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'Blame it all on China' – US and Britain playing a dangerous game with turn to scapegoating

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Tom Plate decries the increasing tendency of political and media sectors to see Beijing as the cause of all their woes, as it goes against the openness that has made America great



“China, China, China”. Blame it all on China. Why not? The scoop from the US mainland is that economic dislocation and unemployment problems are starting to be branded by the political and media sector with that provincial if semi-official moniker: It's China's fault.

Well, yes – China is a problem and it does create problems with its trade wins (but it also creates a lot of opportunities, right?); but China is not *the* problem.

It's our overrated political and overheated media system that defaults to scapegoating – as does China towards the West – that's becoming the problem. Even the Brits have jumped into this dumb, self-defeating game – toddling along as if a clueless puppy on the heels of the new government of Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May.



[1]She pulled an 11th-hour plug on a forward-thinking nuclear power installation deal with Beijing that had been negotiated by the previous government of David Cameron and formally agreed to in good faith by both. At that betrayal, the Xi Jinping (習近平) government is howling and I, for one, cannot blame them.

[Sino-British ties at 'crucial juncture' after delay in Hinkley Point nuclear plant deal, warns Chinese ambassador \[2\]](#)

High-level agreements between governments should be mutually drilled and cemented into core national interests. After all, if every pact is to be subject to the revisionist whims of the next government, what's the value of arduous international negotiations? In the British case, one might have thought the political-ideological distance between Cameron and May,

previously a member of his cabinet, could not possibly have been so great as to recall a signature agreement with Beijing.

May's betrayal of her former boss reminds one of Hillary Clinton's parallel perfidy with her own former boss. The Democratic presidential candidate (egged on by traditionally Democratic union leaders) now opposes the vital Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact as written. Perhaps she has forgotten that it was her own former boss, US President Barack Obama, who put the deal together while she was his appointed secretary of state and was peddling the deal throughout the Pacific.



In opposing the TPP as it stands, US Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton seems to have forgotten that it was she, as secretary of state, who went around the region drumming up support for the trade pact under orders from President Barack Obama.

Photo: AFP On balance, the deal is a good one: were the TPP to come together as Obama and his team imagine, the effect would not only boost US exports but could start to stitch together the Asia-Pacific region in a manner that Beijing might have found difficult to fight. In fact, China might even have been wise – or flattered – enough to join, a development that could render the Pacific region more enduringly economically stable and presumably more politically peaceful.

Ok, so I'm dreaming. Even so, let us reiterate: populist, jingoistic paroxysms of politics are not the monopoly of the Chinese. It is true that the government and Communist Party of China have been indulging in the crowd-control technique of unadulterated nationalism. But this sin is hardly new – indeed, since the death of Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) in 1997 and the retirement of the sensible and grounded Zhu Rongji (朱鎔基) in 2003, China's once-appealing international interface has lost a measure of sheen.



A statue of late paramount leader Deng Xiaoping towers over an exhibition to mark his 110th birth anniversary, at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in August 2014. Photo: Sam Tsang Let us not sugar-coat reality by kowtowing to the proposition that everything China does with the West is now justified because of everything terrible the West has done to China over the centuries. That's a formula for geopolitical regression.

Beijing stroking its nationalism and counting on it to undergird its legitimacy is hardly news. What is news is a reviving Western primitivism. One senses it to be potentially as corrosive as China's. In a way, this too is not new. We recall the early 1990s when the economy of California, the best in the nation, began stumbling badly. The culprit then was not what we Americans were doing wrong but what the Japanese were doing to us. Now the alleged culprit is low-cost Chinese exports and low-cost Chinese labour, which have put some Americans out of work. The result is that, at least for the duration of our miserable election season, the very idea of globalisation is under siege.

Just blame it on China! What a fraud: international globalisation (which, one way or the other, is unavoidable) is not the problem; the problem is incompetent American governance and greedy, narrow-minded corporatism. It is said of the mainland these days that foreigners are viewed with increasing negativity – the crude souring effect of Chinese nationalism.

Beijing stroking
its nationalism
and counting on

That may be true; but what is also true is that American politicians have been working hard to get the American people to forget about those nicely priced toys under the yearly Christmas tree that helped stretch the family budget and stymie price inflation; not to mention the magnitude of Chinese government investment in US Treasury instruments, which have helped finance our pathetically misconceived military adventures and illegal invasions.

[China direct investment in the US set to top US\\$20b for the first time this year](#) [3]

Those who live in glass houses should not lob rhetorical rocks. The US and its historic ally, Britain, would be running a terrible risk in going down the scapegoating route – especially with the Chinese and American navies playing macho games in the South China Sea.

To my mind, maybe the most admirable and exportable American trait is the beautiful mentality of openness to outsiders and to outside ideas. This is America at its greatest. But close that mind, roll up the drawbridge, [build walls around our heart and blame others for our shortcomings](#) [4] – this is the route to decline and the start of American mindlessness.

But Beijing must cut down on the nonsense, too. Why should either of us play such a dangerous game?

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