model to perform poorly overall. Instead we see a model that performs better in the U.S. than in China (the R-squared is more than double that of the same model in China) despite this skewing.

\textsuperscript{15} Each coefficient is taken from a separate regression model in which the component of the index replaced the media exposure index.
By contrast, television’s effects on both the content and the strength of national identity is undeniable. 16

In sum, we have found limited support for each of our hypotheses. Media use has a positive and significant relationship with both culturalism and national attachment even when other factors are taken into account, and its relationship with national attachment is, by contrast, absent in the United States. Finally, more than any other type of media, television is the workhorse that drives the relationship between media consumption and national identity. The first two findings are statistically robust, and the fourth is unambiguous, but, given the preliminary nature of the cross-national test used here, this third finding is the most tentative.

The 2008 China Survey: A Second Opinion

In many areas where the 2007 World Values Survey is lacking, the 2008 China Survey complements it nicely. The China Survey is a project of the College of Liberal Arts at Texas A&M University, in collaboration with the Research Center for Contemporary China (RCCC) at Peking University. In addition to being conducted more recently than the WVS, the China Survey has a larger sample, with over 3900 observations, and uses spatial sampling to achieve a representative sample of the population in both urban and rural areas. Because of its focus on China and its sampling method, it also has more useful measures of ethnic identity and population density. Moreover, it has more detailed measures of media consumption and national attachment. On the other hand, the World Values Survey is, of course, more readily amenable to the cross-national comparison required by hypothesis 3. It also has fuller measures of constitutive norms, making it ideal for testing hypothesis 1. However, the China Survey is useful in subjecting our second and fourth hypotheses to stricter tests.

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16 Although this measure includes television and radio, we must assume that television is the real driving force here, as television viewers far outnumber radio listeners in China. See also note 19 below.
The China Survey offers equivalents of all of the key independent variables and control variables available in the World Values Survey. Measures of media exposure here are more detailed, with each respondent reporting the number of hours they spent the day prior watching television, reading newspapers, reading magazines, or on the internet. Combining these four indicators with whether a respondent listens to the radio (daily, often, sometimes, or never), we arrive at a five-item index of media use. The control variables are also duplicated—and sometimes improved upon—in the China Survey. Measures of education and income are more sensitive, with education measured in years and income measured using a combination of several survey items.\(^\text{17}\) We are also able to construct a more complete model with these data, as this survey allows us to control for ethnic minority status and community type (urban or rural). We include a dummy variable for those self-reporting as a Han Chinese and a dummy variable for rural residents, with the reference categories being all non-Han minority groups and urban-dwellers, respectively.\(^\text{18}\)

While the WVS is better-equipped with measures of constitutive norms, the China Survey includes many useful indicators of national attachment. Here an equally-weighted additive index is made from five indicators. Four of these are measured on a five-point scale of agree strongly to disagree strongly: 1) I would rather be a citizen of China than of any other country in the world; 2) the world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like the Chinese; 3) when my country does well in international sports, it makes me proud to be Chinese; and 4) one should sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of the country. The fifth is

\(^{17}\) When a respondent did not provide a figure for annual income, imputation was based on the respondent placing their family in one of several income brackets. When neither of these options produced a figure, imputation was based on the respondent’s categorization of their family into a level of income on a scale of 1 (low-level) to 10 (high-level). If all of these failed, the interviewer’s assessment of the economic class of the family was used.

\(^{18}\) The category of rural includes respondents whose *hukou* registration is rural, as well as those with urban *hukou* who live in rural districts.
a dichotomous response to the following question: emotionally, do you think of yourself first as a Chinese, or a [province-person] (e.g., Beijinger, Sichuanese)?

Table 3.4: Comparing the Effects of TV and Newspapers on National Attachment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1 Coef.</th>
<th>Model 2 Coef.</th>
<th>Model 3 Coef.</th>
<th>Model 4 Coef.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media Use</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Use</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>0.094**</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Use</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.120*</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Use</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-0.107*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.005***</td>
<td>0.005***</td>
<td>0.004***</td>
<td>0.004***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age^2</td>
<td>-0.000***</td>
<td>-0.000***</td>
<td>-0.000***</td>
<td>-0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.012*</td>
<td>-0.013*</td>
<td>-0.012*</td>
<td>-0.012*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.007***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.007***</td>
<td>0.007***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-0.050***</td>
<td>-0.050***</td>
<td>-0.049***</td>
<td>-0.048***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Worker</td>
<td>-0.037</td>
<td>-0.037</td>
<td>-0.034</td>
<td>-0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCP Member</td>
<td>0.042***</td>
<td>0.040***</td>
<td>0.043***</td>
<td>0.0435***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>0.058***</td>
<td>0.058***</td>
<td>0.058***</td>
<td>0.058***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.548***</td>
<td>0.545***</td>
<td>0.554***</td>
<td>0.560***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>3865</td>
<td>3865</td>
<td>3865</td>
<td>3865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R^2</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05; †p<.10

Note: Coefficients are produced using OLS multiple regression. Source: 2008 China Survey.

Table 3.4 presents the results of the regression models predicting the index of national attachment. At first glance the results appear to refute the first hypothesis, since the media use index has no effect on national attachment in Model 1. However, in Model 2 television use is included instead, and we see a significant positive effect on national attachment. Even more interestingly, Models 3 and 4 show that newspaper use and internet use both have a negative effect on national attachment. As a result, the effect of media-in-general is canceled out, even though particular media have strong effects.
These results support the claim of the fourth hypothesis that television does the real work in constructing national identity. However, the claim of hypothesis 2 is refuted: media use in general has no effect on national identity. Furthermore, consumption of some types of media actually seems to work against the nation-building project. One alternative explanation for the effects of newspapers and the internet here is that newspaper readers and internet users are simply more politically interested. However, once political interest is added as a control variable in the models shown in Table 3.4, the results do not change in any significant way. Barring other relevant omitted variables, it seems that the effects of these three types of media are robust.

The results from the China Survey also affect how we can interpret our findings from the WVS. While hypothesis 1, regarding the effects of general media consumption, was supported in WVS tests, the results from Model 1 urge caution in this regard, as media exposure in general has no effect on national attachment. Obviously, there are many ways to construct an index of media consumption, and using different measures can obtain different results.

**Conclusion**

Before going any further, one potential alternative explanation of the findings must be addressed. It is obvious that individuals’ use of media is based on their interests, attitudes, preferences, and identities, and that people choose to consume media. Because of this, it is not possible to demonstrate causation simply through the correlations shown here. It seems that we must admit that causation in this case may work both ways. However, there are two main reasons that such an interpretation is questionable. First, it is difficult to make an argument that

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19 A fifth model was also tested for radio (not reported in Table 3.4), wherein the effects of radio-listening on national attachment were not significant. Being unable to differentiate television from radio in the WVS, we can now say with confidence that this effect is due to television, not radio.

20 Political interest was excluded from the original model on the grounds that it is not independent of national attachment nor of other explanatory variables in the model, but it is appropriate to include it here in order to address this objection. In fact, political interest is significantly positively correlated with national attachment.
reverse causation can explain *all* of the findings presented here. For instance, while it is perhaps plausible that individuals with a stronger attachment to Chinese national identity may consume informational media more often out of personal preference, it seems somewhat less plausible to explain the correlation with cultural constitutive norms in the same way. It makes little sense to argue that people who have a more culturally-constituted idea of the Chinese nation are more likely to watch television or read a newspaper, because the mechanisms through which national identity is constructed in the media work subtly at an unconscious level that is undetected by people as they consume informational media.

Second, the argument that national attachment causes increased exposure to media would be much more convincing if our analysis were strictly applied to *different types* of media. However, under this interpretation of these findings, one must accept that people with a stronger national identity must have a stronger preference not only for particular types of media, but for informational media consumption *in general*. This argument is very difficult to make, and even if one accepts such an argument, the results here at the very least indicate that national identity and media use are significantly related. There may be a third factor that is responsible for the observed relationship, but given the many factors for which we have controlled statistically, it is difficult to determine what this might be outside of sheer speculation.

To summarize the findings presented here, hypothesis 1 is supported: media consumption does work to mold the content of national identity. Hypothesis 2, that media consumption affects the strength of national attachment, is supported by one set of measures (WVS) but finds no support by another (China Survey). The latter finding does not nullify the former but rather
qualifies it: this relationship exists, but is likely weaker than originally expected. Hypothesis 3 is supported: this ‘nationalizing’ effect of media is stronger in China than in the U.S.\textsuperscript{21}

The most important finding we have discovered, however, concerns Hypothesis 4, which is strongly supported across all tests. When examining the effects of media consumption on national identity, the particular medium matters. Television, the most common medium in China, is still, more than any other medium, under the control of the state. For most Chinese, a large portion—in some cases a majority—of available television channels are those of state-owned CCTV. This is the main reason that television is so able to shape the content and the strength of national identity in China. By contrast, developments in the newspaper industry have resulted in the state releasing its grip on newspapers in general. Many of the most popular newspapers, be they national, regional, or local, are independent from the state. And while the government has been surprisingly adept at regulating the internet, there is simply far too much information on the web for the government to exercise the degree of control it does in television. But since television is by far the most popular medium in China, the effects of media consumption are more often than not what the state wants them to be. Since the phasing out of Marxism-Leninism, this has meant building a strong Chinese national identity based on cultural constitutive norms.

This chapter has established that media consumption has an important relationship with Chinese national identity at the individual level. It appears that the state is able to build a stronger sense of national identity in the public, and even to shape this identity’s content, through the informational media, and especially through television and radio. Furthermore, the results suggest that this effect may not be present, or at least not as strong, in a society in which the press is less susceptible to government influence. With respect to the case of China, the overall

\textsuperscript{21} This is also qualified by the results from the China Survey, although the WVS test—though not a strong test—is still the more appropriate one here, as it compares the two countries by using the same survey questions.
results support the ‘nationalizing’ conception of the media and stand as evidence against the idea of a ‘globalizing’ media. Newspapers and the internet, however, do appear to be forces working against national attachment, and are important exceptions to this general trend.

Finally, not only do people who consume more media have a somewhat stronger attachment to their Chinese national identity, they are also more likely to define Chineseness in a way that accords with the CCP’s broadcasted image of China. While not all alternative explanations of these findings can be completely ruled out, and while the results can be explained through processes outside of centrally controlled propaganda, this certainly resembles what we would expect a ‘propaganda effect’ to look like.

REFERENCES


