

**The Chinese Dream:
Cultivating Expansionist Chinese
Nationalism in the South China Sea
and the Role of Weibo**

Lydia Field

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Approved by:

Klaus Larres, Thesis Advisor
Sara Bush-Castro, Second Reader

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Prologue

My first memorable exposure to Chinese culture came when I was seven years old and visiting an elementary school which I would be transferring to the following year. My visit coincided with Chinese New Year, and one of the students and her mother had volunteered to speak to the class about the holiday. While her mother distributed oranges and *hongbao* (red envelopes) filled with chocolate coins, her daughter explained the traditions of the holiday and proudly displayed her beautiful red and golden colored *qipao*. As a visiting student, the experience was quite poignant, as I was simultaneously allowed a window into a tightknit class, and learned of new foreign ideas and traditions. In my life I had yet to witness such a willingness to share culture with others and the joy and pride in which it was both conducted and received. The experience sparked my initial interest in the world beyond my limited American vantage point, and especially that of China.

I met this girl again when we both shared the same fifth grade class from 2007-2008, and I learned that her name was Hannah: we quickly became friends. My worldview had since expanded, but my interest in China lingered, and was further fueled by the then upcoming 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. Upon noticing my curiosity, she began teaching me simple Mandarin phrases during recess. Armed with a few basic expressions and a new friend, we both entered the same middle and high school and I began formally studying Mandarin there. During 2013, I was able to attend a three week study abroad program in China, which reinforced my desire to continue studying the culture, history, and language at a higher level, with the goal of hopefully returning to study again in China. My path diverged from my childhood friend, as we both ended up attending different universities; nevertheless, I continued to study the language and culture which she first introduced to me, and I soon found myself back in China.

As soon as I had left China in 2013, I began planning on how I would return in the future, and that opportunity arrived in the form of studying abroad in Harbin, China during the summer of 2017. Through the CET Harbin Summer Intensive Language Program at the Harbin Institute of Technology, I spent my summer studying Mandarin, modern Chinese history, and international business. My objective in studying post-Xinhai Revolution China was to obtain a better understanding of the historical context of how the memory of the “Century of Humiliation” had shaped modern China.¹ However, I found that my most useful window into understanding the lingering effects of the “Century of Humiliation” on the ideology of mainland Chinese people (especially youths) came from my discussions with my local Chinese roommates and during our shared adventures in Harbin.

My Chinese roommates were always curious of my studies and would often peer over my shoulder at the Chinese history texts I was studying and translating. They would comment on the topics and/or voice their concerns about their political implications, especially regarding Sino-Japanese relations. We spent many late nights chatting to distract ourselves from the record breaking summer heat in our un-air-conditioned rooms. Our conversations varied from cultural differences between the United States and China, to our hobbies, to politics, to current events, and so on. When I told them that I was considering writing my senior honors thesis on the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, they were both intrigued and we spent several nights conversing on the positives and draw backs of the BRI.² Through our discussions we gradually learned about each other’s political views and perspectives on nationalism and imperialism, which differed from my original assumptions. Although the BRI is not the chosen focus of my

¹ Refers to the period of intervention and imperialism by Western nations and Japan in China between 1839-1949

² Belt and Road Initiative, also known as, the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road

thesis, our discussions about it allowed me to stumble upon my actual thesis topic: “The Chinese Dream.”

Two of my most memorable weekend outings in Harbin were a trip to the movies and visiting the Unit 731 Museum. Retrospectively, both revolve around different expressions of Chinese nationalism. During the semester before leaving for Harbin, I had taken a history class on the Pacific War, and learned about Sino-Japanese relations and the roots of the painful history between these two nations. In addition to studying the Imperial Japanese Kwantung Army’s involvement in northeastern China before and after 1931, Imperial Japan’s invasion of Manchuria and the later 1937 invasion of China, we also studied Japanese war crimes. One such example was Unit 731, which was a Japanese run, covert biological and chemical warfare research and development unit of the Imperial Japanese army, based in Harbin, China. Unit 731 undertook human experimentation on many Chinese civilians during the course of the Second World War. Upon learning that I would be visiting Harbin, my professor encouraged me to visit the museum, and so I did. My readings, while graphic and visceral, did not adequately prepare me for what I saw. The Unit 731 Museum, was a dark maze of chronological horrors, with exhibit explanations inscribed in both Chinese and English. Its horrific narrative culminates with a wall of faces and images of injuries sustained by Chinese civilians as a result of the Imperial Japanese Army’s successful use of biological warfare bombs against Chinese civilians, and the knowledge that the United States aided several of the Japanese experimenters in avoiding justice in exchange for the results of their human experimentations. Leaving the observer haunted and seeking a sense of closure which history never granted as they exit and return to greet the sunlight.

On a lighter note, my second memory was when my roommates and I went to go see a movie, and while viewing the commercials, I witnessed an event which ultimately caused me to amend my desired thesis topic. In American movie theaters, the previews are usually trailers for other future movies, but this is slightly different in China. I recall watching several advertisements, one being for a children's hospital, as well as other types of advertisements which I would expect to appear during a commercial break while watching television. However, the one which struck me most was a propaganda video called “我们的中国梦” (“Our Chinese Dream”). It featured several Chinese celebrities talking about and promoting the “Chinese Dream.” As this is a phrase which not only is closely associated with Xi Jinping, but also exudes nationalistic undertones, I was intrigued. A vital aspect of Xi Jinping's “Chinese Dream” is to encourage young people to diligently work and “contribute to the revitalization of the nation,” which in turn, Xi hopes will bolstered China's future.³ Seeing this political ad was initially somewhat surprising, but I definitely did not anticipate the response from the Chinese audience, which was one of cheering and excitement. Originally, I had thought that this response was elicited due to seeing the celebrities, but on a deeper level, it related to their message.

An ever-growing sense of national pride rooted in historical commemoration of imperial times and emphasizing the suffering of the Chinese people during the “Century of Humiliation” has caused an outward shift in the projection of Chinese nationalism. Xi's plan to rejuvenate the nation is gradually becoming synonymous with the Belt and Road Initiative and the Nine-Dash Line, and contains undertones and overtones of Chinese territorial expansion to reacquire areas formally under imperial control centuries ago.⁴ Instilling the younger generation with

³ Xinhua. (2013, May 4). Xi urges youths to contribute to 'Chinese dream'. *China Daily*.

⁴ Nine-Dash Line refers to a demarcation line used by the PRC, for their claims over a majority of the South China Sea, rejected under UNCLOS in 2016

nationalism, will serve as a foundational base and pressure for executing Xi's plans. As evidence begins to arise of an internal changes in China fueled by nationalism, external changes and mounting international tensions can be seen as well, such as the ongoing conflict over control of the South China Sea.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Chinese Dream

The phrase the “Chinese Dream” is closely associated with Xi Jinping, as he first promoted the phrase while on a high-profile visit to the National Museum of China on November 29, 2012. Xi led the other six members of the newly formed CCP Politburo Standing Committee in visiting the National Museum of China’s “The Road to Rejuvenation” exhibition. The exhibition focused on China’s national experiences from the First Opium War to the present, with a particular emphasis on the history of the “Century of Humiliation,” in which China was attacked and bullied by foreign imperialists.⁵ After physically tracing modern Chinese history extending from China’s humiliating defeat dealt by Great Britain in the First Opium War to the contemporary, Xi announced the “Chinese Dream” as a unifying theme for the Chinese people to achieve a great national revival. The specific language used in Xi’s speech refers to a “national rejuvenation” and the word “rejuvenation” (复兴 *fù xīng*) is a historic mobilization tool. 复兴 *fù xīng* has been utilized by almost every generation of modern Chinese leaders, including Sun Yet-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao.⁶ CCP leaders have “used the national humiliation discourse with the goal of rejuvenation to mobilize the Chinese populace to support their revolution or reform,” and now it appears to be Xi Jinping’s turn.⁷

Depending on whom and when you ask, the “Chinese/China Dream” represents different ideals. The “Chinese Dream” can embody the aspirations of the world’s largest middle class, and

⁵ Sørensen, C. T. (2015). The Significance of Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" for Chinese Foreign Policy: From "Tao Guang Yang Hui" to "Fen Fa You Wei". *Journal of China and International Relations*, 3(1). Page 55.

⁶ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press. Page 2.

⁷ Ibid.

their hopes for a better and more prosperous future.⁸⁹ The “China Dream” as articulated by retired People’s Liberation Army colonel, Liu Mingfu, conveys a desire to reestablish China’s historical prestige. He emphasized that through the cultivation of “martial spirit” and military power, in addition to the accumulation of wealth, China can successfully reemerge as the most powerful nation in the world.¹⁰ Furthermore, he stated that China will represent the rise of a non-hegemonic and benevolent global power.¹¹ It is important to note that before 2012, these different views and ambitions were largely divided along Chinese civilian and Chinese military and government elite lines respectively. However, Liu Mingfu’s hawkish position tends to align largely with that of President Xi Jinping, and was echoed in Xi’s speech detailing the military aspects of his vision for the Chinese Dream.¹² President Xi Jinping emphasized that the Chinese Dream is “the dream of a strong military” and that to “achieve the great revival of the Chinese nation...we must ensure there is unison between a prosperous country and a strong military,” seemingly echoing Liu Mingfu’s worldview.¹³ It is uncertain whether or not Xi Jinping read Liu Mingfu’s book, regardless, the “Chinese Dream” under the care of Xi Jinping has become a hybrid ideal of economic prosperity and military might.

As previously mentioned, former Chinese leaders instituted reforms by framing their chosen issue as necessary for “rejuvenation” (复兴 *fù xīng*), and Jiang Zemin used this language to reform modern Chinese nationalism. In the wake of China’s “reform and opening up” (改革开

⁸ Wang, H. H. (2010). *The Chinese dream: The rise of the world's largest middle class and what it means to you*. Bestseller Press.

⁹ McMahon, D. (2018). *China's Great Wall of Debt: Shadow Banks, Ghost Cities, Massive Loans, and the End of the Chinese Miracle*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

¹⁰ Mingfu, L. (2015). *The China dream: Great power thinking and strategic posture in the post-American era*. New York, NY: CN Times Books. (The Chinese version was originally published in 2010.)

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hawkish: advocating for an aggressive or warlike policy, especially in terms of foreign affairs

¹³ Wong, E. (2012, December 14). China’s Communist Party Chief Acts to Bolster Military. *The New York Times*.

放 *Gǎi gé kāi fàng*) and the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, the CCP's legitimacy needed to be reaffirmed since the Party's "official Communist ideology [had] lost credibility."¹⁴ After the collapse of Communism as a unifying ideology, patriotism and nationalism became the most important tool for garnering support of the Party's rule, and the CCP instituted a "patriotic education campaign" to promote these feelings. The patriotic education campaign was designed to present Chinese youths with detailed information about China's traumatic and humiliating experience in the face of Western and Japanese imperialism, and that the CCP-led revolution won national independence and ultimately ended national humiliation.¹⁵ Additionally, the CCP began marketing its new mission as facilitating "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," and by using the word "rejuvenation," it framed that the Party's work as a collective effort to restore China to its former position and glory.¹⁶

Under the patriotic education campaign, the new curriculum redirected protest towards foreign enemies, and the previous narrative of "China as a victor" was replaced by "China as a victim" in nationalist discourse.¹⁷ Another goal of the patriotic education campaign was to reinforce the notion that "only the Party [could] develop and rejuvenate China," to further strengthen CCP legitimacy.¹⁸ Nevertheless, this legitimacy is founded on distortions of Chinese history, especially regarding the Party's role in ending China's "Century of Humiliation," which requires the CCP to continuously maintain and protect this narrative. Consequently, Jiang

¹⁴ Wang, Z. (2008). National humiliation, history education, and the politics of historical memory: Patriotic education campaign in China. *International Studies Quarterly*, 52(4), 783-806. Page 788.

¹⁵ Ibid. Page 791.

¹⁶ Wang, Z. (2014). The Chinese dream: Concept and context. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 19(1), 1-13. Page 6.

¹⁷ Wang, Z. (2008). National humiliation, history education, and the politics of historical memory: Patriotic education campaign in China. *International Studies Quarterly*, 52(4), 783-806. Page 792.

¹⁸ Ibid. Page 794.

Zemin's sponsored patriotic education campaign was largely responsible for the rapid shift of Chinese social movements from internal-orientated, anti-corruption, and anti-dictatorship democratic movements in the 1980s, to the external-oriented, anti-Western nationalism seen since the 1990s.¹⁹ Due to the "rejuvenation" work of his predecessors, especially that of Jiang Zemin, this allowed for Xi Jinping's administration to have access to a preexisting foundation of Chinese nationalism and anti-foreign sentiments. Xi has begun to shift this modern Chinese nationalism, and its attached anti-Japanese, anti-Western, and anti-imperialist sentiments, into its current expansionist form, in the name of "national rejuvenation" which the "Chinese Dream" encompasses.

China's Complicated History

To provide context and understanding of the CCP's cultivation of modern Chinese nationalism through the use of historical distortions of critical events, the chronicle of Chinese history must be examined to clarify the motives of the Party. The fundamental governing system of the modern nation-state of the People's Republic of China is quite different from that of the divine right dynastic rule of its past; nevertheless, China still views itself as the historical hegemon of the Asia-Pacific region. During Imperial times, China was believed to be the center of the universe and the Emperor of China was considered to be the Son of Heaven. The Emperor, and his dynasty, maintained legitimacy by receiving the Mandate of Heaven (天命 *tiān mìng*). For a dynasty which had received the Mandate of Heaven, crops were plentiful, there was peace and prosperity among the people, the kingdom lacked many natural disasters and possessed a well-functioning government. It was said that all lands below heaven (天下 *tiān xià*) belonged to

¹⁹ Ibid. Page 794.

the Emperor, and as China saw itself as the center of world, the Emperor's domain also applied to the kingdoms and people's beyond China's borders. When formal foreign relations were established, it was politically beneficial for Chinese Emperors to make nations beyond the Middle Kingdom into tributary states. By prostrating themselves before the Emperor and proclaiming Chinese cultural superiority, foreign dignitaries secured tributary state status for their nation and a beneficial economic relationship with China. In turn, the Middle Kingdom maintained that China was the center of the world and that the Emperor had the Mandate of Heaven, because it appeared as though the Emperor controlled all of the known world.

As the aforementioned tributary state system of Imperial China has been used by the Chinese Communist Party as evidence of China's past of peaceful and non-imperialistic management of its neighboring nations in the Asia-Pacific, the voyages of Zheng He are also often used in tandem with this argument. The Chinese seafaring exploration under Zheng He during the early 15th century have been subjected to distortions, and it is claimed that Zheng He established diplomatic relations for China through aweing foreign populations with the massive size of his ships. Consequently, Zheng He has become a symbol of Chinese benevolence, exploration, and naval excellence. Nevertheless, Zheng He's armada were actually colossal troop carriers.²⁰ The "awe" that foreign countries felt upon Zheng He's arrival was the result of intimidation, causing them to ultimately provided tribute for the Emperor. Zheng He wielded the power of his fleet against those who disrupted and/or disrespected the Emperor's tributary state system, taking on pirates,²¹ and even launching a land war against the Kingdom of Kotte in

²⁰ French, H. W. (2017). *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power*. Vintage.

²¹ China Heritage Project. (2005, June). Shipping News: Zheng He's Sexcentenary. Retrieved February 10, 2018.

present day Sri Lanka.²² However, this aggressive narrative is not the one favored by the Chinese Communist Party in their attempt to propagate China's historical peaceful rise and reign. This is one of many examples of distorted memories of history that the CCP has used to justify its expansion.

Due to the uneasy rule of the Chinese Communist Party, the Party is continuously searching for ways to further its legitimacy. To prevent regime change, the CCP has also adhered to the principle of 内乱外患 (*nèi luàn wài huàn*), “preventing civil strife and deterring foreign aggression,” just as their imperial forefathers had. This was particularly evident through the Party's implementation of an education shift in 1991, after the Tiananmen Square Massacre. The new school curriculum was designed to highlight Chinese suffering at the hands of outsiders, with a particular emphasis on China's 百年国耻 (*bǎi nián guó chǐ*) “Century of Humiliation” due to imperialism and the demonization of Japan, as a result of the crimes it had committed against China before and during World War II.²³ This national education underscored that China needed to regain its prestige, which could be actualized through regaining territories lost during “the Century of Humiliation.” The CCP was successful in its desire to misdirect feelings of malcontent away from the Party, and the Chinese people have largely unified around anti-Japanese, anti-Imperialist, and anti-Western sentiments. Consequently, nationalism has surged within China. However, the Chinese Communist Party may have been too successful in its efforts to shape national identity.

²² Sien, L. C., & Church, S. K. (2012). *Zheng He and the Afro-Asian World*. Melaka, Malaysia: Melaka Museums Corporation (PERZIM) and International Zheng He Society. p. 265.

²³ French, H. W. (2017). *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power*. Vintage.

The Chinese Communist Party is weary of the population it rules over, as the Chinese people vastly outnumber the ruling elite. Therefore, the CCP cannot risk losing the support of Chinese public opinion. Over the past decade, as China has fully emerged onto the global stage, public pressure has begun to mount for China to use its growing military power to reassert itself and remove the United States from the Asia-Pacific. Nevertheless, by centering modern Chinese history on the demoralizations of “the Century of Humiliation,” the Chinese government must not bring any further “humiliations” to China. Consequently, the Chinese Communist Party has become a prisoner of the nationalism it created, because it is expected to wield China’s power to its fullest to regain its hegemony, and it cannot fail. Thus, China and President Xi Jinping have embarked on a dangerous geopolitical and military expansionist gambit in the South China Sea.

The South China Sea Disputes

The South China Sea is one of the biggest geopolitical flashpoints in Asia. The disputes involve China, many of its neighbors, such as Vietnam, Taiwan, The Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and also the United States, which functions as a security guarantee in the region. The South China Sea encompasses an area of 1,400,000 square miles, in which one-third of the world’s shipping passes through, carrying \$5 trillion worth of trade a year.²⁴ The South China Sea contains lucrative fisheries that produce 12 percent of the global catch, and provides food security for millions of people in Southeast Asia and beyond.²⁵ Furthermore, the South China Sea is estimated to hold 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 11 billion barrels of oil, with much more potentially still undiscovered.²⁶ Whoever controls these resources can influence

²⁴ Page 28.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, Independent Statistics & Analysis. (2013, February 7). *South China Sea*.

energy, food, and economic security in the broader Asia-Pacific, which increases the geopolitical implications of their distribution. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), these resources *should be* divided based on set geographical distances from nations' coastlines. However, China claims a majority of the South China Sea based on the nation's "historical rights" over the region, rather than adhering to the geography based method outlined by UNCLOS for maritime entitlements.

UNCLOS prescribed zones to determine which state has special rights and sovereignty regarding exploration and use of marine resources. A nation's territorial waters extend out to 12 nautical miles, and the state can set laws, regulate the use of these waters, and use any resources found there. Vessels were also given the right of innocent passage through any territorial waters. "Innocent passage" is defined by the convention as passing through waters in a continuous and expeditious manner, and is not "prejudicial to the peace, good order or the security" of the coastal state.²⁷ However, UNCLOS allows for innocent passage of foreign ships to be temporarily suspended in specified areas of a nation's territorial sea if the suspension is essential for the protection of its security.²⁸ Beyond these initial 12 nautical miles of sovereign territorial sea, UNCLOS also provides further provisions for detailing "sovereign rights" for maritime entitlements falling under a country's exclusive economic zone and/or continental shelf.

A state's exclusive economic zone starts at the edge of its territorial sea and extends outward to a distance of 200 nautical miles. Within this area, the nation has sole exploration rights over all natural resources, whether living or non-living, and also has the exclusive right to construct artificial islands, installations, and structures.²⁹ However, these artificial islands,

²⁷ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Law of the Sea*, 10 December 1982, Articles 17-19.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Article 25

²⁹ *Ibid.* Article 56.

installations, and structures do not possess the status of islands and have no territorial sea of their own.³⁰ States also have rights to the seabed and subsoil of its continental shelf, which can extend up to 350 nautical miles beyond the nation's territorial sea, but the column of water extending from the seabed to the surface is not part of their exclusive economic zone.³¹ Due to the geographical closeness of modern nation-states, especially within smaller swaths of sea, EEZs can overlap and countries can have legitimate competing claims to territory within these zones. However, a majority of the Chinese territorial claims over the South China Sea, as seen within their Nine-Dash Line in Figure 1, push well beyond this legal limit.

Since 2012, China has engaged in a series of large-scale land reclamation projects in the South China Sea and has created over 3,200 acres of artificial islands.³² The artificial islands were created

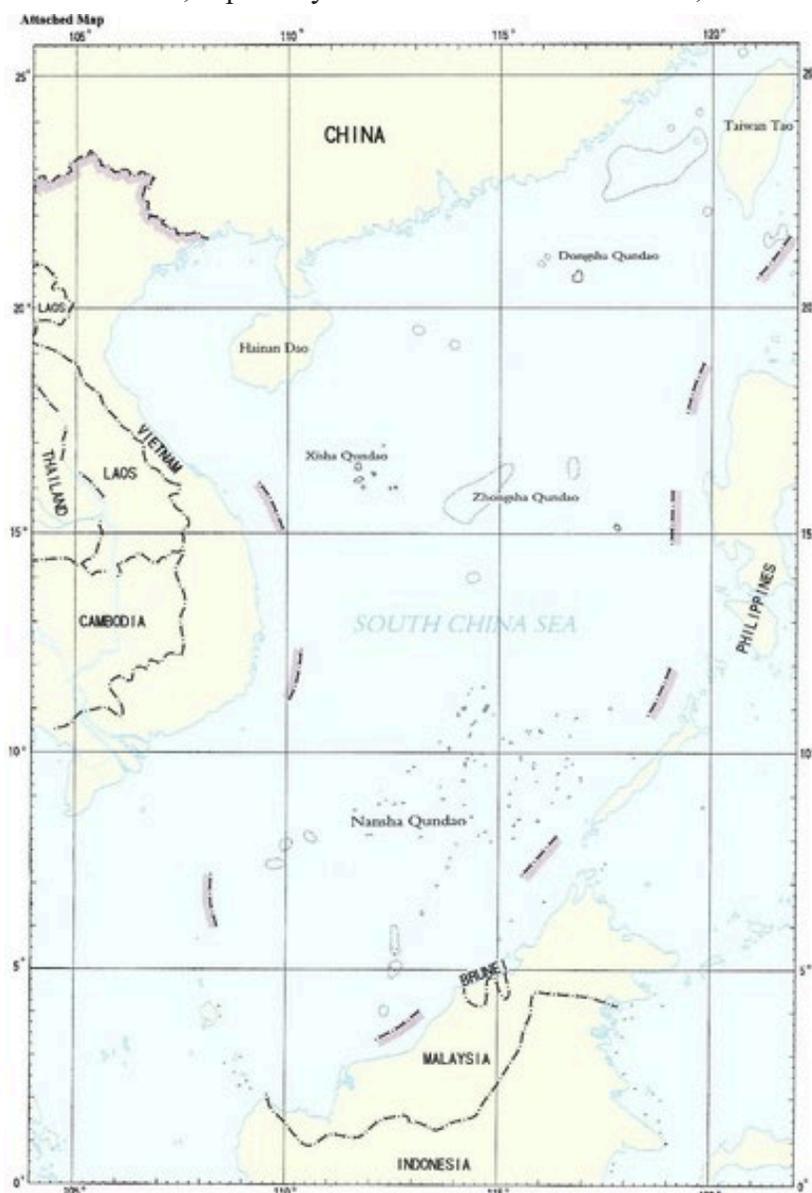


Figure 1: China's 2009 Nine-Dash Line map submission to the UN
(Courtesy of the United Nations)

³⁰ Ibid. Article 60.

³¹ Ibid. Article 76

³² Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. (2016). Island tracker.

by dredging sand onto coral reefs, shoals, and banks, and were then covered with concrete to make into permanent structures, which could be built upon. Many of the reefs and structures that have been part of China's land reclamation program are also contested between Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia. In 2013, the Philippines brought a case against Chinese "historical claims" over the South China Sea before the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague, and on July 12, 2016 the arbitral tribunal issued its ruling largely in favor of the Philippines. The tribunal ruled that any Chinese historic rights to the resources of the South China Sea were "extinguished [when China became a Party to UNCLOS]" and that it found "no evidence that

China had historically exercised exclusive control over the waters or their resources."³³ This ruling clarified that China had no legal basis for its usage of the Nine-Dash Line.

The tribunal found that none of the Spratly Islands could be classified as legal islands because they cannot sustain a stable



Figure 2: Map of Territorial claims in the South China Sea (Courtesy of Voice of America)

³³ Permanent Court of Arbitration. (2016, July 12). The South China Sea Arbitration [Press release]. Pages 1-2.

human community or independent economic activities, and therefore only are entitled to territorial seas and not EEZs.³⁴ The tribunal found that Johnson Reef, Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reef (all a part of the Spratly Islands) and Scarborough Shoal, were rocks and entitled to a 12-nautical-mile territorial sea. However, it found that Hughes Reef and Mischief Reef were below water at high-tide and therefore generated no maritime entitlements of their own.³⁵ It also ruled that Kennan Reef is a low-tide elevation, while Second Thomas Shoal and Reed Bank are submerged and belong to the Philippine continental shelf.³⁶ These ruling effectively invalidated any Chinese territorial claims within the Nine-Dash Line, but China rejected the ruling, continued with land-reclamation, and militarized many of the islands anyways. As many of these islands are not considered “islands” under UNCLOS for the purpose of deciding maritime jurisdiction, the United States has been conducting freedom of navigation operations near these maritime features, to accentuate the view of the international community and UNCLOS (which the United States is not a party to) that China is attempting to enforce illegal Chinese territorial seas and sovereignty.

With each passing year, the PLAN has become more aggressive and antagonist in response to US freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. On September 30, 2018 the USS Decatur was conducting FON operations in the South China Sea, and traveled within 12 nautical miles of Gaven and Johnson Reefs in the Spratly Islands.³⁷ The USS Decatur was then approached by the Chinese destroyer Lanzhou, after aggressive maneuvering, the two vessels had a near collision and came within 45 yards of each other.³⁸ In response to the incident,

³⁴ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. (2016). *Philippines v. China: Arbitration Outcomes*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Reuters with the Associated Press. (2018, October 02). US says Chinese destroyer was 'aggressive' and 'unsafe,' coming dangerously close to American ship. *CNBC*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

China's Ministry of National Defense spokesperson condemned the American "illegal provocation in the name of 'freedom of navigation'" and emphasized that the actions "posed a grave threat to China's sovereignty and security."³⁹ Furthermore, the Ministry of National Defense asserted that "China has indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and their adjacent waters" and that the military will "take all necessary measures to firmly safeguard sovereignty and security."⁴⁰ Within a framework of international law, this claim of indisputable sovereignty does not hold true, but within the context of Chinese nationalism and patriotic education, it has merit. Since the 1940s, generations of Chinese students have learned from their geography textbooks that James Shoal (Zengmu Ansha), a mere 52 miles from the Malaysian coast, is the southernmost point of China's territory.⁴¹ Textbooks in most societies present an "official" version of events and highlight narratives that shape contemporary patriotism, the Nine-Dash Line now appears on official Chinese maps and passports, which has both verbally and visually normalized the teaching of the Nine-Dash Line.⁴² Additionally, after the South China Sea ruling was issued, official censors moved quickly to curtail online discussion that seemed to overstep the bounds of acceptable nationalist discourse and censors removed Weibo posts that contradicted the party line.⁴³ From a Chinese perspective, the South China Sea is Chinese sovereign territory, because a majority of the population have never been taught otherwise.

³⁹ Xinhua. (2018, October 2). Chinese military opposes US provocation in South China Sea. *Xinhua Net*.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Wang, Z. (2014, August 26). The Nine-Dashed Line: 'Engraved in Our Hearts'. *The Diplomat*.

⁴² Wang, Z. (2008). National humiliation, history education, and the politics of historical memory: Patriotic education campaign in China. *International Studies Quarterly*, 52(4), 783-806. Page 786.

⁴³ Allen-Ebrahimian, B. (2016, July 12). After South China Sea Ruling, China Censors Online Calls for War. *Foreign Policy*.

Conclusion

China's economic growth is plateauing and the nation is facing mounting social issues, such as its aging population, environmental degradation, and corruption, among other things. Moreover, Xi Jinping has yet to accomplish all the goals and aspirations of his administration regarding the transition of China into a fully-fledged economic and military hegemon. As Xi's administration has faced criticism and challenges from Chinese elites, it has implemented measures to control these dissenting voices, ranging from anti-corruption campaigns to censorship and regulations to fear. The CCP has been biding its time since 1979 and is now implementing its broader strategy for dethroning the United States' position as the most powerful nation in the region and the world.⁴⁴ China has been subtly testing how far it can push the norms of the Asia-Pacific region in a continuous cycle of mounting tensions and then reducing them (放手 *fàng shǒu*).⁴⁵ These cycles are quite easy to distinguish, and some of the most recent examples of rising tensions are China's disputes with the Philippines, Vietnam, and other countries over the South China Sea, and clashes with Japan over the Senkaku Islands. Additionally, China's Belt and Road Initiative and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank are both examples of cooling tensions. These cycles used to be distinct from each other, but more recently China has been able to simultaneously maintain rising pressures in one area and falling pressures in other, a testament to the success of China's global integration. The next decade is likely China's best opportunity to reaffirm itself as the regional hegemon, which will potentially

⁴⁴ Refers to Deng Xiaoping's dictum "hide your capabilities, bide your time" and also the use of "reform and opening up" to provide China the economic tools to gain prosperity and power over time

⁴⁵ MacFarquhar, R. (Ed.). (1997). *The Politics of China: the eras of Mao and Deng*. Cambridge University Press. p. 371.

make 2020-2030 some of the most dangerous and tension filled years in the region in recent memory.⁴⁶

Research Questions

This thesis revolves around the following questions: What developments regarding Chinese nationalism have allowed for Chinese expansionism to be a vital part of the “Chinese Dream,” especially within the context of the South China Sea? Additionally, how has social media aided in disseminating and achieving the goals of the “Chinese Dream”?

In this thesis, I will argue that through the use of a glorified imperial hegemonic history and an education curriculum which emphasizes the victimization of China during the “Century of Humiliation,” the Chinese Communist Party has established itself as the instrument through which “national rejuvenation” is possible and is essential to the revitalized Chinese national identity. Consequently, the Chinese Communist Party has bound itself to an aggressive and expansionist form of nationalism which demands that China reassert itself over its former domain and that this identity can be seen through social media, especially within the context of the South China Sea disputes.

Outline of Thesis

After this introduction, my thesis will explain my research methodology and contain a literature review examining the major publications around the topics of Chinese nationalism, Chinese social media and censorship, and the South China Sea and its subsequent conflicts.

⁴⁶ French, H. W. (2017). *Everything Under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power*. Vintage.

Following the literature review, the third chapter seeks to review major events in the “Century of Humiliation” which engendered lasting anti-Japanese sentiments. This chapter establishes the linkages between mobilizing anti-Japanese sentiment to disputed territory as a transferable framework to the South China Sea disputes.

In the fourth chapter, I trace the historical roots of modern Chinese nationalism and review major events in the “Century of Humiliation” which engendered enduring anti-Western and anti-Imperialist sentiments, and analyzed their implications for the modern context.

In the fifth chapter, I will analyze the role of Chinese social media in fostering and shaping Chinese nationalism in accordance with the goals of the “Chinese Dream.” I will primarily focus on the micro-blogging platform Weibo and how this has allowed for growing support of Chinese expansion in the South China Sea. Additionally, it will use the framework provided by the 2012 Chinese anti-Japanese protests to analyze mobilization around territorial disputes on Weibo.

Lastly, my conclusion will consider the future of the South China Sea region and expansionist Chinese nationalism, as seen through social media. Additionally, I will present my findings and policy suggestions.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter describes the methods, sources, and framework utilized to answer my research questions and discuss the impact these inputs had on my research process and the ultimate influence on my findings. First, I will describe the methods and the framework I used to answer my research questions and label the specific types of sources I utilized at each stage. I will then go into depth about the types of sources I applied, decisions I made in selecting sources, and the subsequent tensions and commonalities between and within different literatures.

In this chapter, I review several foundational and informative works which will support the framework of my thesis. There are many different perspectives on what constitutes the “Chinese Dream” and how it interacts with Chinese identity, social media platforms, and past, current, and future events in the South China Sea. Through my reading, I have discovered several aspects of agreement and several of contention among writers who discuss the “Chinese/China Dream” and its other overlapping topic areas with my thesis. I have narrowed these points down to the following: Chinese Nationalism, Chinese Social Media Communication and Censorship, and the South China Sea. I will engage critically with many sources that examine these themes and offer explanations for the construction of the Chinese Dream within an expansionist framework⁴⁷ and how it interacts with Chinese nationalism, Chinese Social Media, and Chinese actions taken in the South China Sea.

⁴⁷ The framing of territorial, military, and economic expansion as a necessity for asserting Chinese identity

Methodology

To be able to determine the developments surrounding Chinese nationalism which have allowed for Chinese expansionism to be a vital aspect of the “Chinese Dream,” within the context of the South China Sea, I first had to understand the environment in which these events occurred. The methods used for this portion of thesis research were critical readings and analysis of relevant materials. I began by studying elements of the “Chinese Dream” and the links between Xi Jinping’s original announcement of the “Chinese Dream,” modern Chinese history, and mobilization language. Additionally, after firmly comprehending the background of the South China Sea territorial disputes, I revisited modern Chinese history to locate and understand the sources of Chinese nationalistic motivations for territorial expansion. I was then able to isolate specific events within Chinese history which both cultivated and altered existing Chinese nationalism. I started with the “Century of Humiliation” and progressed chronologically through history, and eventually arrived in the 1990s and learned of the external re-orientation of Chinese nationalism achieved through the CCP’s “patriotic education campaign.”

Additionally, to determine how Chinese social media has aided in dissemination and of the “Chinese Dream,” I studied censorship, the environment of Weibo, Chinese cyberspace policy, and previous examples of Chinese mobilization language and modern Chinese anti-foreign protest movements. I decided to use the 2012 Chinese anti-Japanese demonstrations and the multiple escalatory and de-escalatory roles of Weibo as a framework for understanding Chinese cyber nationalism and expansionist nationalism in response to perceived threats to Chinese territorial sovereignty. The second portion of my thesis research involved actively searching through related Weibo posts and translating them. I used anti-American protest language from Chinese student protests of the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade,

and conducted many Weibo searches through the use of key terms generated from this protest language. I also studied the role of state-sponsored media sources on Weibo and the actions they took to foster expansionist Chinese nationalism and pro-military feelings in the South China Sea.

Chinese Nationalism

As my thesis pertains to the construction and expression of contemporary Chinese expansionist nationalism, I began with a generalized analysis of Western nationalism and how it differs from Chinese nationalism. The Western theoretical foundations and studies of nationalism can be traced to philosophers such as Locke, Hobbes, Machiavelli, Rousseau, and others who conceptualized the relationship between rulers and individuals, sometimes referred to as a social contract. “Nationalism” is a comparatively newer term when likened with the word “patriotism” and their cognates. These two terms are often used interchangeably within the English language to imply a commitment to one’s country, a desire to ensure its well-being and that of its people, and a readiness to defend it, especially in times of crisis. Nevertheless, a distinction has emerged in the tone and connotation of these words. In addition, to the definition which is similar to “patriotism,” the term “nationalism” has also subsumed and now implies feelings of national superiority.

One of the foundational texts on nationalism which depicts a nation as a socially constructed community, is Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. I have used this text and his concept of an imagined community to further my understanding of previous historical examples of constructed identity. I will apply this framework to the construction of modern Chinese nationalism and also engage critically with it in relation to the “patriotic education

campaign” and expansionist Chinese nationalism seen on social media platforms. Benedict Anderson emphasizes that “many different cultures have ‘unified’ by political, military, cultural, economic and social processes.”⁴⁸ A vital aspect of constructing a unifying “we” is by setting it against another group or groups who do not belong to that collective and could threaten its existence. Group identities when tied to expansionist military and economic aims, are contextualized through the schema of nation-state politics. Zhao (2004) argues that under state nationalism, there is a visible convergence of political mobilization and territorial sovereignty issues. Consequently, these identities require constant maintenance and must be continuously refined to highlight in-group similarities and out-group differences.

I have chosen to discuss war time nationalism because several Chinese and Western sources have referred to the conflicts in the South China Sea as “warm” war. While different from both a “cold”⁴⁹ and “hot”⁵⁰ war, “warm”⁵¹ war does have similarities with traditional wartime mentalities. During times of war, nationality and ethnicity are valued above all else, for wars are fought between nations, and nations are held together by the perceived and imagined commonalities of its citizens. The most potent military weapons a country can possess are not made of steel or explosives but made of ideals and emotions: nationalism. Having thousands of soldiers whose hearts overflow with patriotic fervor, are much more effective than the forcibly conscripted militiamen of yesteryear. Nationalism is often defined as feelings of pride in one’s nation and/or national identity. There are many different “brands” of nationalism, for nationalism

⁴⁸ Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso Books. Pages 111.

⁴⁹ Cold war: a period of hostile relations between rivals where direct open warfare is largely avoided

⁵⁰ Hot war: a conflict in which actual armed fighting occurs between the belligerent parties

⁵¹ Warm war: a period when parties are engaging in negotiations for peace, but continue to mobilize forces and implement war plans in preparation for war

has evolved over the centuries and now rarely stands alone. Jingoism, chauvinism,⁵² and xenophobia⁵³ all can be intertwined with nationalism, and are integral to the understanding of modern nationalism. Furthermore, within the Chinese context, modern Chinese nationalism also has anti-foreign sentiments attached to it.

Wartime expansionist nationalism, as conceived by Western scholars, needs an ethnic identity to attach itself to, for this furthers the idea of unity among a militarized nation's citizens. This ethnic identity unites those with a shared language, a shared faith, and a shared racial ancestry under a common banner. Often this ethnic identity is first created by defining what the ideal citizen is not. In doing so, a fifth column is created,⁵⁴ as an in-group cannot exist without an out-group. Wang (2014) asserts that Chinese Nationalism is a unique case, especially in regard to the identity chosen and utilized to create its modern national self-concept, as the "ideal Chinese citizen" has been rebranded to be those who are "patriotic" and loyal to the CCP.⁵⁵ The use of "othering" identities when paired with nationalism provide a foundation for military formation and subsequent racism that stem from these "othering" ethnic identities, serve as the basis for large-scale, militarized violence. Nationalism, paired with attaching an "othering" ethnic identity upon one's enemies, increases the willingness of such groups to kill and sacrifice, as well as commit atrocities against racialized others. Fortunately, China and the United States have not yet reached this point, and hopefully never will. Nonetheless, tensions have begun to

⁵² Chauvinism: exaggerated and/or aggressive patriotism which usually appears as excessive or prejudiced loyalty to one's cause, group, or gender

⁵³ Xenophobia: fear of foreigners and/or foreign ideas which usually appears in an aggressive way

⁵⁴ Fifth column: a group of people who seemingly undermine a larger group from within

⁵⁵ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press.

boil and have manifested in the form of naval brinkmanship in the South China Sea, among other things.

As a modern concept, nationalism was introduced to China by Chinese elites in the late 19th century in an effort to “rejuvenate” (复兴 *fù xīng*) China. Chinese nationalism played a vital role in Chinese politics of the 20th century, and much of modern Chinese mobilization is still initiated by elites in a top-down fashion. Modern Chinese nationalism was cultivated in stages, and were largely reactionary to “humiliations” experienced by China. According to Zhao (2004), the first stage was from the First Opium War (1839-1842) to the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), in which the concept of nationalism was introduced and imported to China through elites. Since the First Opium War, foreign aggression and incursion became a recurring problem for China, and would continue for much of the course of the “Century of Humiliation.” During this time, nationalist consciousness had begun to emerge among Chinese elites and intellectuals, and was later disseminated throughout urban populations. The second stage occurred from the end of the First Sino-Japanese War (1895) to the early years of the Republic of China (1919), and was marked by continued foreign aggression and imperialism and Chinese nationalist movements and revolutions. The third stage consisted of the founding of the Republic of China (1919) and concluded with the founding of the People’s Republic of China (1949), and was marked by violence (caused by foreign invasion and Chinese civil strife), diverging nationalist thought, and the end of the “Century of Humiliation.” The fourth stage (1949-1990) witnessed evolving and different forms of nationalism in the PRC, culminating in the form of the 1989 Tiananmen protests. While the fifth and final stage is modern Chinese nationalism (Zhao, 2004; Wang, 2014). This new nationalism is a continuation of various forms of nationalism observed in the previous stages and is manifested by the implementation of “the great rejuvenation of China” and

the “patriotic education campaign” in the 1990s. It is important to revisit the history of the “Century of Humiliation” as it was responsible for the origin of Chinese nationalism, but also conveys how this history is utilized to shape its contemporary form, and I will do so in later chapters.

The discussion and analysis of Chinese foreign policy in the post-1989 era is dynamic and Whiting (1995) suggests separating Chinese nationalism into three types: affirmative, assertive, and aggressive. Affirmative nationalism focuses “exclusively on ‘us’ as a positive in-group referent with pride in attributes and achievements.”⁵⁶ Assertive nationalism adds a “them” negative out-group to the previous conversation, which serves to confront the in-group’s interests and identity. Lastly, Whiting (1995) states that aggressive nationalism isolates a foreign nation as its enemy, which seemingly possess an imminent threat to the in-group nation and necessitates action. While different in their ultimate results, each type of nationalism fosters a national self-construct, targeting attitudes, engendering external-oriented anger, and mobilizing behaviors. When domestic politics and external factors challenge the nation’s legitimacy, these types of nationalisms can converge to induce a “siege mentality” that fuels state nationalism.⁵⁷ However, some scholars (Xu, 2007) argue that given China’s ascendance to international power status, the “siege mentality” model does not fully depict contemporary Chinese nationalism and must be further revised. Xu (2007) further divides Chinese nationalism into official or nonofficial nationalism. The CCP’s responses to ensure its legitimacy after the 1989 Tiananmen protests are largely indicative of official nationalism. According to Xu (2007), official Chinese nationalism includes three themes: sovereignty, territorial reunification, and the continued reform-and-

⁵⁶ Whiting, A. S. (1995). Chinese nationalism and foreign policy after Deng. *The China Quarterly*. Page 295.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Page 296.

opening-up. Additionally, Xu (2007) emphasizes that nonofficial nationalism combines both affirmative and assertive postures, and incorporates glorified Chinese history, national pride, and perceived Western influence and “insults.”

Whiting’s (1995) and Xu’s (2007) broader assessments of Chinese nationalism held true until the 2008 global financial crisis where there was a surging increase in popular nationalist sentiment. According to Zhao (2013) the 2008 global economic crash caused a “convergence of Chinese state nationalism and popular nationalism [that called] for a more muscular Chinese foreign policy.”⁵⁸ In the time since the economic crash, active duty senior military officers were allowed to openly pressure the CCP to push back against the US on many sensitive foreign policy issues, such as maritime territorial disputes.⁵⁹ Additionally, since the CCP has gained a sense of empowerment through the nation’s new level of wealth and military power, while simultaneously fearing the rise of domestic social, economic, and political tensions, “the communist state has become more willing to play to the popular nationalist gallery in pursuing the so-called core national interests.”⁶⁰ These popular Chinese nationalist voices share the government’s “dream of making China a strong and powerful country that could stand up against the bullies of the Western powers, [which causes] popular nationalism [to be] particularly suspicious about a Western conspiracy and hidden agenda to slow down or even stop China's rise and, therefore, [are] more vocal and emotional than the state in criticism of Western evil intentions.”⁶¹ Galvanized by public pressure and China’s rising power, the CCP expanded the “core interest issues in 2009 to include the maritime territorial claims in the South China Sea...

⁵⁸ Zhao, S. (2013). Foreign policy implications of Chinese nationalism revisited: The strident turn. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 22(82), 535-553. Page. 535.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. Page 539.

[whereas] China's official statements on core interest issues involving sovereignty and territorial integrity had [previously] referred almost exclusively to Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang.”⁶²

A majority of the “popular nationalists are young... [and are] connected mostly by new information technology, particularly the Internet, [and] the youth popular nationalist movement gained momentum in the 2000s.”⁶³ These young popular nationalists routinely take to the Internet and its social media platforms to claim that “the communist state as neither confident enough nor competent enough in safeguarding China's vital national interests and too chummy with Japan and soft in dealing with the United States.”⁶⁴ These voices cause official CCP responses to international incidents to concurrently appear “hard” to a foreign observer, while “soft” and conciliatory to the domestic citizen. Furthermore, Zhao (2013) states that “the commercialization of a large portion of the Chinese media pushed newspapers to make money from subscriptions and advertising...and nationalistic expression [became] a powerful approach to attract readers' attention.”⁶⁵ This caused a majority of Chinese news and media commentators to criticize “government policy from a hawkish, nationalist direction [rather] than from a moderate, internationalist one.”⁶⁶ Zhao (2013) asserts that this type of nationalism “makes compromise extremely difficult if not impossible on issues that China deems as its core interest and thereby push China to adopt increasingly bellicose foreign policies.”⁶⁷ Under the administration of Hu Jintao, the CCP emphasized China’s “peaceful rise,” but under the leadership of Xi Jinping, this approach has partially been abandoned in favor of the aggressive

⁶² Ibid. Page 547.

⁶³ Ibid. Page 539

⁶⁴ Ibid. Page 540.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Page 544.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Page 553.

and expansionist nationalism which the broader Chinese public and online community had been clamoring for.

Since the 1990s, Chinese nationalism was constructed through the patriotic education campaign orchestrated by the CCP, which used “patriotism” to bolster nationalism and ensure the populous’ loyalty and maintain its legitimacy (Zhao, 2004; Wang, 2014). Wang (2014) asserts that the mass media played an important role in the promotion of state-sponsored nationalism. By controlling and limiting engagement with international news narratives that were unfavorable to the CCP’s agenda, state controlled media reinforced the construction and maintenance of anti-foreign sentiments. Chinese foreign policy has assumed a more assertive posture towards the United States and Japan but remains relatively conciliatory towards smaller countries when conflict arises, as a result of the construction of historical memory (Wang, 2014). Wang (2014) shows that when looking to the glories of China’s past, party-approved textbooks engage in selective remembering and forgetting. Furthermore, by selecting which aspects of Chinese history to remember and which parts to erase, the CCP has used historical memory to cultivate a new Chinese national consciousness, which Wang (2014) calls a “Chosen-Myth-Trauma (CMT) complex.”⁶⁸ Many of these chosen national myths arise from glorified Chinese imperial history, the CCP’s role in ending the “Century of Humiliation” and the rejuvenation of China. Conversely, a majority of the chosen traumas arise from the “Century of Humiliation” and recent interactions between China, Japan, and the United States where Chinese civilians have died. This has caused concern and debate about the overall benefits of this “CMT

⁶⁸ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press.

complex,” and the broader implications and impacts of rooting the Chinese population’s national self-concept in the memory of a mythologized past and previous cultural traumas.

Chinese Social Media Communication and Censorship

In addition to nation-state politics, popular media can also create and perpetuate imagined communities. Chinese social media platforms intersects and intermingles with aspects of Chinese identity in several ways, as both a method of communication in a common language and also by proliferating, sharing, and rapidly spreading ideas. Engaging with works about Chinese social media, especially Weibo, is critical to understanding the construction and preservation of modern Chinese nationalism. Many Western articles on Sina Weibo tend to falsely call Weibo a Chinese “Twitter-like-platform” and neglect the diversified communities and viewpoints of users on Weibo. The Internet connects “ethnic Chinese people across national boundaries, leading to the formation of a transnational cultural sphere, within which the meanings of being Chinese are debated and cultivated.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, citizens of the PRC have ever more limited access to online social media and non-CCP approved new sources.

One of the most widely used forms of social media in China is Sina Weibo, which is a micro-blogging platform. Sina Weibo, or simply Weibo (微博), was launched on August 14th, 2009. After the July 2009 Urumqi riots, China blocked most of the domestic and non-China-based microblogging services (such as Twitter and Facebook), which allowed Weibo to rise quickly in popularity after its introduction. The website enables users to send messages and

⁶⁹ Le Han, E. (2016). *Micro-blogging memories: Weibo and collective remembering in contemporary China*. Springer. Page 119.

multimedia messages to one another, upload photos and videos, which can be shared, and add comments, photos, and videos in the comment section of posts. Sina Weibo was allowed to exist behind the so called “Great Firewall of China” due to adhering to Chinese censorship laws; however, it in its inception, it was considerably freer when compared with other Chinese social media websites. Nevertheless, with the Chinese government’s continued pressure to universally enforce internet regulations, and with the addition of new stricter cybersecurity laws, Weibo’s users were no longer allowed a degree of anonymity.

Eileen Le Han (2016) posits that Weibo is unique when compared to other social media platforms because it “provided a common platform for Chinese-speaking users all over the world” and incidentally drew “globally dispersed Chinese people closer during certain public events despite the existence of the Great Firewall.”⁷⁰ Weibo is an event oriented platform, and serves a place where past memories are preserved and can remain present in the consciousness of users. These memories can be itemized through key search terms and hashtags which reinforces “mnemonic activities” and specific phrase associations with those memories.⁷¹ Additionally, Weibo provides a space where these memories and understandings of historic events can be debated and the official narrative can be challenged. However, in challenging the official narrative this can “also serve to reinforce a sense of nationalism and even be incorporated in the official discourse.”⁷² Official and verified Chinese media organizations which have a presence on Weibo have “focused on promoting nationalism during the anniversary commemoration,”⁷³ which “fits into the Chinese government’s nationalism project.”⁷⁴ Chinese authorities have

⁷⁰ Ibid. Page 119.

⁷¹ Ibid. Page 10.

⁷² Ibid. Page 90.

⁷³ Ibid. Page 102.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Page 92.

begun to use social media platforms to engage with historical narratives, and promote historical revisionism. The contested personal and historical narratives discussed on Weibo have been absorbed “into the maintain stream to [legitimize] narratives of nationalism.”⁷⁵

Le Han (2016) also provides anecdotal evidence in how Chinese scholars, journalists, and elites on Weibo serve as de-escalatory voices to combat excessive nationalistic tendencies. In the example of the 2012 China anti-Japanese demonstrations, “rational” users made comparisons to the Cultural Revolution to describe the violent nature of some of the protestors. Le Han’s anecdotal evidence is supported by the empirical evidence discovered by Cairns & Carlson (2016) in their study of Weibo posts during the demonstrations. Cairns & Carlson (2016) reported three major findings: firstly, “the censorship rate of online discussion was lower at a critical juncture in August than extant literature would predict.”⁷⁶ Secondly, that “much of the netizens’ anger was directed at Beijing, not Tokyo.”⁷⁷ Lastly, that “more moderate voices appeared to counter these virulent sentiments directly after a broader swath of the public tuned in to online discussion of the dispute in September.”⁷⁸ Cairns & Carlson (2016) suggest that since the dispute was still in its early stages in August, the CCP may have been more willing to tolerate some risk to societal order to signal its resolve to Tokyo. Cairns & Carlson (2016) also affirm that the CCP selectively allows nationalist protests, which appear to apply pressure to Beijing during international disputes, so long as protestors do not escalate their actions and turn against their leaders. Furthermore, their “observations raise the possibility that Beijing felt it had to let nationalist-minded netizens ‘blow off steam,’”⁷⁹ and the protests served to direct the outlet

⁷⁵ Ibid. Page 112.

⁷⁶ Cairns, C., & Carlson, A. (2016). Real-world islands in a social media sea: Nationalism and censorship on weibo during the 2012 Diaoyu/Senkaku crisis. *The China Quarterly*, 225, 23-49. Page 38.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Page 40.

of anger elsewhere. However, by September, the demonstrations had escalated and became more destructive. While the CCP may not have been able (or willing) to rein in street demonstrations immediately, it was much more capable of tightening online censorship in order to reduce the spread of information about the destructive acts inflicted by the protestors. Moreover, by avoiding *visible* censorship (Roberts, 2018), when online users are aware that censorship is occurring, the CCP may have been trying to avoid inducing heightened information-seeking behaviors.

There is “consistent and systematic censorship of content that violates long-standing taboos [in China] on topics such as the Cultural Revolution, the 1989 crackdown on Tiananmen Square protesters, Taiwanese independence, the repression of minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet, and the banned spiritual group Falun Gong.”⁸⁰ Online publications regarding Chinese territorial sovereignty are highly sensitive, and as a result, are often censored if they do not align with the CCP’s position. As I am dealing with censorship, there are likely some limitations in the sources and evidence I could have potentially used, but I have taken steps to ensure that I have access to and have preserved various unorthodox online opinions. Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet are the most sensitive, because these regions are disputed and are also involved with human rights issues. However, based on previous censorship patterns, the level of censorship surrounding the territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas has taken a step closer to that of Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet. Nevertheless, Chinese online censorship is not universal and is actually quite porous. According to Roberts (2018) the censorship methods employed by the Chinese government function more as a tax on information, by “forcing users to pay money or spend

⁸⁰ Freedom House. (2018). Freedom on the Net 2018. *Freedom House*.

more time if they want to access the censored material.”⁸¹ Roberts (2018) employs a formula of fear, friction, and flooding to explain censorship methods and the types of citizens whom these approaches are designated for. Friction, the act of increasing the costs, either in time or money, of accessing or disseminating information, often diverts citizens’ attention away by imposing barriers to information access.⁸² Flooding is information that is coordinated as a distraction, propaganda, or to sow confusion.⁸³ Flooding competes with information that authoritarian governments would like to censor by diluting it and distracting from it.⁸⁴ Similar to friction, flooding also forces the user to spend extra time finding accurate information. China’s “Great Firewall” and its friction and flooding can be circumvented by the use of Virtual Private Network (VPN), but there are economic and social costs attached to this technique. Therefore, the method of fear is designed for the elites who have already bypassed the friction and flooding methods of censorship.⁸⁵ Moreover, these censorship methods drive a wedge between the elite and the masses, and have caused Weibo users to be “starkly apolitical” when compared to their elite and educated Chinese counterparts on Twitter.⁸⁶ Modern Chinese nationalism is “an elite-led, top-down political movement,”⁸⁷ and by separating the elites from the masses, the CCP prevents the coordination of the masses and the elites and any possible mobilization against government interests.

⁸¹ Roberts, M. E. (2018). *Censored: distraction and diversion inside China's Great Firewall*. Princeton University Press. Page 2.

⁸² Ibid. Page 6.

⁸³ Ibid. Page 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. Page 8.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Page 174.

⁸⁷ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press. Page 140.

The South China Sea

A majority of the sources I used to further my understanding of the South China Sea echoed each other on the factual information on the territorial disputes, but offered different frameworks for understanding the conflict. Allison (2017) uses the paradigm of Thucydides' Trap, an observed pattern of international tension when a rising power threatens to displace the current reigning world hegemon, which often results in war, to explain Chinese motivations in the South China Sea. Allison (2017) asserts that Thucydides' Trap is the best angle for understanding Sino-American relations in the 21st century, and parallels Xi Jinping's and Donald Trump's ambitions to make their respective countries "great again." Furthermore, he offers several examples of how the United States and China could easily find themselves at war, one such example being conflict over the South China Sea. I partially agree with Allison over the global tensions that China's rise has caused, but argue that his approach does not fully account for modern Chinese history, nationalism, and the patriotic education campaign. Miller (2017) utilizes a geopolitical and geo-economic framework for understanding the South China Sea and asserts that China's "true motivation in the South China Sea is to gain strategic control of its shipping lanes."⁸⁸ Moreover, Miller (2017) affirms that "China's expansionism in the South China Sea is part of Beijing's grand strategy to replace the US as the dominant power in Asia."⁸⁹ Miller (2017) also believes that "China sees "the rules-based order" as a rigged system designed both to contain its legitimate rise and to prop up the US *imperium*... [and] the US's 'pivot to Asia' [serves as] proof."⁹⁰ I largely agree with Miller's framework, but also seek to add a

⁸⁸ Miller, T. (2017). *China's Asian dream: Empire building along the new silk road*. Zed Books Ltd. Page 210.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 216

⁹⁰ Ibid. 217

framework of Chinese nationalism and education to establish a comprehensive schema for understanding the South China Sea.

Alternatively, French (2017) uses examples found in China's historical role as the hegemon of the Asia-Pacific region to expound upon modern happenings in China under the rule of Xi Jinping. Xi's China uses its history as a seemingly benevolent and non-imperialistic regional ruler as justification for its desire to return to its place of former power. French (2017) emphasizes that Chinese historical revisionism has helped to cultivate China's growing sense of national dominance and warns that Imperial China's rule was not as benign as revisionists have claimed, and suspects much of the same for potential Chinese rule. As the result of China's sustained and expected further outward projection of economic and military power, French (2017) predicts that due to impending structural challenges within China, such as the ramifications of the One Child Policy, China's window to achieve its aims are closing rapidly. French (2017) also infers that the next decade will be turbulent for the world as China attempts to reassert itself in the Asia-Pacific region before its impending population problem begins to unravel. I mostly agree with French, but hesitate to fully brand modern Chinese historical narrative as a form of historical revisionism, especially when considering the "Century of Humiliation."

Conclusion

In conclusion, through research on the "Chinese Dream," the construction of modern Chinese expansionist nationalism, the South China Sea disputes and Chinese motivations, and Chinese social media communication and censorship, I have identified three foundational works in which this thesis seeks to expand upon. Zheng Wang's (2014) *Never Forget National*

Humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations, Eileen Le Han's (2016) *Micro-blogging Memories: Weibo and collective remembering in contemporary China* and Margaret E. Roberts' (2018) *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall* all are related to the scope of this thesis and provide invaluable evidence for this thesis' argument, but are ultimately different from what this thesis seeks to prove. Le Han explores the impact of ever increasing Chinese nationalism and state-sponsored censorship on Chinese collective memory and historical narratives. Nevertheless, she does so within a time frame that does not reflect the recent legal changes to Weibo resulting from updated Chinese cyberspace policy. Le Han does discuss the East China Sea and 2012 protests, but does so briefly. Wang discusses the CCP's role in shaping educational curriculum to cultivate external-oriented Chinese nationalism and how the Chinese media limits or increases the exposure of international incidents when it is in the interest of the CCP. However, the examples of international incidents he uses are a bit dated (ex: Taiwan crisis: 1995-1996, Embassy crisis: 1999, EP-3 incident: 2001, etc.) and the most recent example (the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games) is now over a decade old. Additionally, Margaret E. Roberts provides a useful framework for understanding the class divisions sowed by Chinese censorship methods, and how they appear on Weibo, but she does not use any examples of censorship within the context of the East or South China Seas. As Roberts (2018) takes a step back from "brainwashing or enforced symbolism, through cult like nationalism, religion, or ideology" she does not engage much with Chinese nationalism exhibited on social media platforms.⁹¹ Additionally, by applying my new methodology of mobilization language to these preexisting frameworks, and building upon them, this will bridge many of the gaps which exist between the chosen literatures.

⁹¹ Roberts, M. E. (2018). *Censored: distraction and diversion inside China's Great Firewall*. Princeton University Press. Page 11.

Chapter 3: Establishing Anti-Japanese Sentiment as a Transferable Framework

Introduction

The origins of modern Chinese nationalism date back to the late Qing dynasty, the Republican Era, and the early days of the People's Republic of China. Nevertheless, China's broader Imperial history is also critical for the construction of several aspects of its contemporary version. The Chinese Communist Party has shaped Chinese nationalism in its present form to ensure its legitimacy. Previously, under Mao Zedong, Chinese nationalism was "shrouded by an overlay of revolutionary ideology."⁹² Intertwining revolutionary ideals and nationalism further served to cultivate loyalty towards the Party and state. However, in the post-Mao Era, as the CCP embarked on economic reform through 改革开放 ("reform and opening-up" *gǎi gé kāi fàng*), Chinese nationalism needed to be reformed as well. Thus, Chinese nationalism transitioned away from the revolutionary ideals of the past and towards aspirations for the future. Consequently, the CCP tied the legitimacy of its rule to its ability to ensure economic growth and national prosperity. The CCP has also framed itself as the "guardian of national pride" and emphasized the past indignities China suffered during "the Century of Humiliation."⁹³ This chapter seeks to understand the historical roots of modern Chinese nationalism and analyze its anti-Japanese components and their implications. Furthermore, this chapter strives to provide a framework of history to convey how anti-Japanese and anti-foreign elements of contemporary Chinese nationalism are involved with the territorial reclamation aspects of the "Chinese Dream."

⁹² Unger, J. (2016). *Chinese nationalism*. London: Routledge. Page ix.

⁹³ Ibid.

Introducing the “Century of Humiliation”

China’s 百年国耻 (“Century of Humiliation” *bǎi nián guó chǐ*) period begins with China’s First Opium War in 1839 and concludes with the Chinese Communist Party’s victory over the Nationalists in the Chinese Civil War in 1949. The “Century of Humiliation” (1839-1949) represents an age when China was subjected to interventionism and imperialism by Western powers and Japan. During this time, China lost much of its international prestige. Furthermore, China’s territorial control was reduced by a third, its imperial system collapsed, and the country was ravaged by rebellions, invasions, and civil war, all of which took millions of lives.⁹⁴ The “Century of Humiliation” is part of a narrative of loss and redemption which legitimizes the CCP and the PRC’s one party system. As the Chinese Communist Party seemingly brought a conclusion to the Chinese Civil War (1949), the CCP ultimately credited itself as the leaders who ended China’s “Century of Humiliation”.

The memory of China’s national humiliation persists with the use of mobilizing phrases, one of the most popular being: 勿忘国耻 (“never forget national humiliation” *wù wàng guó chǐ*). This mobilization language, when used in the present context, not only serves to cultivate nationalism, but also fosters support for the CCP. This is especially evident in instances when the Chinese government frames itself as willing and able to block any attempts by Western powers to subjugate or “humiliate” China again. This particular phrase was popularized in Chinese newspapers and social discourse in 1915, after Japan issued its Twenty-One Demands to China.⁹⁵ The Twenty-One Demands were representative of the broader theme of Imperial

⁹⁴ Kaufman, A. A. (2010). The “Century of Humiliation,” then and now: Chinese perceptions of the international order. *Pacific Focus*, 25(1), 1-33. Page 2.

⁹⁵ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press. Page 64.

Japan's aims to gain control over Chinese territory and limit Chinese sovereignty. Despite this phrase's anti-Japanese origins, it has come to represent all of China's suffering's experienced during the course of the "Century of Humiliation," and necessitates this chapter's discussion of anti-Japanese aspects of Chinese expansionist nationalism. Additionally, by holding onto the memory of China's many national humiliations, especially those at the hands of foreign powers, this narrative bolsters popular anti-foreign sentiment. Furthermore, by "never [forgetting China's] national humiliation" at the hands of foreign powers, it becomes easier for the CCP and the Chinese people to justify belligerent and expansionist actions on the international stage.

Contemporary Chinese nationalism commemorates China's historical weakness, but also celebrates the glories of its imperial past. Nevertheless, the negative image which arises when listing China's faults can be directly attributed to the discourse of China's Century of National Humiliation.⁹⁶ As the "Century of Humiliation" spans a considerable amount of time, especially in regards to the evolution of Chinese nationalism, I will address events which have indirectly and directly shaped different aspects of contemporary Chinese nationalism. The facets of Chinese nationalism which the "Century of Humiliation" contributed to are anti-Japanese, anti-Imperialist, and anti-Western sentiments. This chapter addresses anti-Japanese and anti-Imperialist sentiments, while the subsequent chapter addresses anti-Western and anti-Imperialist sentiments.

⁹⁶ Callahan, W. A. (2004). National insecurities: Humiliation, salvation, and Chinese nationalism. *Alternatives*, 29(2), 199-218. Page 202.

Anti-Japanese Sentiment

I have chosen to highlight anti-Japanese sentiment because I have noticed similar patterns, in both the construction of Chinese national identity and China's response to Japan's claims over disputed island territory, to the South China Sea disputes. This closely mirrors the construction of Chinese identity in regards to the South China Sea and the subsequent response to foreign interference to China's "historic" territorial claims in the region. China's Nine-Dash Line, which serves as a demarcation line for its territorial claims within the South China Sea, is an issue of history. In accordance in the United Nations Convention on the Law and the Sea, "historical rights" (existing or manufactured) are insufficient for granting sovereignty within another state's 12 nautical miles of territorial waters and 200 nautical miles of exclusive economic zone. The South China Sea, and its vast undersea resources, have been deemed necessary for the revitalization of China by Xi Jinping and the CCP, and have been tied to China's imperial past. As China's status in the South China Sea has been increasingly linked to a matter of national pride, I have noticed parallels between China's and Japan's disputed territorial claims over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. China has linked the dispute to historical injustices China endured under the "Century of Humiliation" and has framed the issue as one of national pride. This framework can be further applied to the South China Sea.

The First and Second Sino-Japanese Wars

Through the centuries, northeastern China and its natural resources had been sought after by many, and during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, northeastern China became of particular interest to the Japanese. The railways built throughout the region by the Russians

provided a vast transportation network, and made northeastern China a promising potential resource supplier to fuel Japan's planned expansion throughout Asia. Japan already had a vested economic interest in northeastern China, and the military means to influence the region. Thus, when the opportunity to solidify their control over the region arose, they took it, and Japan's Kwantung Army invaded northeastern China on September 18, 1931. Japanese political interests in northeastern China were tied to its geographical location between Korea and Russia, and its potential to serve as a base to further Japanese influence in Asia and a buffer against Russian/Soviet incursion.

The First-Sino Japanese War from 1894-1895 began over the right to influence Korea, and with their newly modernized military, the Japanese easily triumphed over the Chinese. The war was formally ended with the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ceded Japan the Liaodong Peninsula, in addition to Taiwan and the Penghu Islands. Nevertheless, "the combined powers of Russia, Germany, and France demanded a change to the terms" and "Japan was forced to cede the Liaodong Peninsula to Russia."⁹⁷ Russia later obtained "the right to establish the Chinese Eastern Railway through a secret treaty in 1896 with China," and in 1898, Russia "leased Port Arthur and Dairen at the tip of the Liaodong Peninsula" to construct a southern branch of this very railway.⁹⁸ Russia's activities in northeastern China and its designs on Korea would later come in direct conflict with Japan's own imperialistic plans for establishing a sphere of influence in this region, and culminated in the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War. Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) ended in 1905 with the Treaty of Portsmouth, which returned the Liaodong Peninsula to China, ceded half of Sakhalin Island and control of the South

⁹⁷ Iokibe, M., & Minohara, T. (Eds.). (2017). *The History of US-Japan Relations: From Perry to the Present*. Springer. Page 26.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* Page 27.

Manchuria Railway and its mining concessions to Japan.⁹⁹ After the conclusion of the Portsmouth Peace Conference, Japan was able to “gain recognition over exclusive control of the Korean Peninsula as well as newly acquired rights in southern Manchuria, such as Port Arthur, Dairen, and the Southern Manchurian Railway,” and established the Kwantung Army in 1906 to guard its newly acquired railways.¹⁰⁰ While the surrounding land was Chinese territory, the Kwantung Army was responsible for protecting the railways themselves and the neighboring few feet of land on either sides of the tracks which made up the South Manchurian Railway Zone. Under the Treaty of Portsmouth, Japan was allowed to keep a standing army in northeastern China, which created problems, as the leaders of the Kwantung Army began to act of their own accord.

Over the following two decades, the Kwantung Army had observed a resurgence of Chinese nationalism and increasing anti-Japanese sentiment, and watched as the Chinese Nationalist government to the south, under Chiang Kai-shek, began to strengthen and reunify China. All the while, the Soviet Union to the north continued to gain power. In addition to their position being squeezed and potentially threatened from both the north and south, “operating the railway and the coal mines owned by the railway company posed enormous financial hardship” to Japan.¹⁰¹ In 1931, The Kwantung Army acted “autonomously to provoke a crisis from which they hoped to benefit,” by staging a bombing; however, this incident would later have much broader consequences.¹⁰² On September 18th, 1931 a Japanese Kwantung Army soldier detonated a bomb on a section of train track near Mukden (present day Shenyang). The

⁹⁹ Ibid. Page 31.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Page 33.

¹⁰² Housden, M. (2014). *The League of Nations and the Organization of Peace*. Routledge. Page 99.

Kwantung Army placed the responsibility of the bombing on alleged Chinese dissidents and revolutionaries, and this event which later became known as the Mukden Incident or 九一八事变, served as both the excuse and catalyst for a full-scale Japanese invasion of northeastern China. By the beginning of March 1932, “the Japanese zone of occupation had declared itself an independent state.”¹⁰³ The Japanese army easily invaded northeastern China, and established the puppet state of Manchukuo. Consequently, the Imperial Japanese Army pressed further into China, and on July 7th, 1937 began the Second Sino-Japanese War.

During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) millions of Chinese perished; however, the more precise estimates are still disputed. The legacy of the “War of Resistance against Japan” (抗日战争, *kàng rì zhàn zhēng*) still causes strain to Sino-Japanese relations, especially certain events which occurred during the course of the war. Such events include the Nanjing Massacre, biological warfare research conducted on Chinese civilians at Unit 731, the Japanese use of chemical and bacteriological weapons in warfare, comfort women, etc. The Nanjing Massacre and human experimentation committed at Unit 731 both contribute to modern Chinese nationalism. The Nanjing Massacre remains a point of contention between Japan and China and the total death toll estimates and overall impact are disputed by both nations. After the fall of Shanghai, Imperial Japanese troops marched and fought their way southward to the Chinese capital in Nanjing. On December 13, 1937, Nanjing fell, and in the following six weeks, Japanese soldiers committed mass rape and mass murder against Chinese citizens, and looted the city.¹⁰⁴ The Nanjing Massacre was a coordinated act of brutality against a civilian population, in

¹⁰³ Ibid. Page 100.

¹⁰⁴ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press. Page 57.

which not even babies and children were spared, and soldiers engaged in “killing competitions” to see who could kill more Chinese.¹⁰⁵ Tensions remain over the number of deaths, as the CCP maintains that 300,000 people perished, while most Japanese scholars estimate between 100,000-200,000.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, some Japanese nationalists and revisionist historians suggest that the Nanjing Massacre was fabricated by the Chinese government for political gain, which adds further nationalist fervor and strife to already painful and divisive issue in Sino-Japanese relations.¹⁰⁷

Humiliating History in the National Narrative

In addition to the Chinese educational shift in 1991 to emphasize the “Century of Humiliation,” the Chinese Communist Party has made strides “to construct memory sites and use them for ideological reeducation.”¹⁰⁸ In the words of Peter Sugar, it is important to remember that “there is no corner on the globe where the leaders of...state do not constantly use all the means of communication their disposal to foster nationalism, [as this is] the state-supporting loyalty,” and the narratives constructed around these locations served this purpose for the leaders of the CCP.¹⁰⁹ Incidentally, yearly field trips to these sites have been incorporated into school curriculum and helps to cultivate Chinese patriotism. To further encourage broader population visitation to the sites, the CCP launched a “Red Tourism” campaign. More than 400 million Chinese people traveled to various red tourism locations from 2004-2007, and the Unit 731

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Page 104.

¹⁰⁹ Sugar, P. F. (1981). From Ethnicity to Nationalism and Back Again. *Nationalism: Essays in Honor of Louis L. Snyder*, 67-84. Page 69.

museum is one such location.¹¹⁰ My visit to the Unit 731 Museum actually coincided with a Chinese high school tour group, and some of my most vivid memories of the exhibits are due to how the students' responded to them.

Transitioning to the South China Sea

My desire in addressing the anti-Japanese aspect of modern expansionist Chinese nationalism, is to provide a framework for how the CCP has shaped distant maritime territorial disputes to appear vital to preserving Chinese national pride. The fault lines in Sino-Japanese relations are a consequence of history, but the CCP has weaponized this tragic history in the form of expansionist nationalism. The CCP has shaped the loss of, or inability to regain, territory lost during “the Century of Humiliation” as a historical insult at the hands of those who have already historically wronged China. Nevertheless, as China seeks its national rejuvenation, the Chinese people seek to reassert themselves as the regional hegemon in the Asia-Pacific. However, by centering modern Chinese history on the demoralizations of the “Century of Humiliation,” the Chinese Communist Party must not bring any further “humiliations” to China. Consequently, the CCP has become a prisoner of the nationalism it created, and it cannot fail in defending its claims to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and its militarization endeavors in the South China Sea, because the “national rejuvenation” has been tied to CCP legitimacy.

¹¹⁰ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press. Page 109.

Chapter 4: The Shadows of History and its Echoes Today

As mentioned in previous chapters, in addition to anti-Japanese sentiment, the “Century of Humiliation” has also fostered anti-imperialist, anti-foreign, and anti-Western feelings, all of which are still evident in modern Chinese nationalism. As I have already elaborated on the events which cultivated anti-Japanese sentiment and their impact on Sino-Japanese relations, this chapter seeks to highlight the anti-Imperialist and anti-Western elements of Chinese nationalism and expand upon my established framework. Furthermore, this chapter serves to convey how certain collective traumas sustained during the “Century of Humiliation” at the hands of foreign powers have been incorporated into Chinese national consciousness and are further executed in the South China Sea. Contemporary Chinese nationalism selectively recalls the glories of its past, but also serves to commemorate China's historical weakness. However, by centering modern Chinese history on the demoralizations of “the Century of Humiliation,” the Chinese Communist Party must save face and cannot bring any further “humiliations” upon the Chinese people. As demonstrated by China’s increasingly aggressive posture towards US Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea, and other foreign encroachment towards islands which it views as part of its territorial sovereignty, the CCP is at the will of the nationalism it created, and it cannot fail in its expansionist military endeavors in the South China Sea.

Returning to the “Century of Humiliation”

In the previous chapter, I articulated how specific events and interactions between China and Japan, situated within the broader “Century of Humiliation,” have contributed to Chinese national consciousness. Besides anti-Japanese feelings, these incidents also fostered residual,

anti-imperialist and anti-foreign sentiments which span across cultural memories of the “Century of Humiliation.” Japanese-ness came to represent foreign influence and imperialism within a modern Chinese context. While sharing many overlapping themes and consequences with other events within the “Century of Humiliation,” the interactions with the Japanese did not give rise to anti-Western feelings within China. This chapter seeks to outline the impact of Western dealings with China during the “Century of Humiliation,” as historic “humiliations” and their collective memories, and resulting nationalism serve as a framework for contextualizing the South China Sea.

The First Opium War (1839-1842)

The First Opium War was the result of a long-standing conflict between China and Great Britain over issues of trade and sovereignty.¹¹¹ British demand for Chinese goods continued to grow over the course of the 19th century; however, the Chinese largely remained uninterested in a majority of British exports. Furthermore, China had no desire nor need to reorganize its imperial tribute trade system to adhere to the European model. Eventually, the British discovered a product that was popular on the Chinese market: opium. British traders and smugglers began to take advantage of the preexisting opium market in China, and exponential levels of the drug began to illegally enter China. By 1838, addiction levels had soared and millions were addicted. The opium problem plagued all levels of society, and a significant number of officials and military men had developed the habit. After much debate within the Daoguang Emperor’s court over potential legalization and taxation methods to regulate and reduce the illicit trade, the

¹¹¹ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press. Page 49.

hardline faction ultimately prevailed. Thus, Lin Zexu was given an imperial commission and appointed to halt the illegal opium trade in Guangzhou. Lin quickly arrested Chinese opium dealers and eventually confiscated foreign firms' opium stocks, all of which was ultimately destroyed by being thrown into the sea.¹¹² In response to this, the British government dispatched a military force to China and in the course of the ensuing conflict, the Chinese discovered that Britain had amassed the needed military might to force China to accept its terms.

The waging of the First Opium War thoroughly conveyed the vast degree in which British naval and technological capabilities overshadowed that of the more numerous Qing. Furthermore, the ease in which the British triumphed greatly damaged the prestige of the ruling Qing dynasty. The lasting legacy of the First Opium War can be found in the signing of China's first "unequal treaty," which formally ended the war. In the words of both Sun Yat-sen and Mao Ze-dong, the provisions outlined within the Treaty of Nanjing began China's transformation into a "semi-colonial" country.¹¹³ The Treaty of Nanjing¹¹⁴ abolished the preexisting framework for foreign trade under the Canton and tributary states systems and established Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai as "treaty ports" open for foreign trade. Furthermore, it established static tariff rates for the trade in the treaty ports and allowed for British diplomats to communicate directly with local Chinese customs officials. The treaty also established most-favored nation policies and granted extraterritoriality to foreign nationals. The Qing government was forced to pay indemnities, in total \$21 million as both war reparations and compensation for lost and damaged property. Lastly, Hong Kong was ceded to Great Britain. The Qing

¹¹² Ibid. Page 50.

¹¹³ Kataoka, T., & Tetsuya, K. (1974). *Resistance and Revolution in China: The Communists and the Second United Front* (Vol. 11). University of California Press. Page 5.

¹¹⁴ Mayers, William Frederick (1902). *Treaties Between the Empire of China and Foreign Powers* (4th ed.). Shanghai: North-China Herald. Pages 1-3. All following references made to the Treaty of Nanjing are from this source.

government followed similar patterns when appeasing Western powers over the following decades. Consequently, 割地赔款 (*gē dì péi kuǎn*) “ceding territory and paying indemnities” became the forced primary model for interaction and diplomacy between Western powers and the Qing.¹¹⁵

Modern China has memorialized this culturally traumatic event by building the Opium War Museum at the location where Lin Zexu confiscated the British opium.¹¹⁶ Museums and monuments grant a window into how history is remembered by different groups, and allows for narrative to be inserted into its retelling. While originally built in 1985, before the state sponsored educational shift, the Opium War Museum serves a similar role to other ideological education sites: fostering nationalism. Before entering the museum, visitors are greeted by a sculpture of two hands breaking an opium pipe. The museum offers this explanation for the intriguing design of the monument:

“The big hands are symbolic of the power of Chinese people to resist the foreign invasions and the spirit of the Chinese people cannot be insulted. The broken opium pipe is symbolic of the ultimate failure of the imperialists’ invasion crimes. The sculpture is telling us not to forget this part of history and the Chinese nation cannot be insulted.”¹¹⁷ (Translation courtesy of Zheng Wang.)

I highlight this language, as it offers unique insight into how the remembrance of a historical trauma cultivates nationalism. This rhetoric emphasizes China’s national strength and pride, *past and present*, and accentuates the collective effort to resist foreign influence,

¹¹⁵ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press. Pages 60-61.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Page 50.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

incursion, and imperialism. Furthermore, it stresses the remembrance of this cultural trauma while stating that the present, modern Chinese nation, under the rule of the CCP, will never again suffer the same injustices. The phrase “cannot be insulted” is used twice, referring to both the Chinese people and Chinese nation-state. This language is associated with Chinese anti-foreign, anti-Western, and anti-imperialist protests and condemnations, and was a popular rallying cry of Chinese students protesting the 1999 US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, this language and its sentiment is rooted in the nationalism spawned from the “Century of Humiliation,” as seen with the translation of the Opium War Museum monument explanation.

中国人不可欺，中华不可辱 (*zhōng guó rén bù kě qī, zhōng huá bù kě rǔ*) is usually translated into English as “the Chinese people cannot be bullied, China cannot be insulted.” However, I think this translation is slightly inaccurate, as it diminishes the overall impact of the statement. The grammatical structure of this statement is rooted in Classical Chinese poetry forms, which not only causes it to be difficult to translate, but also demands that those who use and understand this phrase are highly educated. 欺 *qī* can be translated as “to bully,” but also can be translated as: “to deceive,” “to cheat,” and “to take unfair advantage of.” Furthermore, 辱 *rǔ* can be translated as “to insult,” but also can be translated as “to disgrace,” “to dishonor,” or “to bring humiliation to.” These words are all synonyms in Chinese, but in English have differing degrees of severity. Additionally, “cannot” is an acceptable translation for 不可 *bù kě*, but “should not” or “must not” are more suitable. Moreover, in the way in which this rallying phrase

¹¹⁸ Gries, P. H. (2001). Tears of rage: Chinese nationalist reactions to the Belgrade embassy bombing. *The China Journal*, (46), 25-43.

is often incorporated into patriotic statements greatly suggests that China should not be slighted, and that it *will not allow itself to be*.

My translation of 中国人不可欺, 中华不可辱 (*zhōng guó rén bù kě qī, zhōng huá bù kě rǔ*) is: “the Chinese people must not be taken advantage of, China cannot [and will not] be humiliated.” This phrase and its variations receive a spike in usage, both online and in physical protest contexts, when China has been criticized or when Chinese relations with other foreign powers sour. The environment of nationalism in China, and especially in its online community, has greatly reduced the possibility of reproach for Chinese governmental policies, the CCP, and the Chinese commemoration of history. Bilateral and multilateral dealings with other foreign powers that have unfavorable outcomes for China have been construed as “insults” to China, because of the historic shadow of imperialism over these interactions. Foreign disapproval of the CCP’s domestic and foreign policies and any attempted foreign interference with the execution of these policies, especially in regards to Chinese territorial sovereignty, results in swift criticism from Chinese government and ministry spokespeople. In these national condemnations, the spokesperson will they often recount China’s painful memory of history as justification for China’s stance on the issue. Such examples include the ruling of the UNCLOS arbitral tribunal in favor of the Philippines, the United States’ Freedom of Navigation programs in the South China Sea, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute, etc. I will elaborate on this in greater detail in the following chapter, especially in regards to how the climate for policy dissent and Chinese scholarly self-criticism has been restricted on Weibo due to surging expansionist Chinese nationalism.

The Second Opium War (1856-1860)

The initial indemnities, ceded territory, and extraterritoriality provisions granted under the Treaty of Nanjing proved to be insufficient for fulfilling British interests. Since the treaty had not directly addressed the legality of the opium trade, the British were still forced to smuggle the illicit drug into China. Ultimately, the British objective in fighting the Second Opium War was to formally legalize the opium trade in China. Due to various acts of Chinese violence against foreign nationals, who were now seemingly exempt from all Qing laws, the British gained the pretext to launch the Second Opium War.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, with the murder of French missionary, Father Auguste Chapdelaine, France and Britain joined forces in their campaign against the Qing.¹²⁰ Paralleling the First Opium War, the combined naval and technological capabilities of the Anglo-French forces overshadowed that of more numerous Qing, and they were dealt a swift defeat. However, after the Anglo-French expedition marched on Beijing, causing the Emperor to flee, they remained for a month and went about destroying and looting the Old Summer Palace.¹²¹ Many of the looted Chinese relics and zodiac fountain heads remain overseas and in foreign museums, which still causes diplomatic issues today. UNESCO has estimated that 1.67 million Chinese relics are held by 200-plus museums in 47 countries.¹²²

The CCP has allowed the ruins of the Old Summer Palace remain, and little to no effort has been made to rebuild the site. The ruins of the Old Summer Palace stand as a reminder and a symbol of the physical and metaphorical destruction of Chinese culture at the hands of foreign imperialists. The ruins of the Old Summer Palace is popular location to visit in Beijing and

¹¹⁹ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press. Page 52.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Meyer, K. E. (2015). The Chinese want their art back. *The New York Times*.

serves as a location for “patriotic education” and constructing modern Chinese self-concept. Nevertheless, the story of humiliations continues and despite the destruction of the Old Summer Palace, the Qing were made to sign another “unequal treaty.”

As a result of the asymmetric power structure, the Treaty of Tianjin¹²³ also provided provisions to Russia and the United States, who were not even belligerents during the Second Opium War, in addition to Great Britain and France. The Treaty of Tianjin allowed for Russia, France, Great Britain, and the United States to station diplomats in Beijing, opened eleven more “treaty ports” to foreign trade, granted the right of free navigation for foreign vessels on the Yangtze River, and the right of foreigners to freely travel throughout all of China. In addition, more indemnities were to be paid, Kowloon was ceded to the British, and territories in Outer Manchuria were ceded to Russia. Ceding territory, paying indemnities, and surrendering sovereign rights are a recurring theme related to the “unequal treaties.” The legacy of imperialism has shaped much of modern Chinese rhetoric around the measure of the success of China’s “national rejuvenation,” as it has been framed as the government’s ability to regain lost territory and reinforce its territorial claims.

The Boxer Rebellion

The Boxer Rebellion was a reactionary, proto-nationalist, local resistance movement against the rapid expansion of Western influence in China.¹²⁴ From 1898-1901, the “Boxers” operated a violent, anti-imperialist, and anti-Christian movement, which sought to “Support the

¹²³ Mayers, William Frederick (1902). *Treaties Between the Empire of China and Foreign Powers* (4th ed.). Shanghai: North-China Herald. Pages 7-31. All following references made to the Treaty of Tianjin are from this source.

¹²⁴ Wang, Z. (2014). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press. Page 55.

Qing, Destroy the Foreign” (扶清灭洋 *fú qīng miè yáng*).¹²⁵ The “Boxers” converged on Beijing, and violence broke out against foreigners and Chinese Christians.¹²⁶ In response, the Eight-Nation Alliance, in which the United States and Japan were included, dispatched troops to Beijing in August 1900 to suppress the movement. Upon the troop’s arrival, the Empress Dowager and her officials were forced to flee, and once again, China’s capital and imperial palaces were occupied by foreign troops and ransacked.¹²⁷ The Qing dynasty was forced to sign the Boxer Protocol of 1901, which included provisions for China to pay an indemnity of 450 million taels of silver, and also granted the eight powers a “Legation Quarter,” an area of Beijing which functioned as sovereign foreign territory within the capital.¹²⁸ During the “Century of Humiliation,” China was repeatedly invaded by foreign imperialists, forced to appease these foreign powers by paying large indemnities and ceding them sovereign Chinese territory, and forced to adopt Western and European models of social and economic convention. Ultimately, these historic consequences of imperialism are tied to the destruction of China’s glorified imperial past, and the CCP will not allow the Chinese people to forget this.

Conclusion

In writing these chapters recounting Chinese history, it is not my intention to understate the magnitude of the tragic cultural events which occurred during China’s “Century of Humiliation,” as many Chinese claims about the broader motivations of the West and western interference are valid. Rather, these chapters serve to voice my concerns over how modern

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid. Page 63.

criticism of China and the CCP, from the West, have been rejected on grounds of imperialist intent. The legacy of imperialism and foreign intervention China experienced during the “Century of Humiliation” have firmly rooted themselves in the discourse surrounding Chinese nationalism, causing modern Chinese identity to reorient itself towards *resistance*. The language employed by the Chinese Communist Party has historically been steeped in revolutionary rhetoric. However, by wrapping itself within and shielding itself with the traumas in China’s historical narrative, it has supercharged the explosivity of Chinese nationalism. Within the Chinese context, “resistance” towards foreign influence and imperialism has military connotations, and this has increasingly transformed into calls for action against those who oppose and/or hinder China’s rise and “national rejuvenation.” Furthermore, with Xi Jinping’s centralization of power and China’s increasing in-life and online censorship, the presence of calming and tension easing voices have largely been (legally) eliminated from the conversation. Unlike the critical and diffusing online scholarly response to the 2012 Senkaku/Diaoyu islands protests, the nationalist fueled pressure surrounding Chinese military expansion in the South China Sea and broader “the Chinese Dream” has only continued to rise, and may boil over.

Chapter 5: Chinese Cyber Nationalism and the East and South China Seas

The CCP's Regulation of Weibo and Collective Memory

The micro-blogging platform Sina Weibo, or simply Weibo (微博), is one of the most widely used forms of social media in China and currently has 445 million active users.¹²⁹ Sina Weibo was created as a Chinese-based alternative to Western social media websites, and was allowed to remain operational due to its compliance with Chinese censorship laws. Despite this, Sina Weibo remained considerably freer than other Chinese social media websites. This degree of freedom was due to a level of anonymity afforded to its users. The decreased level of user accountability created an online space where Weibo users could contest censorship, engage in free speech, and even criticize the government to an extent. Nevertheless, Chinese cyberspace censorship over its population has improved over the years and has been better adapted to fit and monitor the micro-blogging sphere. Furthermore, with the Chinese government's continued pressure of Sina to universally enforce CAC internet regulations, Weibo no longer affords the limited freedoms of its early "golden years."

The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) was founded in 2014 and is linked with patterns of increased censorship and ever decreasing civil liberties seen under the leadership of Xi Jinping's administration. The CAC has ushered in sweeping changes to China's digital sphere; with some of the most stringent regulations beginning to take effect in and after 2017. As of June, 2017, the CAC has required online news broadcasters to be licensed by the Chinese government to publish news on the internet and on social media platforms.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the

¹²⁹ Bylund, A. (2018, November 29). Weibo Added 15 Million Users in Q3. *The Motley Fool*.

¹³⁰ Xinhua. (2017, May 3). China issues regulation on online news service. *Xinhua Net*.

CAC detailed that the types of media which require licenses for the distribution of news included: “websites, applications, forums, blogs, microblogs, public accounts, instant messaging tools, and internet broadcasts.”¹³¹ This enhances the government’s control of limiting public engagement and functions to construct more favorable political narratives. Also, CAC regulations released on August 25, 2017 required that Chinese social media users had to verify their accounts with their real names, effective October 1, 2017.¹³² These measures were passed just ahead of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. During China’s 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping began his second term as the leader of China and cemented his legacy by having his official Thought enshrined into the Party’s Constitution, and took steps to centralize his power and role in policymaking decisions.¹³³ The new CAC regulations prompted Weibo to demand that its users verify their accounts with their real identities by September 15, 2017.¹³⁴ These regulations greatly diminish the dissemination of public comments and criticisms of the government, as well as the role of citizen journalism, within an increasingly limited environment.

Before the increased censorship of social media platforms, Sina Weibo provided a space where memories and understandings of historic events could be debated and the official government narrative could be challenged by users. Previously, debates on history were limited to scholars or small groups of interested and passionate individuals. However, after the introduction of social media platforms which allowed for broad audience participation, both the

¹³¹ Li, E. (2018, July 20). China updates internet regulations to tighten control over online news. *The South China Morning Post*.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Fleischmann, A. (2017, November 10). Xi on the Rise: Outcomes from the 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress. *Forbes*.

¹³⁴ Gao, C. (2017, September 12). Weibo Requires All Users to Register With Real Names by Mid-September. *The Diplomat*.

scholarly and informal debates on the CCP's recount of history gained a much wider visibility. Aided by the ease of information dissemination through Weibo, "the monolithic official version of the past, the one told in history textbooks, [began] to face questions."¹³⁵ However, just as the netizens and scholars before them, Chinese authorities also began to use social media platforms to engage with historical accounts, and greatly promoted the CCP's desired historical narrative. This caused some of the contested and extreme personal and historical narratives discussed on Weibo to be absorbed "into the mainstream to [legitimize] narratives of nationalism."¹³⁶ Furthermore, after increased government engagement, attempts made to challenge the official narrative "also serve[d] to reinforce a sense of nationalism," as they were portrayed as unpatriotic acts and later censored.¹³⁷

Weibo is an events oriented platform, and functions as a place where past memories are preserved and remain present in the consciousness of users. These online memories can be categorized, recalled, and engaged with by the use of key term searches and hashtags. When engaging with Weibo posts about memories and broader Chinese historical narrative, the presence of "mobilizing mnemonic activities" greatly increases.¹³⁸ These activities usually appear in the form of words related to the preservation of memory, such as "remember," "commemorate," and "do not forget." Many Chinese naming conventions for historical events, especially those tied to war, often use dates and the word "incident" (事变 *shì biàn*) rather than list the location and the event that occurred there. Examples of such "incidents" include: the Mukden Incident (九一八事变 "September 18 Incident"), the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (七七

¹³⁵ Le Han, E. (2016). *Micro-blogging memories: Weibo and collective remembering in contemporary China*. Springer. Page 91.

¹³⁶ Ibid. Page 112.

¹³⁷ Ibid. Page 90.

¹³⁸ Ibid. Page 10.

事变 “July 7 Incident”), the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade (五八事变 “May 7 Incident”), etc. This naming convention firmly grounds these events in an *annual* temporal space, which promotes commemoration, similar to how the September 11th attacks are also simply referred to as 9/11 in the United States.

National Heroes, Anniversaries, and Celebrations of Nationalism

On anniversaries of important dates in modern Chinese history, verified news sources, scholars, and ordinary citizen users memorialize the events and those impacted through their Weibo posts. This engagement with the past greatly increases the prevalence of mobilizing mnemonic activities, and can even cause the topic to trend on all of Weibo. Official and verified Chinese media organizations which have a presence on Weibo have “focused on promoting nationalism during the anniversary commemoration,” and this practice has been amplified after the introduction of the online media publication licensing requirement enacted in 2017.¹³⁹ Figure 1 shows an example of this practice in the form of a Weibo post from *China Youth Daily* with additional civilian user commentary. *China Youth Daily* is the official newspaper for the Communist Youth League of China, and the CYLC is a youth movement run by the CCP. In this post it commemorates the anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre with graphic images of Chinese victims of the massacre and uses nationalistic, mobilizing language.

¹³⁹ Le Han, E. (2016). *Micro-blogging memories: Weibo and collective remembering in contemporary China*. Springer. Page 102.

Translation:

Small Black Bench: “The reason why Chinese people are Chinese is because everyone in this country bears such a history. The history of weakness cannot be forgotten; the shame of humiliating the country must not be forgotten; the blood of [our] ancestors, [we] dare not forget!”

China Youth Daily: “[Irrefutable evidence! [We] cannot forget! [We] must not forget! [We] dare not forget!] Today is the fifth Nanjing Massacre Memorial Day, the country’s first local legislation for national memorial service the “Nanjing National Memorial Ceremony Protection Regulations” also came into force today. There are fewer than 100 survivors of the Nanjing Massacre on the books, witnesses will grow old, but history cannot be forgotten! Because some people have forgotten, so we must remember: today, please observe a moment of silence in tribute of the compatriot victims!”



小黑的板凳 🍌

中国人之所以是中国人，就是因为这个国家的每个人都背负着这样的历史。羸弱之史，不能忘；辱国之耻，不可忘；先辈之血，不敢忘！

@中国青年报 ✓

【🔥 铁证如山！不能忘，不可忘，不敢忘！】今天是第五个南京大屠杀死难者国家公祭日，全国首部国家公祭地方立法——《南京市国家公祭保障条例》也于今日起施行。在册的南京大屠杀幸存者已不足百位，证人都会老去，但是历史不能忘记！因为有些人忘记了，所以我们要记得：今天，请向遇难同胞默哀！[展开全文](#) ✓



2018年12月13日 08:08 来自 微博 weibo.com

转发 44778 | 评论 20175 | 129114

2018年12月13日 12:53 来自 荣耀7X 全面屏手机

Figure 3: 12/3/2018 Weibo post from China Youth Daily commemorating the Nanjing Massacre, with additional user reposting and comments

Another such example of the government's effort to cultivate Chinese nationalism is through the memorialization of past and the construction of new "national heroes" 民族英雄 (*mín zú yīng xióng*). Under the guidance of Xi Jinping and his administration, China's legislature passed resolutions to create multiple new national observances in 2014: "Victory Day," "Nanjing Memorial Day," and "Martyrs' Day." September 3 was designated "Victory Day of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression," December 13 was designated a National Memorial Day to commemorate the Nanjing Massacre, and September 30 was later designated as "Martyrs' Day." Victory Day and the Nanjing Memorial Day both serve to institutionalize anti-Japanese sentiment, promote Chinese nationalism, and ensure loyalty to the Party by celebrating the CCP's role in defeating Imperial Japan.¹⁴⁰ Martyrs' Day falls the day before the National Day of the PRC, which commemorates the founding of the PRC. Martyrs' Day is similar to the two new previously mentioned national observances, but is much broader in its scope as it serves to honor all "who died serving the nation, beginning with the First Opium War in 1840... [and includes] Kuomintang soldiers who died during the Second Sino-Japanese War."¹⁴¹ To mark these national remembrance days, President Xi Jinping and other state leaders annually attend a high-profile ceremony in Tiananmen Square, schools are ordered to organize commemorative events to "guide the young students to follow socialist core values," and the Ministry of Civil Affairs announces the names of those who are honored as martyrs.¹⁴² These national observances are designed to encourage nationalistic feelings and celebrate all those who died resisting foreign invaders during the "Century of Humiliation."

¹⁴⁰ Tiezzi, S. (2014, September 04). China's 'Victory Day' Celebration. *The Diplomat*.

¹⁴¹ Chen, A. (2014, September 30). First national Martyrs' Day remembers those who sacrificed for China. *South China Morning Post*.

¹⁴² Ibid.

The CCP has taken the institutionalization of these holidays and nationalism a step further, and in 2018 the CCP began issuing laws and regulations regarding their observance. “The Nanjing National Memorial Ceremony Protection Regulations” (mentioned in Figure 1) introduced an obligatory city-wide “minute of silence during the memorial ceremony” and provided provisions for prosecuting those who engage “in speeches that distort or deny the facts of the Nanjing Massacre.”¹⁴³ These regulations increase government control over the collective memory and commemoration of the event and greatly impacts the nationalistic narrative surrounding the Nanjing Massacre. Additionally, the “Heroes and Martyrs Protection Act” threatens unnamed “administrative penalties” or even “criminal sanctions” against those who “damage memorials, [and/or] insult or slander heroes and martyrs.”¹⁴⁴ These laws effectively make it illegal to even *suggest* that the CCP’s narrative of the individuals it memorializes and history surrounding them may not be founded in complete truth. Furthermore, the passage of these laws were motivated by the increase in “people in China [who] have slandered or derogated heroes and martyrs via the Internet, magazines and other media in the name of ‘academic freedom,’ ‘restoring history,’ or ‘probing into details.’”¹⁴⁵ By attempting to quell all forms of online dissent, this thoroughly conveys the lengths to which Xi Jinping and the CCP are willing to go to safeguard the legitimacy of the Party and promote expansionist Chinese nationalism.

Heroic stories of past sacrifice and suffering undertaken by martyrs and individuals for the good of the country, especially in regard to the struggle for national independence and

¹⁴³ Xinhua. (2018, December, 13). Regulation on supporting memorial ceremony for Nanjing Massacre victims take effect. *Xinhua News Agency*.

¹⁴⁴ Xinhua. (2017, December 29). Draft law protecting heroes, martyrs released for public opinion. *Xinhua News Agency*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

endeavors against foreign aggression, “fit into the Chinese government’s nationalism project” and furthers its agenda.¹⁴⁶ These posts often take the form of calls to “remember” and “never forget” fallen national heroes as well as the millions of Chinese who died during the various wars encompassed by the “Century of Humiliation.” The government has been promoting Chinese military exploits and the accomplishments of PLA service members through social media. This has further fueled expansionist nationalism and Chinese expansionist feelings involving disputed territory. However, sometimes these posts, especially from more nationalistic users, can make a call for indirect or direct action in the present. Usually, these patriotic calls to action is a preventative measure to ensure that China is not “humiliated” again at the hands of foreign powers. Nevertheless, in some of the most extreme examples, users have suggested and even called for PLA military action against nations who have “insulted China.”

The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute

In 2012, Shintaro Ishihara, the right-wing governor of Tokyo, announced his decision to purchase the privately-owned Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea on behalf of the local Japanese government, which sparked large-scale public protests across China. This group of eight small uninhabited islands and rocks located in the East China Sea are contested by three nations: China, Japan, and Taiwan. The Chinese and Taiwanese refer to the islands as the *Diaoyu* and both consider themselves to be their rightful owners. The Japanese refer to the islands as the *Senkaku* and have purchased three of the islands. Despite their small and uninhabited nature, these islands are at the forefront of one the most explosive national security conflicts in the Asia-

¹⁴⁶ Le Han, E. (2016). *Micro-blogging memories: Weibo and collective remembering in contemporary China*. Springer. Page 92.

Pacific region. The disputed territory not only lies near key shipping lanes and rich fishing grounds, but is also believed to contain considerable undersea oil and gas reserves, which has greatly increased the geopolitical consequences regarding the islands' territorial sovereignty and maritime boundaries. Consequently, when Japan took steps to formally claim the islands, many Chinese people and Chinese government officials reacted severely.

In response to Japan's plan to buy and nationalize the Diaoyu Islands, the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Liu Weimin stated that "the Diaoyu Island and its affiliated islands have been China's inherent territory since ancient times, for which China has indisputable historical and jurisprudential evidence... [and that] the Chinese Government will continue to take necessary measures to resolutely safeguard its sovereignty over the Diaoyu Island and its affiliated islands."¹⁴⁷ China's alleged proof of "indisputable historical" evidence dating back to ancient times of their claims of territorial sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands mirrors their "historical claims" or "historical rights" over other disputed islands in the South China Sea. Paralleling the historical arguments which the Chinese have attempted to use to contest several groups of islands in the South China Sea, these claims have a precedent of failing as they fall within a framework of international law which favors geography over history. The arguments in support for China's "historic rights" over the South China Sea are based in China's imperial history as the regional hegemon of the Asia-Pacific. Modern Chinese leaders have extended Chinese maritime territory to include that of nearly every former vassal state which offered tribute to the Chinese Emperor under the tributary state system. These leaders have also attempted to use China's former position in the region as justification for its claims within the

¹⁴⁷ Foreign Ministry of China. (2012, July 08). *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin's Remarks on the Japanese Government's Plan to "Buy" the Diaoyu Islands* [Press release].

framework of UNCLOS. However, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are unique, for while subject to UNCLOS regulations, they are also subject to acquisition, which includes issues of treaties and occupation. The issue of acquisition is vital to China's claim over the Diaoyu Islands as it is rooted in interactions between Japan and China during the "Century of Humiliation." For the purpose of this thesis, this serves to provide evidence for how the "Century of Humiliation," and its nationalism, have been used to justify Chinese territorial expansion.

After China lost the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki, it signified Imperial Japan's first successful endeavor with imperialism and the first use of "an unequal treaty" by an East Asian country against another. The loss of the war and the Treaty of Shimonoseki caused China to suffer many "humiliations," and fostered the beginnings of a national reckoning within China. The provision of the Treaty of Shimonoseki which pertains to the modern territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands was the ceding of Taiwan to Japan. Article 2 (b) of the Treaty of Shimonoseki states that China must cede "the island of Formosa [Taiwan], together with all islands appertaining or belonging to the said island of Formosa" to Japan.¹⁴⁸ The Treaty of Shimonoseki makes no direct mention of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, but China maintains that these islands were considered to be a part of Taiwan by the Qing court.¹⁴⁹ Conversely, Japan maintains that the reason the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands were not directly mentioned in the Treaty of Shimonoseki was that the Senkaku Islands were incorporated into Japan's territory by exercising its rights of "acquisition through occupation" based on the legal principle of *terra nullius*, three months prior to the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki.¹⁵⁰ Intriguingly, the Cairo Declaration stated that "all the territories Japan

¹⁴⁸ Dan, L. (2018, August 08). Diaoyu Islands Dispute: A Chinese Perspective. *The Diplomat*.

¹⁴⁹ The People's Republic of China's State Council Information Office, *Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China*, September 2012.

¹⁵⁰ Ikeda, T. (2013, November 26). Getting Senkaku History Right. *The Diplomat*.

has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa [Taiwan] and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China. Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed."¹⁵¹ Therefore, the CCP government asserts that as the Cairo Declaration was carried out by the Potsdam Declaration and the Japanese Instrument of Surrender, "the Diaoyu Dao, as affiliated islands of Taiwan, should be returned, together with Taiwan, to China."¹⁵² However, the Cairo Declaration, Potsdam Declaration, and Japanese Instrument of Surrender were all negotiated with Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China and not the People's Republic of China, which has allowed for ambiguity regarding territorial sovereignty. The complexities and ramifications of the Republic of China's KMT solely representing all Chinese interests in designing the Western-based post-WWII World Order are still felt today, and their echoes can also be heard in the South China Sea.

The 2012 China Anti-Japanese Demonstrations and Weibo's Role

As mentioned in the previous section, the April 2012 plan announced by Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara to purchase the privately-owned Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, on behalf of the local Japanese government, sparked large-scale public protests across China. In the months following the announcement, Sino-Japanese relations were strained, and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested vehemently as the Japanese began to take measures to purchase several islands. However, on August 15, 2012, the anniversary of the announcement of Imperial Japan's surrender, tensions reached a tipping point. Activists from Hong Kong sailed to and landed on one of the disputed islands, but were stopped and detained by Japanese

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

authorities.¹⁵³ The detained activists were deported two days later; nevertheless, the act of detaining the activists sparked the first wave of anti-Japanese demonstrations across China, in which Weibo users played a fundamental role.

Before increased Weibo censorship, Chinese netizens used the social media platform as a tool to quickly mobilize anti-Japanese sentiment. Through Weibo posts, Chinese users successfully organized boycotts of Japanese goods and mass street demonstrations in response to the proposed Japanese purchase of the disputed territory. At this point, the Chinese government was supportive of the Weibo community which quickly condemned the Japanese government's actions. The CCP leaders continued to support the social media campaigns, as it was in the government's interest and functioned to release broader public tension surrounding domestic issues which the population had been focused on before this convenient diversion. However, when some of the demonstrations turned violent and/or when the protestors condemned unrelated policies and actions taken by the Chinese government, this caused local authorities to intervene. Nevertheless, protests continued sporadically for nearly a month. As the September anniversary of the Mukden Incident (九一八事件 *Jiǔ yī bā shì biàn*) approached, Weibo was used by the CCP to mobilize the masses in a second wave of anti-Japanese protests in many regions in the country. The anniversary of the Japanese staged bombing of railroad tracks near modern day Shenyang, which led to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, is remembered and written by its date "the 9/18 incident," which reinforces the magnitude of the event and its impact on the nation's consciousness. As September 18th neared, protests began to be reined in by the authorities in many metropolitan areas including Xi'an and Shanghai. The restrictions included

¹⁵³ Yuan, E. (2012, August 17). Japan deporting Chinese held over island landing. *CNN*.

cracking down on the use social media to organize protests, which was already illegal, but quickly began being enforced after the government's current agenda had been achieved.

There is a growing body of literature surrounding the escalatory role of propaganda in the 2012 China Anti-Japanese Demonstrations, but also on Chinese individuals who criticized the movement and served as de-escalatory and "rational" voices on Weibo. Chinese cyber nationalism, paired with anti-Japanese sentiment, fueled the movement, but some sources claim that the CCP had a more direct role rather than simply just sanctioning the protests. Richard McGregor noted "baroque, staged qualities" in the movement and language used during the protests, which he linked to the upcoming 18th National Party Congress.¹⁵⁴ As this important event was only two months away, the 2012 Anti-Japanese Demonstrations "required extra vigilance to ensure the demonstrations [did not] morph into anger at grievances closer to home."¹⁵⁵ In addition to Chinese government officials' indirect and direct involvement with both inciting and breaking up the protests, online individuals also aided in reducing the nationalistic fervor by commenting on the violence exhibited by some protestors and comparing it to other events in Chinese history.

Pre-recent-censorship Weibo functioned as a place where past memories and history were discussed, especially those of a controversial nature, and "the most frequently mentioned historical event [was] the Cultural Revolution," where it was often contrasted with events transpiring in the present context.¹⁵⁶ Many Weibo users linked the "chaotic situation [of the 2012 Anti-Japanese Demonstrations] to the Cultural Revolution," and it was seen as particularly

¹⁵⁴ McGregor, R. (2018). *Asia's Reckoning: China, Japan, and the Fate of US Power in the Pacific Century*. Penguin Books. Page 227.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. Page 228.

¹⁵⁶ Le Han, E. (2016). *Micro-blogging memories: Weibo and collective remembering in contemporary China*. Springer. Pages 94-95.

problematic among more liberal-leaning individuals and groups.¹⁵⁷ As a result of this connection, “many of the ‘patriotic’ activities—such as smashing Japanese cars, boycotting Japanese goods, and even beating up Japanese citizens—were labeled ‘irrational’ on Weibo.”¹⁵⁸ These criticisms and historical parallels were “mostly contributed by media professionals... [who noted the pattern of] extremely violent and irrational forms of nationalist expression.”¹⁵⁹ Open public discussion and condemnations of the Cultural Revolution “is quite limited, not to mention activities such as public commemoration,” which further conveys the impact, and risk, of these reproachful and de-escalatory statements made by scholars, journalists, and individuals.¹⁶⁰

Weibo has consistently served as a mobilization tool, but before its censorship it also served as a tool to mitigate excess nationalistic tendencies and promoted alternative views rather than those sanctioned by the CCP. However, with the new censorship laws, citizen journalism became challenging and non-government approved narratives are much less accessible. The Chinese government learned that Weibo was a useful mobilization asset, but could be detrimental to its agenda when its users were not reined in. Consequently, it designed ways to utilize Weibo to its own benefit, rather than risk possible detrimental mobilization against CCP interests. Subsequently, within its post-censorship context, Weibo is largely no longer able to serve as “a warning sign to the public of the possibility of...chaos in society [as a result of violent forms of nationalism].”¹⁶¹ Under the administration of Xi Jinping, censorship has greatly increased since his first announcement of the “Chinese Dream” and Xi has amassed and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. Page 95.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Le Han, E. (2016). *Micro-blogging memories: Weibo and collective remembering in contemporary China*. Springer. Page 96.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Page 94.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. Page 96.

centralized power by reducing the number of his political rivals. The online echo-chamber of the escalation of nationalism seen on Weibo since 2017 mirrors the on the ground reality of Xi's administration. Since Xi has surrounded himself with those who either agree with his expansionist agenda or those who are not willing to risk the consequences of disagreeing with it, the cycle of sustained escalation continues and is particularly visible in the South China Sea.

The South China Sea within an Anti-Western Framework

Evidence of the CCP's process of expansionist nationalism cultivation and fostering public support for the PLA can be plainly observed on Weibo. Furthermore, since the CCP has strengthened its grip on the (legal) distribution of news on Weibo and implemented various regulations limiting dissent and access to alternative historic narratives, excessive Chinese nationalistic tendencies and militaristic calls to action cannot be mitigated by online de-escalatory voices. The Chinese government's problem with justifying its territorial expansion and militarization of the South China Sea is that UNCLOS, which the People's Republic of China is a party to, regulates maritime entitlements based on *geography* and not on historical rights, sovereignty, or nationalism. After ruling in favor of The Philippines within the arbitration case brought before the Tribunal regarding China's Nine-Dash Line, China rejected the ruling. Furthermore, Xi Jinping stated that China's "territorial sovereignty and marine rights" would not be affected by the ruling.¹⁶² Even though China's contested claims to the Paracel Islands, the Spratly Islands, Scarborough Shoal, the Pratas Islands, *Macclesfield Bank*, etc. have been refuted under The Hague's international maritime law, decades of "patriotic education" have ensured

¹⁶² Jinping, X. (2015). *Forging a Strong Partnership to Enhance Prosperity on Asia*. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. From Xi's speech at the National University of Singapore, November 7, 2015.

that a majority of the Chinese population still view Chinese territory as extending all the way through the southernmost reaches of the South China Sea to James Shoal, located only 52 miles off the Malaysian coast.¹⁶³

The CCP government has control over educational curriculum, information distribution, and national maps, which promotes and reinforces their agenda and cultivates nationalism. As China failed to justify its South China Sea territorial claims and land reclamation process to the international community, it has returned its focus to its own people. Through decades of patriotic education, “the nine-dash line has been painted in the hearts and minds of the Chinese” and expansionist nationalism has surged.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, as China’s “national rejuvenation” has been linked with reclaiming Chinese territory lost to foreign powers, the CCP has begun to manufacture and/or recall old enemies into the present context. The Senkaku Islands provide a new issue in which a pre-existing anti-Japanese sentiment, anti-foreign sentiment and expansionist nationalism can coalesce around. However, the South China Sea and its many disputed islands provide many South and East Asian adversaries with fewer historical “insults” to China, necessitating that this territorial dispute be reframed as an anti-Western and anti-American issue to further foster expansionist nationalism. It is in the CCP’s interest to galvanize public support around military expansion within the South China Sea, but that requires cultivating combative feelings against its neighboring nations and the West. Indonesia, Vietnam, and The Philippines all have had some form of modern anti-Chinese demonstrations, such as riots and protests. These nations have also objected to Chinese military expansion and island building within the South China Sea, and have been supported by the United States. However,

¹⁶³ Wang, Z. (2014, August 26). The Nine-Dashed Line: 'Engraved in Our Hearts'. *The Diplomat*.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

these disputed islands, reefs, and shoals largely were never taken from China, but due to Imperial China's tributary state system, China claims them based on "historic rights." The South China Sea territorial disputes are representative of a clash between the historic records of dynastic China and the legal principles imported with the Westphalian system and broader international (Western) rules-based order. Moreover, due to the patriotic education campaign and preexisting suspicions of the United States lingering from "the Century of Humiliation," anti-American and anti-Western feelings have proved to be quite useful for generating the rudimentary level of expansionist nationalism required to implement the CCP's grand strategy of replacing the United States' leadership and dominance in the Asia-Pacific.

The legacy of imperialism and foreign invasions still affect Chinese thinking today, and the lessons China learned during the "Century of Humiliation" are currently being applied in the South China Sea. Over the many centuries of imperial Chinese dynastic rule, "China created buffers against hostile neighbors by taking territory... [but] it failed to construct southern and eastern maritime defenses to protect its coastline from foreign invasion by sea."¹⁶⁵ As a result, its shores were easily susceptible to incursions made by Western troops during the "Century of Humiliation." By militarizing the islands in the South China Sea region, China is attempting to correct its historical weakness, which was exposed many times during the "Century of Humiliation," and allow for the country to be able to protect itself from foreign influence and invasion. Furthermore, China believes that the Asia-Pacific falls under its rightful area of regional influence. Therefore, Chinese government leaders reacted with haste to ensure the longevity of China's strategic positions within the region when the United States announced in

¹⁶⁵ Hawksley, H. (2018). *Asian Waters: The Struggle Over the South China Sea and the Strategy of Chinese Expansion*. New York, NY: The Overlook Press. Page 35.

2011 that it would shift much of its military focus from the Middle East to the Pacific. This US policy became known as the Pivot to Asia, but “the Pivot announcement was a public relations disaster,” and sparked Chinese historical anxieties regarding its position as the regional hegemon.¹⁶⁶ Beijing interpreted the Pivot to Asia as the US’s “aim to contain China as it once had the Soviet Union,”¹⁶⁷ or at the very least, as an attempt to “stop China’s rise and expansion.”¹⁶⁸ Based on China’s historical experiences in dealing with Western foreign powers, these fears were well founded. Consequently, “in 2012 it deployed engineers to reclaim land [in various island chains throughout the South China Sea] and build military bases” and China has done so with striking success.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, satellite images from 2016 showed that some of these Chinese military bases had “evidence of [anti-ship cruise and surface-to-air] missiles deployed there,” and considering the long-distance nature of these weapons, it suggests that China has shifted from a defensive to an aggressive posture in the South China Sea.¹⁷⁰

A Fortunate Coincidence

The Chinese military has seen a significant funding increase since President Xi Jinping announced the “Chinese Dream,” particularly the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). This navy build up projects both power and national pride, as the “Chinese Dream” has become irrevocably linked to the Chinese military. Currently, China only possesses one aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, but is constructing more. The *Liaoning* functions primarily as a “training ship for

¹⁶⁶ Hawksley, H. (2018). *Asian Waters: The Struggle Over the South China Sea and the Strategy of Chinese Expansion*. New York, NY: The Overlook Press. Page 70.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. Page 19.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. Page 69.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. Page 18.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Page 55.

aircraft carrier operations,” but is still a prominent symbol of Chinese expansionist military power.¹⁷¹ Aircraft carriers are not fundamentally necessary for defending a nation’s own shores, as this can be accomplished by smaller crafts, land-based planes, and missiles.¹⁷² Aircraft carriers create a transportable airbase, and therefore, allow the navy to be able to stage aircraft operations without the support of local bases. Considering China’s land reclamation and military construction activities in the South China Sea, an aircraft carrier supported by these strategically placed bases allows China to protect and further expand its expansionist aims. Aircraft carriers “are designed to project power far from a country’s own coasts... [and with it] China could dominate the South China Sea region.”¹⁷³ Additionally, when at sea, “the Chinese government had declared a forty-five kilometer ‘safety zone’ around the Liaoning” and nothing can enter the area “without permission from the Liaoning’s commander.”¹⁷⁴ Attempting to assert sovereignty over such a wide swath of sea is in violation “of international maritime law and the freedom of the seas,” and is similar to the Chinese attempt to claim a majority of the South China Sea.¹⁷⁵ China is utilizing its aircraft carrier to project its military power by both using it as a domestic and international symbol, one of unchallengeable military authority. Consequently, the *Liaoning* has served as a tool for increasing Chinese expansionist nationalism, as the PLAN bolsters its military presence in the South China Sea.

On November 25, 2012, the Chinese military announced that *Shenyang J-15s* had made five successful landings on the *Liaoning*’s deck using an arresting cable.¹⁷⁶ Being able to

¹⁷¹ Fabey, M. (2017). *Crashback: The Power Clash Between the US and China in the Pacific*. Simon and Schuster. Page 96.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. Page 17.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Lei, Z. (2012, November 26). Jets land on China's 1st aircraft carrier. *China Daily*.

perform this maneuver successfully is a necessary precondition to being able to conduct maritime air operations in the South China Sea, and Chinese state media enthusiastically reported and disseminated the success with a video of the launchings and landings. The video had a “viral result” and within hours of the initial broadcast, Chinese social media users were taking and posting photos of themselves emulating the iconic hand gesture used by flight deck officers to release the J-15s.¹⁷⁷ This Chinese staged photo fad and meme came to be known as “Aircraft Carrier Style” (航母-style *háng mǔ*-style). The meme involved extending one’s right hand while kneeling the left knee and bending the right leg. It emulates the Shooter’s pose, a military gesture used by navy personnel to signal the release of fighter jets. The name of the meme is also a parody of the viral song and music video “Gangnam Style” which was quite popular at the time, as the Chinese word for aircraft carrier “*háng mǔ*” sounds similar to “Gangnam.” The “Aircraft Carrier Style” photo postings became so prolific that Weibo made an events page solely for engagement with the photo fad. While Internet memes are often humorous, as they involve parody, it is impossible to know the intention behind each user’s participation. However, this example can provide broader implications about the scale of Weibo and Chinese social media engagement with the successes of the *Liaoning*, and the potential for fostering expansionist nationalism.

Immediately after the successful landing missions of the *Shenyang J-15s* on the carrier, Luo Yang, the scientist who had designed the jet, suffered cardiac arrest, but his death was largely overshadowed by the birth of the new meme. Luo Yang spent eight days on the carrier and worked day and night, and it is believed that he died from overwork since he “was under

¹⁷⁷ Fung, B. (2012, November 28). 'Shooter' Is the New Eastwooding: China's Aircraft Carrier Gets a Meme. *The Atlantic*.

severe mental pressure to achieve the landing feat” and did not seek medical attention when he was initially feeling unwell.¹⁷⁸ Luo Yang was posthumously honored by The Ministry of Civil Affairs with the title of “martyr” and memorialized.¹⁷⁹ “Martyr” is one of the most prestigious titles awarded by the Chinese government to those “who have died in protecting national security, fighting crime, undertaking diplomatic missions or carrying out rescue work and weapons and equipment tests.”¹⁸⁰ National martyrs are usually collectively honored on Martyr’s Day, but Luo Yang’s case is unique, as he is memorialized annually by Chinese State sponsored media sources on Weibo on the anniversary of his sudden passing.

I decided to title this subsection “The Fortunate Coincidence” for two reasons. The first being that a happy coincidence led me to find a bulk of my evidence for this thesis, and the second being that the coincidence of Luo Yang’s death and the successful J-15 launchings have been utilized by Chinese state sponsored media and other CCP-approved media sources to foster expansionist nationalist feelings in the South China Sea. Out of curiosity I happened to search “航母-style” on Weibo on the anniversary of the first successful launchings of the J-15s off the *Liaoning*, and stumbled upon the “还记得航母 style 吗?” (“[Do you] still remember Aircraft Carrier Style?” *Hái jì dé hang mǔ style ma?*) meme tag on Weibo. I observed Chinese media sources utilizing the anniversary of the death of Luo Yang, now a highly symbolic national martyr, to garner nationalistic feelings around Chinese military and air powers in the South China Sea. Various media sources all utilized the same skeleton of the post, and reposted it on Weibo with only slight variations. State sponsored and state approved media sources co-opted a neutral and parodic meme, to increase social media engagement with their “martyr,” to foster

¹⁷⁸ Dasgupta, S. (2012, November 27). Jet designer dies after carrier glory. *The Times of India*.

¹⁷⁹ Xinhua. (2012, November 30). China bestows posthumous honors on jet director. *China Daily*.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

nationalistic feelings and galvanize public support over Chinese military endeavors in the South China Sea. This common theme of institutionalized anniversary creation, honoring national heroes and martyrs, and promoting Chinese military power in the South China Sea through mobilizing language can be seen from years of Weibo posts dating back to 2015. Furthermore, to accurately convey the expansionist nationalism cultivation effort, I traced Weibo posts from 2015-2018 regarding Luo Yang, and discovered that with each passing year, the language and rhetoric used becomes increasingly more expansionist and nationalistic.

Translation:

First News: “(Did you forget him today? Cherish the memory of Luo Yang.) From @人民网, do you still remember Aircraft Carrier Style? In November of that year, J-15s successfully landed on the aircraft carrier platform of the *Liaoning* ship. On the same day, Luo Yang, the general director of development for the J-15, fell. On November 25, 2012, China Aviation Industry Group Chairman Luo Yang, suddenly developed an acute myocardial infraction while on the aircraft carrier, and died after receiving emergency medical treatment, he was 51. Today is the #third anniversary of Luo Yang’s death#, pay tribute to the backbone of the nation!”



Figure 4: 11/25/2015 Weibo post from First News memorializing Luo Yang

Translation:

Henan Normal University Research Institute: “#Research Institute Headlines# [Do you] still remember Aircraft Carrier Style? Four years ago today, China’s first aircraft carrier, the “Liaoning Ship,” successfully launched and landed J-15 carrier-based aircrafts. Once the carrier-based aircraft took off and the image was broadcast, the [flight deck] commander’s handsome and powerful take-off signal subsequently became popular. However, on the same day, Luo Yang, the general director of development, suddenly developed an acute myocardial infraction and fell, and died at the age of 51. He traded his life in exchange for the perfect launch of the fighter! Today, relive this gesture that made the Chinese people proud and remember to cherish the memory of the backbone of the nation!”



河南师范大学学研会 ✓

#学研头条#还记得航母style吗? 4年前的今天, 我国首艘航母“辽宁舰”成功起降歼-15舰载机。

舰载机起飞画面一经播出, 指挥员帅气有力的起飞手势随之走红。然而同一天, 研制现场总指挥罗阳突发心肌梗死却倒下了, 享年51岁。他用生命换来了战机完美升空! 今天, 重温这一令中国人自豪的手势, 缅怀民族脊梁 [展开全文](#) ✓



2016年11月25日 09:19 来自 vivo智能手机

收藏

转发 3

评论

👍 5

Figure 5: 11/25/2016 Weibo post from Henan Normal University Research Institute memorializing Luo Yang

Translation:

CCTV News: “#That Year Today# ([Do you] still remember Aircraft Carrier Style? Today, pay tribute to Luo Yang!) Five years ago today, China’s first aircraft carrier, the “Liaoning Ship,” successfully launched and landed J-15 carrier-based aircrafts. Once the carrier-based aircrafts took off and the image was broadcasted, the [flight deck] commander’s take-off signal subsequently became popular. However, on the same day, Luo Yang, the general director of development, fell... In 2012, Luo Yang was selected as the Chinese person of the year. Today, relive this gesture that made the Chinese people proud and cherish the memory of the model worker and hero of aviation who dedicated himself to serving the country, Luo Yang!”



央视新闻 V

#那年今日#【还记得航母style吗？今天，向罗阳致敬！】5年前的今天，我国首艘航母“辽宁舰”成功起降歼-15舰载机。舰载机起飞画面一经播出，指挥员的手势随之走红。然而同一天，研制现场总指挥罗阳却倒下了...2012年，罗阳获选感动中国年度人物。今天，重温令中国人自豪的手势，缅怀航空报国英模罗阳！



2017年11月25日 07:20 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏

转发 633

评论 652

👍 6792

Figure 6: 11/25/2017 Weibo post from CCTV memorializing Luo Yang

Translation:

Military newspaper reporter: #This Day in Military History# ([Do you] still remember Aircraft Carrier Style? Today, pay tribute to Luo Yang) [Do you] still remember Aircraft Carrier Style? Today in 2012, when fellow compatriots witnessed the perfect launch of the J-15s through the TV, on the ship, Luo Yang was (also) entering the countdown of his life. When the public expressed their inner joy with “Aircraft Carrier Style,” the hero, who created the miracle on the aircraft carrier, suddenly passed away. This is a sorrowful moment that belongs to China, forward (this post), and pay tribute to the backbone of the nation!



军报记者 ✓

#军史今日# 【还记得航母style吗？今天，向罗阳致敬！❤️】还记得航母style吗？2012年的今天，当国人通过电视目睹歼-15完美升空，舰上的罗阳却正在步入生命的倒计时；当公众用“航母Style”表达内心欢呼，缔造奇迹的航母功臣却猝然离世……这是属于中国的悲伤时刻，转发，向民族脊梁致敬！👉



2018年11月25日 08:39 来自 微博 weibo.com

收藏

转发 65

评论 26

👍 349

Figure 7: 11/25/2018 Weibo post from a military newspaper reporter for People's Liberation Army Daily memorializing Luo Yang

The Weibo post in Figure 4 uses some nationalistic mobilizing language in calling for Chinese citizens to “pay tribute” to Luo Yang, but the post presents factual information surrounding Luo Yang’s death and does not attempt to mislead the reader or distort the facts. This 2015 post more closely resembles that of a social media platform news bulletin when compared to later versions of this post. The Weibo post in Figure 5 uses the same nationalistic mobilizing language as the previous version of the post in calling for Chinese citizens to “pay tribute” to Luo Yang, but also incorporates more nationalistic rhetoric surrounding Luo Yang’s actions by claiming that “he traded his life in exchange for the perfect launch of the fighter.” This Weibo post also characterizes PLAN personnel as “handsome and powerful” and promotes public support of military actions by connecting the Chinese military with national pride. This 2016 post still presents the factual information surrounding Luo Yang’s death and does not attempt to distort the fact that he died of a heart attack. Ultimately, this post resembles that of a social media platform news bulletin with added propaganda.

By classifying him as a “model worker and hero of aviation who dedicated himself to serving the country,” the Weibo post in Figure 6 uses more overt nationalistic mobilizing language than the previous version in calling for Chinese citizens to “relive the gesture” and “cherish the memory” of Luo Yang. This Weibo post promotes public support of military actions by associating the PLAN with fostering and securing Chinese national pride. Additionally, this 2017 post attempts to mislead to reader by removing the circumstances surrounding Luo Yang’s death, as it is reported that he simply “fell.” This post resembles that of propaganda with added historical information. Furthermore, by posting this message on the verified CCTV Weibo account, this greatly increased the viewership of and engagement with this particular post. The Weibo post in Figure 7 was written by a military newspaper reporter for the People’s Liberation

Army Daily: the Chinese military's newspaper. It uses less overt nationalistic mobilizing language than the previous versions of this post, and the nationalistic phrases are well woven into the structure of the post. In calling for Chinese citizens to "pay tribute" to Luo Yang, the author also added that other users should forward the post, which would ultimately increase viewership. This 2018 Weibo post promotes public support of PLAN actions by linking the "Aircraft Carrier Style" meme to an expression of Chinese national pride in the aviation accomplishments of the military. Additionally, this post slightly distorts the circumstances surrounding Luo Yang's death, as it is reported that he was "entering the countdown of his life" and "suddenly passed away," failing to mention his heart attack. This post is a well-crafted propaganda story, as Luo Yang is called a "hero" and it is suggested that his death is a sadness which needs to be acknowledged by all of China. Despite their differences in rhetoric, each of these posts incorporates the use of the phrase "Aircraft Carrier Style" to reach a broader online audience when promoting Chinese PLAN triumphs in the South China Sea, with the ultimate goal of increasing Chinese expansionist nationalism.

Summary

Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" seeks to mobilize the Chinese people in support of PLAN activities in the South China Sea and normalize its expansionist activities. Under the guidance of Xi Jinping's administration, the preexisting foundation of Chinese nationalism, cultivated through decades of "patriotic education," has been reinforced through new coordinated expansionist nationalism campaigns. The addition of new nationalistic holidays, the ever increasing number of "national heroes," as seen in the case of Luo Yang's martyrdom, and the decreasing legal paths of dissent and de-escalation, Chinese external-oriented nationalism is actively being shifted into an expansionist form to achieve the CCP's goal of indisputable dominance over the South China Sea.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The “Chinese Dream” is the vision of a powerful military, one which under the leadership of the CCP, can rejuvenate the Chinese nation by reclaiming territory lost to foreign powers during “the Century of Humiliation” and by the collapse of China’s imperial tributary state system. More specifically, the “Chinese Dream” seeks to mobilize the Chinese people in support of the PLAN’s actions in the South China Sea and normalize its expansionist activities as being within China’s indisputable sovereign territorial rights. Under the guidance of Xi Jinping’s administration, the preexisting foundation of external-oriented Chinese nationalism, cultivated through decades of “patriotic education,” has been reinforced through coordinated nationalism campaigns and shifted into its expansionist form. Since Xi Jinping assumed power, China’s legislature has approved the addition of nationalistic anniversaries and holidays, increased the numbers of “national heroes” and “martyrs,” and limited the legal paths of dissent and de-escalation. The new holidays serve to institutionalize anti-Japanese and anti-Western sentiments, promote Chinese nationalism, and ensure loyalty to the Party by celebrating the CCP’s role in halting any future national “humiliations” and defeating Imperial Japan. These national observances are designed to encourage nationalistic feelings and celebrate all those who died resisting foreign invaders during the “Century of Humiliation,” and rebrands modern Chinese nationalism as one linked to resistance rather than expansion.

Xi’s government has passed numerous regulations that bolsters China’s existing legal censorship framework to include online challenges made to the Party’s distorted narrative of history. This has allowed the government to take steps to secure Weibo as a beneficial escalatory mobilization tool to broadcast and promote the Party’s expansionist agenda. Moreover, as the CCP is able to control the degree in which the Chinese public is able to access information and

alternative news sources, its narrative of indisputable sovereignty of the South China Sea remains resolute. Xi could easily use the CCP's narrative of history and Chinese collective memory issues surrounding the "Century of Humiliation" as tools of mobilization, and the CCP's ever growing control over Weibo could force the social media platform to assume this escalatory mobilization role. Furthermore, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands protests could serve as a possible model for the future online mobilization of anti-American and anti-Western sentiments. The "patriotic education" campaign has taught generations of the Chinese populace that the South China Sea falls under Chinese sovereignty, and as a result of surging expansionist nationalism, the Chinese people are more willing to defend this claim, even by force.

The most extreme expansionist voices continuously force the CCP to take ever more strong and confrontational positions to not appear "weak" against perceived foreign incursion to its territory in the South China Sea. Furthermore, as China has already successfully constructed several artificial island military bases in the South China Sea, the CCP would greatly "lose face" if it suddenly abandoned them and seemingly accepted the unfavorable UNCLOS arbitration tribunal ruling. China's broader political environment of surging anti-foreign sentiments and public support for expansionism is not compatible for seeking any concessions, and therefore, China is largely entrenched in both its strategic and political positions. I encourage the United States to continue its freedom of navigation operations, especially with the backing of a broader European and Southeast Asian nation coalition. I would also suggest that these operations' stated objectives be reoriented from solely claiming to protect the maritime flow of trade to also serving as a demonstrated commitment to and support for our security partners and allies within the region. However, as the overall objective is regional stability and peace, I would warn against engaging in naval or aerial brinkmanship. As any collisions, or near-collisions, as seen with the

USS Decatur, will likely result in Chinese claims of Western provocation and could even provide a pretext for justifying combative actions taken against foreign ships in the name of defense.

Translation: “Released a headline article: ‘The South China Sea may become a hot spot in Sino-American Relations,’ the US guided missile destroyer “(USS Decatur)” cruised through the South China Sea one day before the 69th National Day of China.”



Figure 8:10/1/2018 Weibo post with an article link about the incident with the USS Decatur

Returning to the September 30, 2018 incident between the USS Decatur and the Lanzhou, many American media sources referenced the ongoing US-China trade war as an explanation for the Chinese destroyer’s aggressive maneuvering. While Western sources explained the incident through the broader context of the trade war, Chinese Weibo sources cited the proximity to National Day. Western sources neglected to mention that the incident occurred the day before Chinese National Day, and therefore was likely a result of both the trade war tensions and

Chinese nationalism. Moreover, by referencing the short temporal distance between the day of the incident and National Day, this likely implies that the Chinese populous views the timing as intentional, and therefore, an extreme act of provocation. Signifying that Chinese media sources, and citizens alike, on Weibo have begun perceiving the very intentions behind Sino-American interactions within a schema of nationalist outrage.

The most extreme nationalistic voices have pushed the CCP to adopt increasingly more aggressive and assertive postures in responding to international incidences. I worry that when the next major international crisis erupts, the Chinese de-escalatory voices may be drowned out, censored, or will simply not be present on Weibo to defuse and combat the online calls for war. My greatest fear is that the CCP will continuously be pushed and pulled by the most extreme expansionist voices of its populous, and may stumble into or be pressured into a “hot” war in the South China Sea by the very expansionist nationalism it created.

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