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Book Stokes Nationalism in China

By JASON DEAN

BEIJING -- A hot-selling new book that excoriates the U.S. and calls for China to be more assertive is fueling debate among Chinese about nationalism and their country's role in the world.

"Unhappy China" is a collection of essays by five authors who argue that China has been too deferential to a Western world that is hostile toward it. They argue that China needs to use its growing power and economic resources to carve out its own position of pre-eminence. **"From looking at the history of human civilization, we are most qualified to lead this world; Westerners should be second," the book says.**

The authors, a group of scholars, single out the U.S. for special scorn, and say their book's message -- aimed largely at younger Chinese -- has been helped by the economic crisis. "This economic problem has shown the Chinese people that America does have problems, that what we've been saying is right," said Wang Xiaodong, in an interview Friday in Beijing with three of his co-authors: Liu Yang, Song Qiang and Huang Jisu. The fifth author is Song Xiaojun.

Since being released March 13, the book has sold out its initial shipments in many Chinese bookstores and landed on the best-seller list at leading online retailer Dangdang.com. The publisher has printed 270,000 copies, and says sales are far outpacing expectations.

Yet much of the response has been negative, reflecting the complex place that nationalism holds in today's China. Several reviews in the Chinese media have ridiculed "Unhappy China" as an attempt to cash in on nationalistic sentiment. The book is a way to "fish money from the pockets of the angry youth and angry elderly," wrote one critic in the China Youth Daily, a leading state-run newspaper.

An English-language article by Xinhua, the state-run news agency, said the book had failed to hit a chord with average Chinese, and quoted blistering critiques from bloggers and academics calling its nationalism embarrassing and unconstructive.

"Unhappy China" comes as the economic crisis has damaged the West and, in the minds of some Chinese, left China relatively strong.

In January, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Premier Wen Jiabao blamed the U.S. for creating the economic crisis. Earlier this month, he expressed concern about China's holdings of U.S. government debt given questions over Washington's economic policies. Last week, Zhou Xiaochuan, China's central-bank governor, proposed adopting a global currency to replace the dollar as a world standard. But Chinese officials, like their Western counterparts, also

have called for more international cooperation to help pull the global economy out of its slump.

The authors of "Unhappy China" reject such talk, reciting a litany of grievances against the U.S., from a monetary policy that threatens to devalue China's holdings of U.S. Treasuries to Washington's support for Taiwan.

Many of the prescriptions in "Unhappy China" echo positions China's government espouses -- strengthening the country's reliance on domestic technology and innovation, and bolstering its military, for example.

The authors, however, reserve some of their greatest resentment for China's current political and economic leadership.

"I've already lost all hope in China's elite," says Mr. Wang. The authors see last year's angry protests by mainly young Chinese against foreign criticism of China's Tibet policies and its hosting of the Olympics as a "milestone" for relations with the West.

"America will face a less friendly China in the future," says Mr. Wang.

—Sue Feng contributed to this article.

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