International Relations of the Asia-Pacific Volume 00, (2021) 1–30
doi: 10.1093/irap/lcab002

The Chinese government's management of anti-Japan nationalism during Hu-Wen era

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Accepted 27 January 2021

Abstract

China and Japan continue to partly live in the shadow of World War II (WWII) with recurrent expressions of anti-Japanese nationalism in China periodically ebbing bilateral relations. How does the Chinese government manage anti-Japan public manifestations of nationalism and what factors explain it? The government has to walk a fine line by managing the nationalism it has bred without undermining its own rule and considering elite divisions, heightened public nationalism, and the developments in its external environment. Six case studies from the Hu-Wen era provide a comprehensive understanding of what pertains to Chinese nationalism, the means used to express it, and more importantly the way the government chose to tackle them. While nationalism can be a mean of garnering legitimacy and exercising pressure on Japan to bend to its wishes, the Chinese government is embarked on the sinuous task of preventing an escalation beyond its control at both the domestic and international levels.

International Relations of the Asia-Pacific Vol. 00 No. 0

1 Introduction

Over 75 years have passed since the end of WWII and nearly 50 years since China and Japan re-established diplomatic relations, but anti-Japanese feelings in China have not yet dissipated. Despite increasing economic and cultural ties, China's nationalist attitude towards Japan is often described as 'xenophobic', 'resentful', 'aggressive', and 'on the rise' (Shambaugh, 1990; Chang, 2001; Blumenthal, 2011; Shi, 2015). The expectation of fading nationalism under the pressure of globalization underestimated the importance of history, territoriality and the desire and pride of belonging to a 'great' nation, along with the hidden political agendas of those in positions of power.

Nationalism is a malleable concept and subject to a constructive process. In a non-democratic state, the government's instrumental approach to nationalism is likely to dominate the agency of the non-state actors. Nevertheless, in the context of crisis involves Japan, a strand of nationalism that invokes 'historical memory', 'justice', 'territorial sovereignty' can quickly snowball and trigger ardent online discussions, boycotts, street protests, and activists' actions. At times, these manifestations are oppressed and at other times they are encouraged or both phases can both be part of a cycle. Given that nationalism, organically and instrumentally grown (see Brass, 1991; Connor, 1994; Smith, 1995) sits at the core of such manifestations, the government has to carefully weigh its options. How does the Government manage such manifestations when faced with the nationalism it has bread and which risks becoming counterproductive to its interests? What explains its stance and what does it tell us about the relation between the public and the state? Exploring these questions is important because China has stoked the flames of anti-Japan nationalism for decades and used them skillfully to acquire domestic capital, gain leverage in international relations or divert attention from scandals. At the same time, it has exposed itself to criticism from hawkish nationalists when it was perceived to fall short from upholding China's national interests and opened the door to (organized) unrest. Answering these questions also partially taps into meaningful debates over the nature of nationalism and the public-state relations. This article argues that the government finds public opinion a useful tool in its dealings with Japan, but realizes that it has to be managed lest it escalate beyond its ability to control. Moreover, multiple factors, including the heightened level of

nationalism, elite divisions and the 'others' state actor actions, are all significant in the government's course of action.

Through six case studies this article explains how the government manages anti-Japan manifestations and under what circumstances, while shedding light on mechanisms of persuasion and coercion used and public-state relations. The systematic analysis of the case studies evaluates four propositions based on the literature and then draws on both primary and secondary sources.

2 Literature review

The literature on anti-foreign manifestations and nationalism is broad, but two particular strands are of interest to this article. The first strand of the literature focuses on the pluralization of actors that participate in the nationalistic anti-foreign manifestations. Traditionally, it is assumed that power resides solely within the hands of state actors. The CCP has calibrated the education system (Wang, 2008), media (Stockmann, 2013), and web (Schneider, 2018) in line with its own interests. However, over the last 2 decades China has gone through important domestic changes. During the Hu-Wen era, the government has shown more interest in taking the pulse of the public opinion (Hao and Su, 2005), which was more freely available due to the rise of Internet users (Breslin and Shen, 2010) and the partial liberalization of the media (He, 2007a). It has hence been argued that nationalism constrain the Chinese government's negotiating space and its ability to design and implement policy (Fewsmith and Rosen, 2001; Gries *et al.*, 2016). Strictly in relation to Japan, Zhang (2007) argues that the rise of internet users and the pluralization of society led to the emergence of anti-Japan NGOs and the formation of a nationalism separate from state, indicative of the government's loss of control over discourse and even areas of foreign policy. This is reinforced by Schneider (2016) whose analysis on Nanjing massacre and the Diaoyu/Senkaku island conflict shows that the 'Leninist mass-communication logic' only succeeded in traditional internet settings, but not on microblogs or chat services. Zhang et al. (2018, p. 758) who investigated over 6,000 tweets from 146 Chinese opinion leaders on Weibo confirm these findings, but warn that 'nationalists who may incorporate liberal values to challenge the government (...) provoke a backlash of nationalism among certain groups'.

The second strand of the literature focuses the government the audience cost and cost–benefit analysis of allowing or supressing anti-foreign protests. Audience cost refers to situations where domestic audiences penalize leaders for failed policies. If democratic leaders justify their lack of maneuver in international negotiations through their vulnerability in electoral polls (Fearon, 1994; Schultz 2001), this may be difficult to uphold in a non-democratic state where leaders are more willing to quell public or entice manifestations by whatever means necessary and hence their stance is less credible. Nevertheless, even autocrats incur audience costs (Weeks, 2008). The Chinese Government may still face public pressure because nationalism is one of its key pillars of legitimacy. Particularly in relation to Japan, state nationalism is largely on historical events post the Second Sino-Japanese war (1894–1895), including on the CCP's role as liberator of the nation and sovereign of the Chinese state (Shirk, 2007; Wang, 2008; Breslin and Shen, 2010). The propaganda state machine has made significant efforts to equate nationalism with patriotism where the love of the nation is conflated with that of the party.

Conversely, both in democratic and non-democratic states satisfying domestic audiences is not always as important as economic benefits (Downs and Saunders, 1999; Seckington, 2005; Wiegand, 2009). The Chinese government is arguably more willing to risk domestic dissatisfaction by not fulfilling nationalistic demands, rather than jeopardizing good bilateral economic relations, especially with key economic partners like Japan. These studies accept, nevertheless, the contradiction between China's simultaneous pursuit of economic and nationalist policies in the context of Sino-Japanese relations.

Cost–benefit analysis goes beyond audience costs theory. Reilly (2014) sets out several explanatory factors of government's response to a 'wave' of public opinion. The government may tolerate protests when emotions are high, bilateral relations are acrimonious and top leaders are divided over foreign policy, while repression is exercised when costs are too high for the Government and domestic stability is at stake. Additionally, nationalistic public opinion is useful for the government in making gains in foreign policy by invoking the constraints of domestic pressure (Weiss, 2013). When engaging in diplomatic signaling, autocratic governments have to weigh carefully the costs of repressing and tolerating protests, namely physical costs (deployment of police

forces), psychological effects (protesters' resilience), international reputation damage, respectively demonstration effects (cascade information), resource mobilization (activating networks), and divisions among elites (Weiss, 2014). While Weiss' cost–benefit calculation is extremely useful, her analysis focuses solely on protests and mainly on international negotiations, explanations of tolerating the protests due to government's incapacity (Gries, 2005), diversionary incentives (He, 2007b), and factional interests (Swaine, 2011) are underplayed. Domestic priorities such as the government's need to use nationalism to strengthen its regime stability (Moore, 2010, p. 302) and global power shifts and perceptions of affront (Whiting, 1995, p. 295) are too easily disregarded due to the over focus on foreign policy outcomes.

Based on the literature discussed, four propositions are put forward:

1. the government is likely to tolerate public expressions of nationalism when emotions run high and the Party can rip the benefits of buttressing its legitimacy or using them as leverage in international negotiations;
2. the protests are stopped when there is a significant perceived risk to domestic stability;
3. protests may follow an inconsistent pattern when risk-benefit calculations are unclear, factional disagreements exist, or it may be difficult to evenly restrain protesters who have the necessary means to mobilize resources, organizes, and cascade information; and
4. the government's stance may show adaptability to the development of a situation depending on the actions of the 'other'.

3 Methodology

Case studies are a useful tool for both theory development and theory testing. The six case studies selected here represent what Lijphart (1971, p. 692) describes as 'hypothesis-generating case studies', which start with vague propositions and are tested across cases. The exploration of the cases is based on Yin's (2009) logic of explanation building where the phenomenon of anti-foreign protests and its management, in this case, is analyzed through 'how' and 'why' questions; explanation building occurs in narrative form and reflects on the theoretical propositions exposed in the literature.

The government's management of anti-foreign manifestations is discussed in relation to six case studies that refer only to Japan and are from

Hu Jintao's era. All cases were selected on two main principles. First, they represent different aspects of Sino-Japanese relations, including infrastructure, energy, natural disasters, territorial disputes, and political and judicial problems. Second, the diversity of cases allows for the analysis of the different means used to express nationalism, ranging from public petitions and protests to lobbying through personal channels, and hence different mechanisms employed by the government in response to them.

Secondary data are complemented by interviews with three key Japan-oriented NGOs, which shed new light on the public–state relations, and Chinese academic who work on Sino-Japanese relations. All activists interviewed belong to one of the most prominent anti-Japan organizations: The China Federation for Defending Diaoyu Islands (CFDDI), The China Federation of Civil Claims against Japan (CFCCJ) and Patriots Alliance. The three organizations identify themselves as NGOs whose aim was to represent the interest of the Chinese people, but in the context of a non-democratic state like China, government-organized non-governmental organizations are still the norm and interview data should be treated with some degree of caution. Interviews were conducted in person while on fieldwork in Beijing and Shanghai, and online where geographical distance was an obstacle between 2014 and 2016. Appropriate ethical review was obtained for conducting this research. Participants were informed about the content of the study and always had the option to withdraw from it. Some of the interviewees chose to remain anonymous, and accordingly, their personal data were securely protected and archived.

4 Empirical findings and discussion

Six case studies are discussed in a systematic manner, each starting with a short introduction before moving on to analyze the government's management strategy and the circumstances under which this was devised.

4.1 High-speed railway

In 2003, a Japanese company placed a bid for the construction of a high-speed railway (HSR) in China between Shanghai and Beijing; it was supported by a number of Chinese officials, including president Hu

Jintao who suggested to the Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi that the rail project would be a good opportunity to put Sino-Japanese relations back on track (Przystup, 2004) on the backdrop of Diaoyu/Senkaku island disputes in 2002. The value of the contract was extremely lucrative, estimated at $12 billion (China Daily, 2003) with the expected benefit that the winner of the bid would monopolize China's railway market. The Patriots Alliance activists rebuffed this move, perceived to be an infringement of China's 'economic sovereignty'. Parallels with the railway system set up by Japan in Manchuria during the 1932 invasion were vividly evoked. They demanded Chinese technology to be used instead and built up opposition to Japan's bid by collecting signatures for an online petition (Li, 2014). Other websites soon disseminated the petition, which was also picked up by the media, including *China Youth Daily*, which backed up the initiative and aided in the collection of over 80,000 signatures (Reilly, 2008). Public opinion was easily incited given that earlier that month mustard gas containers left behind by Japanese troops in WWII were discovered in the Northeast of China and led to the hospitalization of 40 people and only two weeks later 60 Japanese officials visited the Yasukuni Shrine (*The Economist*, 2003). Since the Patriots Alliance were the initiators of this process, an official from the Chinese Railway Ministry directly requested the activists to stop their 'protest' out of concern for national security, a common and vague request the Chinese government issues for perceived 'troublemakers'; when the activists refused, their website was shut down (Li, 2014). While in May 2003 Hu Jintao was optimistic about the Sino-Japanese railway cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2003), by January 2004, he was welcoming French companies' bids to the HSR. In this period, the political U-turn was also reflected in the cold reception of Japan's Minister of Transport in 2003 who could not even secure a meeting with high-ranked officials, whereas only a year earlier was warmly received by her ministerial counterpart (Reilly, 2008). Zhang Hanya, from the National Development and Reform Commission, in an interview in *Beijing Times*, explained at the time that 'political considerations are also an important factor in national decision-making and the most unstable variable' (*Beijing Times*, 2004). Japan ended up losing the bid and Chinese, French, and German technology was used instead. In the activists' eyes, driven by their patriotic duty to the country, the campaign they initiated was fruitful: 'the Minister started to think more about national security and the safety of technology used and in the end our plea was

successful' (Li, 2014). The domestic costs of unrest, which came on the backdrop of two different events historically charged, were a risk not worth taking when attractive options from France and Germany were on the table.

In December 2004, China clearly took advantage of the situation and created a linkage to HSR when Japan accepted Taiwan's former president Lee Teng-hui's visit. The Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei and the vice chairman of the National People's Congress' Standing Committee Xu Jialu even told a visiting Japanese Diet delegation at that time that they may have to exclude Japan from the railway project due to the public opinion pressure: 'we are facing high anti-Japan sentiment in China. If our government adopts the shinkansen technique in the railway project, the people would have (negative) opinions' (cited in Chen, 2004). The instrumental use of public opinion is clearly visible. The government's strategy adapted to different contexts, changing from more genuine concerns of domestic unrest complemented, coincidentally, by other bilateral disputes, to bluffing by tying in HSR to 'core interests' such as Taiwan to exercise pressure over Japan.

4.2 Joint resource exploration

The sovereignty of Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, an uninhabited chain of small islands in the East China Sea (ECS), has been contested by China and Japan since 1971, when China laid its first official claim over the islands. The timing of this claim brought a lot of speculation given the 1969 UN report, which alleged the area surrounding the islands might hold oil and gas resources. Yet, at the same time the United States was drafting the Reversion Act through which it was returning administrative rights of WWII territories back to Japan; this may have been China's last chance to contest the ownership of the islands. With the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in 1972, the two Prime ministers Zhou Enlai and Tanaka agreed to shelve the dispute (Asahi Shimbun, 2015). Despite this, ever since, both Chinese and Japanese state and non-state actors continued to make claims over the islands. The closest the two governments got in reaching a compromise was in 2008 through the joint resource exploration arrangement.

In a series of examples of direct lobbying from 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2008, a Diaoyu activist accompanied by a lawyer tried to petition

the Chinese government to stop the joint resource exploration plan. They approached several major national bureaus in Beijing, including the National People's Congress, but they got stopped at the gate. They eventually found an 'open door' at the Central Military Commission (CMC). They went with the hope that 'military leaders stand up and get involved when it comes to making decisions concerning China's sovereignty' (Activist, 2013). Their petition was received: 'As for petitioning CMC, it is not as difficult as a lot of people think, it is just that most people feel CMC is unapproachable!', the activist explains.

The petition put forward found the Sino-Japanese joint sea exploration unacceptable for several reasons. First, the timing of announcing a joint cooperation was disadvantageous for China because it came at a point when Taiwanese activists were making great strides to protect the islands; hence, the Sino-Japanese consensus could have further alienated Taiwan from the Mainland. Second, compromising on sovereignty based on the median line which 'satisfies Japan's greed at the cost of China's sovereignty and state interests (...) would be the most humiliating thing ever happens to the new China in the recent 60 years' – this tapped into the government's own discourse on historical humiliation. Third, 'policymaking related to natural resources which belong to all people of China should not be a "dark box" as it violates the Constitution'; similar to the high-speed train case, activists raised the importance of public consultation and transparency on what they perceived to be issues of national interest. The following paragraphs extracted from their petition provided by Activist N. speak for themselves:

> However, the negotiation with Japan on the East Sea issue is done secretly in a dark case, which leads to strong disaffection from the public. Moreover, people's freedom of expressing opinions on the issue is blocked, and people's rights of assembly,demonstration and protest are deprived, even official media is required not to mention public opinion on East Sea issue, plus online information is censored and monitored. On the internet, East Sea issue has become the restricted zone. (All the articles that contain "East Sea" would be censored, only those that are in favour of the consensus could make it through the censorship). Many websites shut down because of this, (for instance, the website of the China Federation of Defending the

> Diaoyu Islands), countless online forum posts are deleted, numberless IDs and IPs are blocked, all of which suggest this "principled consensus" is undoubtedly against the will of the people. (And there is an easy way to support my theory, which is a referendum).
>
> Such drastic measures are taken to deprive people of their rights to know, to express their opinions, and to say things that are against concessions made towards to Japan. Such great state property owned by all the Chinese people is sent away as a gift to other countries, metaphorically, it's like the servant blinds the eyes of the master, gags his month, ties up his limbs, and then takes his property away with another robber. Definitely this is unacceptable for the Chinese people!
>
> The excuses we used to limit people's civil rights including rights of speech, assembly and demonstration are "for the sake of a stable society" and "sovereignty come before human rights". But now, our civil rights are limited when people are trying to use them to guard the sovereignty of the country, which means humans rights and sovereignty are both damaged; obviously, this is illegal and unreasonable, which may lead to self-destruction. If we "stabilize" our society like this, we are like keeping heading to an erupting volcano, or trying to stay in the lobby of a collapsing building (Activist N., 2013)

Beyond the activists' anger over the alleged unfairness the tentative agreement on ECS would bring to China, the petition is illustrative of how the activists demand the public's voice to be factored into the decision-making process. They object to the government's decision to censor discussions and go 'against the will of the people'; they demand their civil liberties and even ask for a referendum. In other words, the activists are asserting rights and demanding democratic measures that are anathema to the government.

Since 2004, China and Japan have faced multiple deadlocks over the exploration of resources, often marred by mutual distrust. For instance, after the 6–7 March 2006 Japan-China East China Sea Talk:

> both sides agreed at the end of the talks that it would be beneficial if information on the Chinese proposal stayed out of the press.

> Blaming the Japanese side for leaks and pointing out that China had kept the details of the previously proposed Japanese plan out of the press, Xue [MFA Japan Division Deputy Director] said the media reports left both sides little choice but to take strong public stances and reject the other's proposal, thus making it appear that the talks had failed (Wikileaks, 2006).

This suggests that the public pressure was a factor that could not be ignored. In June 2008, China and Japan agreed once again to restart the joint exploration plan in the disputed gas fields of Chunxiao. Despite Hu Jintao backing the deal, the domestic opposition was too powerful to rein in; even Zhang Guobao, the head of the Chinese National Energy Administration, which would have been responsible for the joint development was opposed to the deal (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 44). Prompted also by the netizens' vastly negative views, as well as Fukuda's replacements with Taro Aso, a less China friendly politician, led to the collapse of this agreements (Lam, 2015, p. 213).

In early September 2010, after the arrest of the Chinese captain who collided with the Japanese coast guard in the proximity of Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, among other measures taken, China postponed bilateral talks which were meant to conclude with a treaty on the joint gas field development in the ECS. On 17 September 2010, China changed tact and started moving drilling equipment in the gas field putting Japan on high alert (*BBC News*, 2010). Prime Minister Naoto Kan and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao postponed an anticipated bilateral meeting in New York, at the United Nations General Assembly scheduled on the 21 September. A month later, during the East Asia Summit in Hanoi, another much awaited meeting between the two was also called off, this time by China and in the last minute. The Chinese complained again about false information being disseminated according to which consultations over ECS gas exploration joint project were to restart (Anderlini *et al.*, 2010). Both Japan's Foreign Ministry Maehara and Japan's deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuyama said the report over East China Sea development had angered China: 'It appears the administration of President Hu Jintao was concerned that anti-Japan rallies in inland regions had not stopped and Beijing fears the demonstrators might turn their criticism against the government' (cited in Miyai and Mukai, 2010). Wen was worried about both conservatives

within the government back home and the public protests against the government itself for 'selling off' the country to Japan. Ma Licheng's admonishment came true once and may become true again: 'the risk of using nationalism is that if one day when China will want to make peace with the West these patriots will call the government a traitor' (Interview, 2014).

Nationalism in the age of the Internet allows the public voice to be heard louder than before, and when coupled with a divided Chinese government and a newly installed in power and less engaging Japanese government, it leaves the government more vulnerable to pressure both from within and without.

4.3 UN Security Council bid

A third case dates from 2005 when Japan failed to secure a seat in the UN Security Council (UNSC). Japan is one of the main financiers of the UN and has long sought permanent representation in its Security Council, along with Germany, India, and Brazil. The enlargement of the UNSC has been often opposed by the existent members worried that it will diminish the value of their seats. China has been particularly vehement in its opposition to Japan's attempt to join the club of five on the basis that, in the words of Wen Jiabao, it still 'needs to face up squarely to history' (Hong Fincher, 2009).

A petition against Japan's bid was originally launched by the Alliance to Preserve the History of WWII in Asia, an organization formed in 2002 by Asian immigrants in the United States and Canada which targeted Asians based in the United States. It initially did not get much traction, but once they partnered with Patriot Alliance and was translated into Chinese, it went viral, attaining over 40 million signatures (Wu, 2007). Street protests and boycotts of Japanese goods became a common occurrence in March and April 2005. The debates were further fuelled by the breakout of another scandal over history books in Japan approved by the Ministry of Education that minimized Japan's WWII crimes. Activists claim that the petition represented the voice of the Chinese public and the government could not have risked opposing its underlining nationalistic spirit (Li, 2014). Weiss (2014) argues that the protests and the signature campaign were a diplomatic asset for China given that it preferred to publicly avoid opposing

Japan's bid, so 'having opened the floodgates of public opinion, the Chinese government then found itself pressed to oppose Japan's candidacy more openly'. Liu Jianchao, the Foreign Ministry spokesman, played the history card in justifying China's opposition to the bid: 'Japan has to take a responsible attitude toward history to build trust among the people of Asia, including China' (Kahn, 2005). The Chinese position was further bolstered by Japan's decision to announce the start of resource exploration in disputed waters in East China Sea; Wen Jiabao counteracted Japan's statement in the same day by officially declaring that China will oppose Japan's bid (Watts, 2005).

The government's stance on Japan's bid to the UN was in unison with the anti-Japanese feelings ignited, and Japan choice to take a stronger stance on ECS matters further justified the government's tolerance of public manifestations to continue. Only when mob violence started targeting Japanese businesses and the Japanese consulate, the Chinese government clamped down on protesters, conveniently justifying its move through the need to restore order while maintaining its anti-Japan stance. Generally, there is little doubt over the Party's 'controlocracy', a term Ringen (2016) uses to describe China's 'perfect dictatorship', hence the capacity of the government to nip the petition or the street protests in the bud. As Professor Feng Wei from Fudan University explains 'Activists can be controlled and have no influence. They just meet the national sentiment. But their activities cannot be curbed in a direct way because people see them as heroes when they actually aren't' (Interview, 2015). It is not only about the government's capacity to impose its 'dictatorship', but also about calculating the costs and benefits of allowing or curtailing public opinion on a sensitive topic like Japan, which is made easier when public and government interests converge.

4.4 Sichuan earthquake

In the aftermath of the powerful 12 May 2008 Sichuan earthquake, Hu Jintao was the first Chinese President ever to appeal to Japan for aid relief. Japan responded immediately and within a couple of days dispatched several professional rescue teams. However, two weeks later, when Japan proposed to send Self-Defense Force (SDF) planes, instead

of civilian planes, to deliver aid resources such as blankets and tents, the Chinese government rejected the offer.

Indeed, after Hu Jintao's initial call for Japan's help, the spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry reiterated that help was welcomed from 'any country and its military to provide logistical supplies', but was reticent in stating whether this would include Japan, leaving the Defence Ministers to clarify matters further (Lo, 2014). When Chinese authorities decided to turn down Japan's SDF offer of help, as a diplomatic columnist put it, they did so 'without any expression of reasons' (Qiu, 2011). Hardly anything surfaced in the Chinese media about the official governmental standpoint on the SDF, and most of the news expressed China's deep appreciation for the assistance and donations received from Japan. The Chinese Ambassador to Japan Cui Tiankai was even quoted saying: 'the outstanding performance of the Japanese relief team in its rescue operations in the quake-stricken areas has earned vast applause among the Chinese people' (*China Daily*, 2008).

This change in policy must have been based on the government's recognition that the news about the SDF deployment could blow out of proportion domestically. This also explains the decision to censor news on the SDF. Searches using key words such as 'Sichuan earthquake', 'Japan Self-Defense Forces', 'SDF' conducted on LexisNexis on Chinese sources in English, including newspapers, magazines, reports and online Web sites, between 11 May 2008 and 1 July 2008, all returned 0 findings. The same search was conducted on *China Daily*, which returned one finding only in the form of a quote of the Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura: 'According to my understanding, China wants Japan to send its Self-Defense Forces planes to transport relief materials including tents and blankets' (China Daily, 2008). *People's Daily*, the Chinese version, also returns 0 findings in that period; otherwise, all 14 articles retrieved, which mention Japan's role in the earthquake's rescue maintain a positive vibe.

Despite these press restrictions, the word about SDF aircrafts being deployed spread among Chinese netizens. Yomiuri Shimbun wrote at the time that 'Chinese Net forums [were] swamped by anti-SDF posts' (Sugiyama, 2008). Patriots Alliance 'patriotically contributed' by submitting several petitions to the relevant authorities in an attempt to persuade the government to reject humanitarian aid sent in Japanese military aircrafts, seen as an unpleasant reminiscence of WWII and yet

another infringement of China's sovereignty (Li, 2014). When Patriots Alliance deployed teams to support the alleviation efforts in Sichuan, the government became suspicious of their actions (Li, 2014). As Sheng Ding reminds us, 'the CPC just wants the CSO [civil society organisations] to play the role of consultor, instead of participant, in China's political development' (DiNg, 2014). Activists perceived this cold treatment as a 'process of learning' where the benefits of NGOs complementing the government's role rather than challenge it is not yet understood (Li, 2014).

In one of the few public remarks on this matter, the PLA's Deputy Chief of Staff Ma Xiaotian took notice of the public's mood: 'personally' he could not welcome the SDF because the sight of Japanese aircrafts over China 'would have a certain degree of impact on the psychology of the Chinese public' (Przystup, 2008). Even in the critical moment of facing a devastating 80,000 casualties and a bill of reconstruction of minimum $10 billion (*European Chamber*, 2008), close attention was paid to the potential domestic reaction towards Japan and consequently preventive measures were put in place. A layer of anti-Japanese nationalism could have easily escalated and turned against the Chinese government, especially in the context in which officials' corruption and lack of appropriate building regulations were seen as the main causes for the earthquake's high death toll (Lim, 2013).

Overall, the government chose to avoid the build-up of a nationalistic anti-Japan wave by censoring SDF-related news and changing its decision to accept SDF relief aid. This would have attracted unnecessary criticism of the government, which was already under public scrutiny for the disastrous consequences of the earthquake.

4.5 Judicial cases

The compensation campaign for Chinese victims of Japan's WWII acts of aggression also constitutes a sore topic in Sino-Japanese relations. Through the 1972 PRC and Japan joint communique, 'for the friendship of China and Japan, the People's Republic of China abandons its right to claim war indemnities' (Kim, 2015). However, the legal wording is vague and some, including Japanese lower courts, reasoned that the PRC waived state reparation claims, but not individual ones (The law library of Congress, 2008). The CFCCJ organization drew on this

interpretation and appealed on behalf of WWII victims for war reparations, both against the Japanese government and Japanese private companies. Japan's substantial yen loan packages to China which started after the 1978 Treaty of Peace and Friendship is an insignificant gesture in the eyes of the activists; for them, the 'sorrow' and 'damage' that Japan inflicted to China has no comparable reference and 'a little right [i.e., yen loans] cannot undermine the past' (Activist, 2014). The trials are a way of rectifying history and ensuring a fair compensation for Chinese victims.

The CFCCJ started its activity at the beginning of the 1990s and focuses on forced labor, sex slavery and indiscriminate bombings claims from the World War Two era; its claims were turned down on numerous occasions by Japanese and Chinese courts alike (Tong, 2015). After over two decades of activity, progress was registered on the backdrop of the introduction of new Chinese laws. One of the new laws enforced in 2015 stipulates that Chinese courts now have to attend to any appeal and cannot simply reject a case (Finder, 2015), a problem which previously often brought CFCCJ efforts to a halt. Lawsuits against private Japanese companies have been successfully launched for the first time in what seems to be a new turn of events. For instance, in February 2014, a court in Beijing accepted a lawsuit against two Japanese companies brought by 40 Chinese people, supported by CFCCJ, who were forced into labor during the war (Wee and Li, 2014). In April 2014, a Shanghai court ordered Mitsui, a Japanese shipping company, to pay $27 million for the release of its seized ship over a wartime commercial dispute (Ng, 2014). In July 2015, after years of being pressured, Mitsubishi also admitted that 'the human rights of Chinese forced labourers were infringed upon', apologized and agreed to compensate the victims (Xinhua, 2015). Lin Xiaoguang, an international relations expert at the Central Party School, observed that 'the courts are more willing to accept these [civil] cases (...) they [courts] usually did not when bilateral ties were good' (cited in Ng, 2014). However, with the changes in law and established precedent, cases will be less dependent on the nature of the bilateral relations. Another scholar further explains what triggered the change at the government level:

> The Chinese government has found it difficult to control the grassroots redress movement which also involves Japanese lawyers

> and supporters. The government has become resigned to the issue while still not pressuring the Japanese government to resolve the suits on behalf of Chinese plaintiffs (...) the Chinese government now tries to balance between domestic pressure and its desire for a strong relationship with Japan (Wan, 2006)

This view is shared by activists: 'The process [of compensation claims] may not be smooth, meaning that people's nationalism may become strong enough to influence the diplomacy of the government and lead to social instability' (Tong, 2015). After approximately 20 years of campaigning, activists believe that the Chinese government has slightly relented to domestic pressure and 'historical justice' (Activist, 2014; Tong, 2015). This alone is unlikely to explain the change. The wider context in which in 2013 South Korean courts ordered Japanese companies to pay wartime damages and in 2015 Mitsubishi apologized to American prisoners of war (*Japan Times*, 2015) triggered a broader change within which the Chinese government most likely decided to allow the compensation lawsuits to proceed.

The CFCCJ continues its work with other Japan-related projects. A project that started in the 1990s as a collection of interviews and letters from WWII victims of Japan's military were translated in English and uploaded online in July 2015. The bilingual website www.www.10000cfji.org, suggestively named '10000 Cries for Justice' (一萬個正義的呼聲), is reflective of the approximate number of letters the organization received. Concerned about the government's supervision and potential interference, the NGO cooperated with a US-based activist who posted the documents on a 'secure website' with a server based in the United States (Tong, 2015). Anti-Japanese feelings live through these thousands of documents collected over the years and the activists took upon themselves the 'responsibility' of 'teaching the world the truth about history' and 'correcting' the Chinese government's course of action when needed (Tong, 2015).

4.6 Diaoyu/Senkaku activities

As discussed in case study two, both Chinese and Japanese state and non-state actors have laid claims over the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands over the last half-century. From 1996 to 2012 in particular, two

successful landings on the island instigated by activists triggered a series of domestic and international events. The government's management of Diaoyu/Senkaku islands has been consistent with the level of nationalism experienced domestically and the international context.

On 24 March 2004, Chinese activists landed on the islands only to be immediately arrested by the Japanese authorities. Okinawa prefecture accused them of violating immigration laws and trespassing Japan's territory. Koizumi, at that time Japan's Prime Minister, called for calm in Sino-Japanese relations, but the Japanese media called instead for a stronger approach 'against the Chinese security threat' (C. Kim, 2015). On 30 March 2004, a resolution concerning the protection of Japanese territory requesting the Japanese government to strengthen its security around the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands was endorsed in the House of Representatives for the first time (Drifte, 2014). Moreover, Edano Yukio, chief of the Constitution Research Committee of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), proposed SDF troops to be stationed on the disputed islands to prevent incursions by other countries. The United States also reacted by reiterating its neutrality while also claiming that the islands fall under article V of the Mutual Security Treaty with Japan (Fravel, 2010, p. 148). This was already in the context in which the involvement of the United States in the conflict was an ever-present risk. In November 2011, Hillary Clinton announced the 'US pivot' to Asia and in April 2012, the US-Japan alliance was deepened 'to promote bilateral dynamic defence cooperation, including joint training, joint surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, and joint and shared use of facilities' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2012). In China's eyes, a powerful alliance was once again strengthening at its borders.

On 15 August 2012, a day symbolizing the surrender of Japan in 1945, a crew of activists from the PRC, Macao and Hong Kong landed on the islands to reassert China's sovereignty over them. After their arrest by the Japanese authorities, the Chinese Foreign Minister bashed Japan for violating China's territorial sovereignty and called for the release of the 'illegally arrested' activists. The issue escalated and the Japanese government also summoned the Chinese Ambassador to Japan to the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo to lodge a protest (Liu and Liang, 2012). Only days later, on 19 August, 150 Japanese activists on 21 ships, including 8 parliamentarians from the LDP and DPJ, went to

the islands to commemorate those who died there during WWII; despite not having permission from the local authorities to land, 10 activists did (BBC News, 2012). One of the parliamentarians aboard explained: 'Four days ago there was an illegal landing of Chinese people on the island as such we need to solidly reaffirm our own territory' (Associated Press, 2012). Xinhua fought back and warned that such 'provocations' created another setback for bilateral relations (Branigan, 2012).

During the same period of the landings, PM Noda was in discussions with Ishihara, the right-wing mayor of Tokyo, over the nationalization of the islands (Horiuchi, no date). Noda feared if he decided to postpone the nationalization of the islands he would face domestic criticism for bending to China's pressure (Zakowski, 2015) and that Ishihara's purchase would build up further tensions with China (Horiuchi, no date). Noda's task became increasingly difficult in August when South Korea also made territorial claims over the disputed Tokdo islands and reissued calls for the Japanese emperor to apologies for Korean's treatment during WWII (Zakowski, 2015). The activists' landings, the consequent pressure exercised by China and South Korea, and the domestic criticism received strengthened Noda's conviction that nationalizing the islands was the best option available.

Over the following two months protests spread to over 85 cities in China (*Global Times*, 2012) in response to the nationalization of the islands by Japan. The government tried to keep in reign these developments, but as one of the activists puts it, 'People's anger burst in 2010 and 2012, but without the government tolerance this would not have been possible, yet the government did not support the protests'; they tolerated it because emotions were high and 'they needed a voice (...) to show the international society what China has to do to protect its territory (...) but the riots took them by surprise and had to bring them to a halt' (Li, 2014). Wang Shaopu makes a similar point by noting that the government's strong stance calmed the 'angry Chinese public' (Interview, 2015).

During that period, the CFDDI and Patriot Alliance members were sternly monitored and constrained in their activities by local authorities (Li, 2014; Activist, 2015). Some were placed under house arrest and others were permanently monitored by police; they were prevented from organizing or attending the protests and their Web site was taken

down. Others lost their jobs and continued to be harassed along with their families in what they describe 'pressure beyond belief' (Li, 2014). In the words of Li Nan (Li, 2014), the leader of the two organizations:

> 2010 and 2012 were indeed the peak of anti-Japanese nationalism, but it is a pity that it was a low time for the Patriots Alliance because we are professional members for patriotic activities and the government would pay attention to us especially when things were tense, they wouldn't want us to be powerful and influential then. It all depended on the government - sometimes they allowed us to have a voice and sometimes they forbade us to take part in activities. Every time we protested, we had to ask for approval. In 2012 we went to protest in front of the Japanese embassy, but the government always turned us down, however we were so stubborn that we still went there and were arrested. Well, [in the past] that was not always the case, at other times if the government thought it was ok then we would not be arrested. I think it's a strategy of the government to achieve harmony between domestic and international diplomacy.

One of the other activists (Activist, 2013) who otherwise participated in the organization's activities of defending the islands back in 2003–2004, recounts:

> During 2010 and 2012, I wasn't involved in any protest against Japan. In 2010, I went back to a fishing port in Zhejiang and all the hotels in vicinity were controlled by the police and no one was allowed to sail to Diaoyu Island. I wasn't able to be there on the spot when the protests against Japan were going on in Beijing and other cities as my presence was unwanted by the officers who were working for the local governments.

The government has often kept a close eye of their activities. For instance, CFDDI was not permitted to travel to Japan to act on an invitation from a Japanese media outlet who wanted to bring them together at the same table with Japanese right-wing activists (Li, 2014). On a different occasion, an NGO funded by the children of WWII war criminals who call for improved China-Japan relations invited them to workshops in Japan, but once again their travel plans were annulled by

the government (Li, 2014). Being on foreign soil and engaging with their counterparts meant that the Chinese government had no control over the media if things got out of hand (Activist, 2013). This approach is not surprising and is not solely characteristic to the Hu-Wen era. An activist involved in a series of anti-Japanese projects for over a decade described the day of 9 November 2004, when Iris Chang, widely known for her book, *The Rape of Nanking* (1997), in which she revivifies historical accounts of Japanese brutalities, committed suicide. She was much respected by the activists, who gathered in Beihai Park in Beijing, to mourn her death. To their surprise, police officers were patrolling all around the park and the mourning was banned. Activist O. explains that 'it was during Jiang Zemin time and he used to keep a close eye on any events that could turn against the government. They were worried that sentiments could escalate' (Activist, 2015). Even Iris Chang's death must have been perceived as powerful and evocative with the potential of causing trouble in the form of a collective action that had to be stopped.

This close monitoring process over the years suggests that the voyage of the activists to the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in 2012 is most likely to have been tolerated by authorities. The existence of such (GO) NGOs in itself is of course questionable; despite their claimed connection with some officials, their instrumental use as an extension of the government arm partly may explain best why they are still in operation. Activists seem to accept being used in such a way as long as they can protect China's core interests, although this does not mean that they do not find themselves taking contradictory stances to that of the government (Li, 2014).

Most importantly, it is crucial to note that even if the Government tolerated the activists' voyage and *initial* protests and boycotts manifestations of nationalism, this does not mean that a snowball effect which elided the government 'blue print' strategy did not occur. While nationalism can be instrumental, by reducing it simply to an on/off switch controlled by elites as this would undermine its ethno-symbolistic base on which instrumentalism otherwise needs to rest upon. At the domestic level, the large scale of the protests, in the midst of which cars were burnt, shops were looted and even CCP facilities came under attack in Shenzhen and required armed police intervention (Minemura and Koyama, 2012), created rare chaotic scenes that were

quickly censored (Earp, 2013) as of 18 September, commemorating the Mukden incident approached. In Japan's context, the activists and lawmakers landing on the islands the debates in the Diet and the pressure under which Noda came were also side effects that are too quickly discounted. Putnam's (1988) two-level game serves as a good reminder. Negotiators must consider both foreign counterparts and domestic constituents, the former of which is too often consigned to a static position.

Using the strength of public anti-Japan manifestations bolstered the Government's stance in issuing sovereign rights over the Diaoyu/Senkaku, launching maritime patrols and hence taking a more assertive stance (Chubb, 2019) as was soon to be seen in South China Sea too. Undoubtedly, the Chinese government finds public opinion and activists a useful tool in its dealings with Japan, but realizes that they have to be managed to prevent an escalation beyond its control at both domestic and international levels.

5 Conclusion

The six case studies discussed illustrate a series of mechanisms through which the public manifested its nationalism and the government's approach to it. In the HSR case, emotions expressed online and through public petitions appeared as a bottom-up manifestation of a somewhat xenophobic nationalism, and the potential for domestic unrest increased when coupled with other events reminiscent of historical injustice; the government chose to curb such manifestations by accepting other bids which matched its financial and technological considerations. The joint resource exploration case displayed China's sensitivity to media leaks and public opinion, as well as divisions within Chinese officials under Hu, whose position was not sufficiently consolidated to unify them, particularly after the arrival to power of a less amiable Japanese administration. In the UN bid case, the public's view was considered because its interest converged with that of the government, aided simultaneously by the context of historical disputes, in which both China and South Korea were highly critical of Japan's refusal of facing its past. The fourth case, that of the Sichuan earthquake, showcases public pressure as the main explanatory factor to date regarding the government's decision to reject SDF aid; adding a nationalistic

crisis to a natural catastrophe where public anger was already directed at Chinese officials for poor construction standards and corruption was not a risk worth taking. The fifth case, that of the Chinese redress of history movement, is one to be followed with interest in the years to come as the introduction of new laws in China, and the change in the international context in relation to the United States and South Korea may lead to new developments. As for the Diaoyu/Senkaku island dispute, the government's concern about fuelling further anti-Japanese sentiments in China explains why activists were kept under supervision while protests were somewhat tolerated; nonetheless, the public actions have helped the Government assert its rights over the islands, an interest that they both shared. All six cases indicate that there was no one factor that played a determinant role in the government's management of the protests or the policy outcome. Elite divisions, the costs and benefits of the public emotions triggered for legitimacy purposes or international negotiation leverage, as well as Japan's actions and reactions, and the wider international context were all part of the process. It is often the interface between all these elements that inform government's policy toward protesters.

The Chinese government has the necessary means to curb nationalistic manifestations and has done it so far, but at times has struggled to control it. This is best captured by Professor Xiao Gongqin from Shanghai Normal University who describes nationalism emerging from a 'stronger' and 'unhappy' China as arrogant and risky, bordering irrationality, and hence the need for 'wise and highly sophisticated politicians [who] must strike a balance to utilise nationalism and avoid its pitfalls' (Interview, 2015). Over time, netizens, protesters, and activists could become more efficient and resilient in using petitions, boycotts, physical and online networks and legal procedures to disseminate their nationalistic message. Activists made demands that go far beyond anger over the alleged unfairness in Sino-Japanese relations; they demand public opinion to be dealt into the decision-making process and same as netizens object to censoring discussions. They are grieved that people are deprived of their rights to express their opinions, which is anathema to the government. Anti-Japan nationalistic manifestations in China are part of the glue that unify the nation and depending on the government's management of it the 'love for the party' may still be equated with the 'love for the nation'.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dr Miwa Hirono, Professor Gregory Moore, Professor Katharine Adeney and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and criticisms that led to this article. This research was possible with funding received from the School of Politics and International Relations and Asia Research Institute, University of Nottingham.

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