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COLLECTIVE MEMORY, CHINESE NATIONAL NARRATIVE, AND THE CENTURY OF HUMILIATION

Jacob Finke

Mentor: James Wertsch

In U.S. discourse regarding China, there is an under-emphasis placed on the Chinese Century of Humiliation. The Century of Humiliation is the period from 1840 to 1950 during which China was continually under occupation by foreign powers. This research attempts to draw attention to the importance of the Century of Humiliation in shaping the births of the Communist Party of China and the People's Republic of China. This research also attempts to understand how the Century of Humiliation continues to shape popular discourse in China to this day. The following conclusions were drawn from two in-person interviews with Chinese university students and detailed observational research at Chinese museums, memorials, and monuments in mainland China. The findings of this paper emphasize the importance of the Century of Humiliation to both the Communist Party of China and the general Chinese population. The Century of Humiliation serves as a founding myth for the Communist Party of China, justifies its foreign policies, and is a source of animus regarding the Japanese and Sino-Japanese relations. There are also pointed differences in how the Western-focused Century and Japanese-focused Century are remembered. These findings all have important meaning for Sino-U.S. relations, as the Century of Humiliation and its memory is still alive and well in the Chinese national narrative propagated by the Communist Party of China. This national narrative informs policies toward the United States. Understanding the Century of Humiliation and its place in China's national narrative is necessary for American public policy and discourse when regarding Sino-U.S. relations in the twenty-first century.