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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Wang, H., & Zhou, M. (2017). Anti-Japanese Sentiment among Chinese University Students: The Influence of Contemporary Nationalist Propaganda. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 46(1), 167-185. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-4-10454>

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Journal of Current Chinese Affairs

China aktuell

Zhou, Min and Hanning Wang (2017),
Anti-Japanese Sentiment among Chinese University Students: The Influence of
Contemporary Nationalist Propaganda, in: *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 46,
1, 167–185.

URN: <http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-4-10454>

ISSN: 1868-4874 (online), ISSN: 1868-1026 (print)

The online version of this article and the other articles can be found at:
<www.CurrentChineseAffairs.org>

Published by
GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Institute of Asian Studies, in
co-operation with the Lau China Institute at King's College London, and Hamburg
University Press.

This Taiwan edition has been published and edited in cooperation with the European
Research Center on Contemporary Taiwan (ERCCT) at Eberhard Karls University of
Tübingen.

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Anti-Japanese Sentiment among Chinese University Students: The Influence of Contemporary Nationalist Propaganda

Min ZHOU and Hanning WANG

Abstract: This study looks at the sources of anti-Japanese sentiment in today's China. Using original survey data collected in June 2014 from 1,458 students at three elite universities in Beijing, we quantitatively investigate which factors are associated with stronger anti-Japanese sentiment among elite university students. In particular, we examine the link between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s nationalist propaganda (especially patriotic education) and university students' anti-Japanese sentiment. We find that nationalist propaganda does indeed have a significant effect on negative sentiment towards Japan. Reliance on state-sanctioned textbooks for information about Japan, visiting museums and memorials or watching television programmes and movies relating to the War of Resistance against Japan are all associated with higher levels of anti-Japanese sentiment. The findings suggest the effectiveness of nationalist propaganda in promoting anti-Japanese sentiment. We also find that alternative sources of information, especially personal contact with Japan, can mitigate anti-Japanese sentiment. Thus, visiting Japan and knowing Japanese people in person can potentially offset some of the influences of nationalist propaganda.

■ Manuscript received 25 April 2016; accepted 22 August 2016

Keywords: China, nationalism, nationalist propaganda, anti-Japanese sentiment, patriotic education

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Introduction

Nationalism in contemporary China has caught the attention of many China scholars. It has become “one of the most powerful forces of collective action” in today’s China (Tang and Darr 2012: 811) and sometimes gives rise to street protests against foreign countries. For instance, large-scale anti-United States street demonstrations took place in 1999; anti-France demonstrations occurred in 2008; and anti-Japan demonstrations have erupted periodically in recent years. In this study, we focus on a prominent manifestation of Chinese nationalism: anti-Japanese sentiment. Strongly negative attitudes towards Japan are especially popular among the Chinese people and underlie the periodic eruption of anti-Japan demonstrations in recent years. Recent nationwide anti-Japanese demonstrations occurred in 2005, 2010, and 2012. The scale of these street demonstrations often shocked outside observers. For instance, during the 2012 anti-Japan demonstrations, protest activities were observed in as many as 208 of China’s total 287 prefectural cities (Wallace and Weiss 2015; Weiss 2014). This leads us to ask the question: what are the sources of this anti-Japanese sentiment? As part of this enquiry, we conducted a large-scale survey of 1,458 students from three elite universities in Beijing in June 2014. Original data was used to quantitatively investigate what factors are associated with stronger anti-Japanese sentiment among elite university students. In particular, we empirically examine the link between the nationalist propaganda (especially patriotic education) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the university students’ anti-Japanese sentiment.

Chinese Nationalist Propaganda

Many scholars point out the role of the CCP government in constructing and promoting nationalism in China (Barmé 1993; Coble 2007; Gries 2004; Gries et al. 2011; He 2007, 2009; Mitter 2000, 2003; Reilly 2012; Wang 2008, 2012; Zhao 1998, 2004). Nationalism has been exploited by the CCP as a substitute for a communist ideology that has lost its appeal with the Chinese public. After the 1989 Tian’anmen Square pro-democracy protests and starting in the early 1990s, the CCP intensified its propaganda to promote nationalism. In particular, it launched the Patriotic Education Campaign (爱国主义教

育活动, *aiguo zhubuyi jiaoyu huodong*) to divert the attention of the public and shore up the legitimacy of the CCP government. The propaganda has been carried out through both the educational system and the mass media. It is promulgated not only in the form of school curricula (especially officially-sanctioned history textbooks), but also in the form of broadcast media, films, museums and memorials (Barmé 1993; Coble 2007; He 2007; Mitter 2000, 2003; Wang 2008, 2012; Zhao 1998).

Although everyone in China can be subject to nationalist propaganda, the Chinese youth have been singled out as the main target group. Accounting for a large part of this nationalist propaganda, patriotic education is incorporated into the entire process of education from “kindergartens all the way through the universities” (Zhao 1998: 293). Nationalist propaganda focuses on restoring national pride and eliminating national humiliation. China’s official media and its education system propagate nationalism through repeated emphasis on China’s humiliation and victimhood caused by foreign powers over the past two centuries. Within this discourse, a particular emphasis is placed upon China’s suffering at the hands of aggressive Japanese imperialists (Coble 2007; Cohen 2002; Gries 2005; He 2007, 2009). Japan figures prominently in China’s nationalist propaganda. One essential component of this propaganda is the historical memory of Japan’s wartime atrocities and its apparent lack of sincerity in coming to terms with this history.

Despite the fact that much attention has been paid to nationalism in China and the CCP-led nationalist propaganda (including patriotic education), there have been no empirical studies that quantitatively investigate the effect of this nationalist propaganda, especially its effect on anti-Japanese sentiment. This study attempts to fill this lacuna. We seek to empirically assess the important question: to what extent has the CCP-led nationalist propaganda “contributed to an aggrieved nationalism among China’s youth”? (Gries et al. 2011: 17).

Information Diversity

In addition to nationalist propaganda, another possible source of anti-Japanese sentiment in China might be insufficient understanding between the people of the two nations. Although China and Japan are close neighbours, only separated by the East China Sea, the lack of

understanding about each other is often striking (Iriye 1992; Rozman 2004). On the Chinese side, this lack of knowledge about Japan is exacerbated by two factors. Firstly, most Chinese have had little or no direct contact with Japan and its people, generally speaking. This situation has only changed, to some degree, in recent years as more and more Chinese have started to travel overseas. Another factor is the CCP's tight control and censorship over the media and information flow. Thus, the channels for obtaining information about Japan are limited. Most Chinese have little direct access to foreign sources of information; therefore, it is not easy for ordinary Chinese people to freely access information from overseas. It is well-known in cross-cultural psychological studies that the lack of well-rounded knowledge about other groups of people can lead to misunderstanding, prejudice, and negative impressions (Chin 2010; Oskamp 2008). This lack of information diversity, including foreign information sources and direct contact with Japan, may also potentially contribute to China's anti-Japanese sentiment. In contrast, greater access to foreign information sources and direct contact with Japan may have the potential to reduce negative sentiment towards Japan.

We further explore whether individuals with greater information diversity are less prone to the manipulation of the state. With alternative (especially foreign) sources of information and direct contact with Japan, individuals may be less likely to take in the CCP-led nationalist propaganda. Drawing on foreign information sources and personal contact, they may see a multifaceted Japan or even another Japan that differs greatly from the image constructed by the nationalist propaganda. Thus, diverse information might dilute or even challenge the information received from the state propaganda. Hence, the influence of the nationalist propaganda may become weaker or even become insignificant when an individual has foreign information sources and direct contact with Japan. In other words, there may be a negative interaction effect between nationalist propaganda and information diversity on anti-Japanese sentiment. Nevertheless, it is also likely that there is no interaction effect. Nationalist propaganda can have a deep and entrenched impact, because it operates at almost every stage of schooling and in many forms of the media. Its influence may still exist even when people have alternative channels to gain knowledge about Japan.

Taken together, this study empirically addresses three interrelated questions on anti-Japanese sentiment among elite university students in Beijing. First, does nationalist propaganda actually promote anti-Japanese sentiment? Second, does more alternative information reduce anti-Japanese sentiment? Third, can information diversity undermine the impact of nationalist propaganda on anti-Japanese sentiment?

The Data: Three Elite Universities in Beijing

In June 2014, we conducted a large-scale survey and chose three elite universities in Beijing as the sampling sites. Beijing is usually the centre of political activism in China (Zhao 2002). It is closer to the political centre and possesses the largest number of higher education institutions in China. Survey studies on attitudes towards world affairs, including nationalist attitudes, are often conducted in Beijing (Gries et al. 2011; Johnston 2004; Sinkkonen 2013; Zhao 2002). We focus on university students in light of their prominent role in major social movements in China's modern history. As Zhao (888) asserts, the political attitudes of today's university students "will shape tomorrow's Chinese politics" (Zhao 2002: 888).

Following previous empirical studies on nationalism among Chinese students (Sinkkonen 2013; Yu and Zhao 2006; Zhao 2002, 2003), we conducted the survey in Peking University, Tsinghua University, and Renmin (People's) University of China. Of the many universities in Beijing, these three are "among the most prestigious and have exerted a great impact on students in other universities and on Chinese politics" and are thus the "vanguard of student activism" in the city (Zhao 2002: 888). Students from the three universities are also likely to "assume leading roles in society after graduating" (Sinkkonen 2013: 1048). We selected these three universities for this same reason.

The final sample size was 1,458, with 504 students from Peking University, 467 from Tsinghua University, and 487 from Renmin University. The probability sampling method used was a modified form of two-stage clustering sampling based on the types of on-campus student dormitories. In all three universities, almost all the students live on campus except for a very small number of married graduate students. In each institution, there are different types of

dormitory rooms with one to six students living in them. We first sampled the dormitory rooms based on room type and then selected one or two students from each selected room. We selected one student from dormitory rooms with three or less students and two students from dormitory rooms with four or more students to complete the questionnaires. The different probabilities for a student to be selected in different room types required separate sampling for different room types. Eventually, the probability of a student being selected into the final sample was the product of the probabilities at the two stages, that is, (1) the probability of each room being selected multiplied by (2) the probability of each person being selected from the room. We set this probability to be the sample size divided by the population size. In the sampling, all students have an equal chance of being selected into the final sample.

The overall response rate based on the strict probability sampling was 72.5 per cent. To increase the response rate, we adopted additional techniques. If the selected student refused to complete the questionnaire, another student in the same room would be chosen randomly. If there were not enough students willing to participate in that room, one or two students in the nearest room would be selected. These techniques of filling non-responses increased the response rate to almost 100 per cent and reduced the impact of non-responses.

The final sample included students from throughout China: they came from all 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities, two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau), and Taiwan. In the sample, the average age was 22 years. A total of 54.05 per cent of the participants were male ($N=788$) and 45.95 per cent were female ($N=670$). The participants in the sample were predominantly Han ethnicity (89.71 per cent), while minority groups made up the remaining 10.29 per cent. Undergraduate and graduate students constituted 67 per cent and 33 per cent of the participants, respectively. These numbers well represent the overall profile of the student body in these universities. Careful sampling and data collection gave us confidence in the final sample's representativeness of the student population in the three universities. The questionnaire, detailed survey methods, and data can be found at <www.minzhou.ca/research.html>.

Dependent Variable

We surveyed students' general attitudes towards Japan by posing the question: "How do you feel about Japan in general?" The responses were recorded on the following five-point scale: "Like Japan very much" (1), "Like Japan somewhat" (2), "Neutral" (3), "Dislike Japan somewhat" (4), and "Dislike Japan very much" (5). This dependent variable was ordinal. A higher score suggests a greater level of negative sentiment towards Japan.

Key Independent Variables

The first set of key independent variables related to nationalist propaganda. The CCP employs a variety of tools to implement nationalist propaganda. We used a series of variables. The first variable was history textbooks. The survey asked students about the importance of history textbooks as their source of information about Japan. This textbook variable was binary with "1" indicating "very important" and "0" denoting "not important."

The second variable was visiting memorials or museums relating to the War of Resistance against Japan (抗日战争, *Kangri zhanzheng*; also known as the Second Sino-Japanese War). The survey asked students whether they had ever visited any memorials or museums relating to the War of Resistance against Japan. The third variable was the viewing of television programmes or films about the War of Resistance against Japan. The survey asked students whether they had ever watched any television programmes or films about the War of Resistance against Japan. Both variables were binary with "1" indicating "yes" and "0" indicating "no." As part of the propaganda effort, many memorials and museums have been established or expanded to commemorate the War of Resistance against Japan, and many television programmes and films have been produced on the theme of the War of Resistance against Japan. These memorials, museums, television programmes, and films usually highlight the atrocities committed by the Japanese armies, the suffering of ordinary Chinese, and the leadership of the CCP in resisting Japanese aggression.

The second set of key independent variables was about information diversity, especially whether students have alternative channels to gain knowledge about Japan outside of state-controlled chan-

nels. This set of variables included whether they have access to foreign sources of information and whether they have direct contact with Japan and its people. Access to foreign sources of information was measured by the question: “Will you be able to access news from foreign sources if you want to?” Direct contact with Japan and its people was captured by two variables: experience of visiting Japan (“Have you ever visited Japan?”) and knowing Japanese people (“Do you know any Japanese people in person?”). All three variables were binary with “1” indicating “yes” and “0” indicating “no.”

We also created nine interaction variables between the first set (nationalist propaganda) and the second set (information diversity) – specifically, between textbooks and foreign information, textbooks and visiting Japan, textbooks and knowing Japanese people, memorials and foreign information, memorials and visiting Japan, memorials and knowing Japanese people, TV and foreign information, TV and visiting Japan, and TV and knowing Japanese people.

Control Variables

In the analysis, we also controlled basic socio-demographic characteristics. Gender was a dummy variable, with male coded as “1” and female as “0.” Family income was measured through the question: “How much is your parents’ total monthly income approximately?” The responses were on a nine-point scale: lower than 1,000 CNY (1), 1,000–2,000 CNY (2), 2,000–4,000 CNY (3), 4,000–6,000 CNY (4), 6,000–8,000 CNY (5), 8,000–10,000 CNY (6), 10,000–15,000 CNY (7), 15,000–20,000 CNY (8), and over 20,000 CNY (9). Thus, a larger number indicates a higher family income. Membership of the CCP was also a binary variable, with “1” indicating a CCP member and “0” a non-CCP member. Ethnicity was measured as a binary variable, with Han coded as “1” and non-Han as “0.” Household registration or *hukou* (户口) type was also binary, with rural residents coded as “1” and urban residents as “0.” Region was measured by a series of dummy variables including East China, Northeast China, North China, Central China, South China, Northwest China, Southwest China, and other (areas outside mainland China, including Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan).

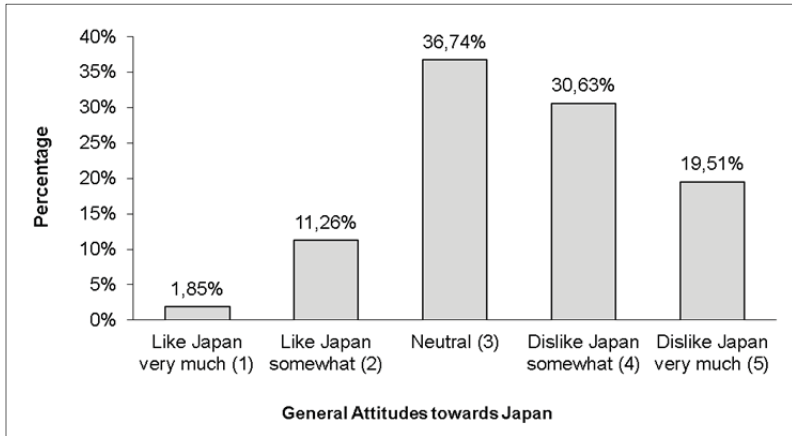
Analyses and Results

Table 1 summarises the basic descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analysis. Figure 1 further shows the distribution of the dependent variable on students' general attitudes towards Japan. More than half (30.63 per cent + 19.51 per cent = 50.14 per cent) of all sampled students expressed a clear dislike of Japan, while only 13 per cent (1.85 per cent + 11.26 per cent = 13.11 per cent) said they liked Japan to some degree. In particular, a substantial proportion (close to 20 per cent) disliked Japan very much. Overall, general attitudes towards Japan were very negative among the sampled university students.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analysis

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Negative sentiment towards Japan	3.547	.987	1	5
Gender (male)	.540	.499	0	1
Family income	5.222	2.003	1	9
CCP membership	.314	.464	0	1
Ethnicity (Han)	.897	.296	0	1
Household type (rural)	.218	.413	0	1
Region:				
East China	.270	.444	0	1
Northeast China	.097	.297	0	1
North China	.192	.394	0	1
Central China	.161	.368	0	1
South China	.079	.255	0	1
Southwest China	.114	.318	0	1
Northwest China	.077	.266	0	1
Other (non-mainland China)	.010	.101	0	1
History textbook	.243	.429	0	1
Visiting memorial/museum	.681	.466	0	1
Watching TV/movie	.905	.293	0	1
Foreign information	.698	.459	0	1
Travelling to Japan	.079	.270	0	1
Knowing Japanese people	.242	.428	0	1

Figure 1: Students' General Attitudes towards Japan



Next, regression modelling was used to identify the variables that have significant influences on general attitudes towards Japan. Given the ordinal nature of the dependent variable, we chose ordered logit regression. A battery of regression models was estimated with different modelling specifications. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Ordinal Logit Regression of Negative Sentiment towards Japan

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Gender (male)	.582*** (.100)	.619*** (.102)	.562*** (.102)	.596*** (.103)	.599*** (.100)	.299***
Family income	-.066* (.027)	-.070** (.027)	-.049* (.025)	-.051* (.028)	-.068** (.025)	-.136**
CCP membership	.189 (.106)	.190 (.107)	.186 (.108)	.177 (.109)		
Ethnicity (Han)	.035 (.169)	.050 (.171)	-.013 (.173)	-.001 (.174)		
Household type (rural)	.129 (.126)	.181 (.129)	.147 (.129)	.177 (.131)		
Region:						
Northeast China	.172 (.187)	.157 (.190)	.180 (.189)	.168 (.191)		
North China	.100 (.145)	.107 (.145)	.154 (.149)	.156 (.149)		
Central China	.037 (.154)	.056 (.155)	.039 (.155)	.065 (.155)		

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
South China	-.241 (.206)	-.200 (.207)	-.219 (.211)	-.176 (.211)		
Southwest China	-.300 (.170)	-.257 (.172)	-.269 (.172)	-.221 (.173)		
Northwest China	.119 (.205)	.172 (.205)	.174 (.206)	.235 (.206)		
Other (non-mainland China)	-1.713** (.587)	-1.440* (.605)	-1.226* (.582)	-1.202* (.596)	-1.263* (.516)	-.127*
History textbook		.238* (.115)		.242* (.118)	.259* (.115)	.111*
Visiting memorial/museum		.126* (.060)		.123* (.062)	.126* (.061)	.080*
Watching TV/movie		.704*** (.186)		.577** (.198)	.623** (.190)	.183**
Foreign information			.052 (.108)	-.027 (.112)		
Traveling to Japan			-.559** (.208)	-.579** (.209)	-.504* (.201)	-.136*
Knowing Japanese people			-.575*** (.123)	-.565*** (.124)	-.572*** (.121)	-.245***
Model fit Statistics:						
Log-likelihood	-1884.4***	-1860.1***	-1827.5***	-1812.0***	-1819.4***	-1819.4***
R ²	.074	.106	.123	.142	.136	.136

Notes: (1) N = 1458; (2) Numbers in parentheses are standard errors; (3) From two-tailed tests, * P<.05; ** P<.01; *** P<.001; (4) For "region" dummy variables, in Models 1–4 East China is the reference group and thus omitted, while in Models 5–6 the reference group becomes all regions within mainland China.

First, we estimated a baseline model, Model 1, which only contained basic socio-demographic variables. Of these socio-demographic variables, only gender, family income, and other region (non-mainland China) have significant effects on negative sentiment towards Japan. Male students tended to hold more negative sentiment than female students, and students from less well-off family backgrounds disliked Japan more than their better-off counterparts. Students from outside mainland China showed less negative attitudes towards Japan in comparison with mainland Chinese students.

Second, building on baseline Model 1, we examined the effects of nationalist propaganda. Model 2 further included variables representing history textbooks, visiting memorials or museums, and watching television or films. All of the variables relating to nationalist propaganda had significantly positive coefficients, so they all increased negative sentiment towards Japan. People under greater influence of nationalist propaganda were more likely to develop more negative sentiment towards Japan.

Third, we added information diversity variables, including foreign information sources, experience of visiting Japan, and knowing Japanese people in person, to the baseline Model 1, which produced Model 3. All of these variables representing alternative channels for getting to know Japan had negative coefficients, so they all decreased negative sentiment. Having access to foreign information sources, experience of visiting Japan and knowing Japanese people in person all depressed negative sentiment towards Japan. In particular, the effects of visiting Japan and knowing Japanese people were statistically significant, while having access to foreign information sources was not. Personal experiences were particularly effective in altering students' negative attitudes towards Japan.

Fourth, we brought both nationalist propaganda and information diversity variables into the modelling and arrived at the complete model, Model 4. All previous findings held. All three nationalist propaganda variables promoted negative sentiment towards Japan, while all three information diversity variables, especially the two personal experience variables, reduced negative sentiment.

Next, the different interaction terms between the nationalist propaganda variables and the information diversity variables were tested. None of the interactions had any significant effect. Hence, the hypothesised interaction effect between nationalist propaganda and information diversity was not supported. The lack of interaction effect suggests that nationalist propaganda is influential whether the individual has alternative information sources or not.

Fifth, we applied the stepwise modelling procedure to the modelling. Instead of specifying a model with certain variables *ex ante*, the process was modelled and the stepwise model selection technique was allowed to select relevant variables into the final model. The final model, Model 5, confirmed that all the nationalist propaganda variables and the personal contact with Japan variables were significantly

associated with attitudes towards Japan. The results were consistent with those from the previous models. Nationalist propaganda promoted negative sentiment towards Japan, whereas diverse information, especially personal contact with Japan, decreased negative sentiment. No interaction terms were selected into the final model, indicating a lack of interaction effect between nationalist propaganda and information diversity.

Finally, to compare the relative importance of these significant variables, we further estimated a model that uses standardised coefficients. First, all explanatory variables were rescaled and transformed into standardised scores (with a mean of zero and a variance of one). Then we re-estimated Model 5 with these standardised variables. The results were presented in Model 6. The standardised variables were unit-free so their effects were now comparable. By comparing the standardised coefficients, we were able to examine which variables had greater effects. Of the significant variables, gender (being male), knowing Japanese people in person, and watching anti-Japanese television or films had the greatest impact on negative sentiment towards Japan, followed by income, visiting Japan, coming from outside mainland China, history textbooks, and visiting memorials or museums. Therefore, of the nationalist propaganda variables, television and films were the most effective, followed by history textbooks. Memorials and museums were the least effective in fostering anti-Japanese sentiment. It is also worth noting that personal contact with Japan was very effective at mitigating negative sentiment towards Japan. In some cases, the mitigating effect of personal contact with Japan rivalled and potentially offset the nationalism-promoting effect of nationalist propaganda.

Conclusion and Discussion

There has been much discussion of the role of the CCP-led nationalist propaganda (including patriotic education) in inciting prejudice against foreign countries, Japan in particular. This study is the first attempt to quantitatively evaluate the actual effect of this propaganda on anti-Japanese sentiment. Among elite university students in Beijing, nationalist propaganda does have a significant effect on levels of negative sentiment towards Japan. Dependence on state-sanctioned textbooks for information about Japan, visiting museums and memor-

ials, and watching television programmes and movies relating to the War of Resistance against Japan are all associated with more intense anti-Japanese sentiment. This study provides empirical evidence in support of a link between nationalist propaganda and anti-Japanese sentiment. It seems that the CCP has no intention of loosening its propaganda effort any time soon. In January 2016, for instance, the Ministry of Education issued another directive calling for patriotic education to “suffuse each stage and aspect of schooling” (Buckley 2016). We conjecture that, as the CCP continues or even intensifies its nationalist propaganda, nationalism – including anti-Japanese sentiment – in China will remain salient.

Diverse information channels are associated with less negative sentiment towards Japan. In particular, personal contact with Japan provides direct channels for learning about Japan beyond state propaganda, which may help to mitigate anti-Japanese sentiment. As more and more Chinese visit Japan and get into direct contact with Japan and its people, these Chinese have alternative channels for gaining knowledge about Japan. Direct contact with Japan exposes them to today’s Japan which differs from the historical images depicted in China’s domestic media. The Chinese people who travel to Japan develop more positive attitudes towards Japan as a result. Therefore, promoting Japan-bound tourism may be an effective way of improving the Chinese people’s attitudes towards Japan.

It is also interesting to note that there is an absence of interaction effect between nationalist propaganda and information diversity. Although personal contact with Japan may improve students’ attitudes towards Japan, the influences of nationalist propaganda are still at work even for those who have personal contact with Japan. Therefore, nationalist propaganda is widely effective in promoting anti-Japanese sentiment. Nationalist propaganda, such as patriotic education, is instilled in students from a very young age and covers many stages and aspects of schooling. Its impact can be deeply ingrained into students and remains influential even when students have alternative information sources. Nevertheless, the lack of any interaction effect also highlights the effectiveness of personal contact with Japan in mitigating anti-Japanese sentiment. Regardless of the extent of the influence of nationalist propaganda, having direct contact with Japan consistently improves attitudes towards Japan. Even for those who are heavily influenced by state propaganda, personal contact with

Japan is just as effective at mitigating anti-Japanese sentiment. Overall, nationalist propaganda and personal experiences both operate effectively but independently in influencing people's attitudes towards Japan.

Last but not least, we reflect on the limitations of this study. This study empirically confirms the presence of a link between nationalist propaganda and anti-Japanese sentiment. Thus, people who are under greater influence from state propaganda tend to be more anti-Japanese. However, due to the cross-sectional nature of the survey data, we should refrain from jumping to strong causal conclusions. There can be unobserved confounding variables (such as a family history of suffering during the Japanese invasion) that make people both more prone to propaganda and more anti-Japanese. Reverse causality is also a possibility, especially in the case of watching anti-Japanese television or movies and visiting memorials or museums. Individuals with stronger anti-Japanese sentiment may be more willing and more likely to watch anti-Japanese television or movies and to visit memorials or museums. This reverse causality is less likely in the case of history textbooks, though, because all students must study state-sanctioned textbooks at school. To better establish causality it would be helpful to collect longitudinal data to survey individuals before and after exposure to nationalist propaganda. For example, we might survey individuals' sentiment towards Japan before they visited a memorial and then survey them again after the visit. This type of data would be more effective in establishing causality.

Finally, this survey was conducted at three elite universities in Beijing, so the group under study is the student body of these universities. We should avoid over-generalising the findings here to all university students around China, let alone other social groups. The elite university students under study possess unique characteristics. They are admitted into top universities so they may be among the best at studying in their high schools or even regions. They are likely to be diligent students who pay close attention to school curricula and programmes, and thus are potentially more prone to patriotic education. By the same token, they are also likely to be some of the most intelligent students from all over China and may have more potential to become independent and critical thinkers. In this sense, they may develop their own independent assessment of Japan and are less likely to be manipulated by state propaganda. Considering these two com-

peting perspectives, it remains an open empirical question whether elite university students are more or less prone to nationalist propaganda. In future research it would be interesting to compare this elite student group with other social groups. The comparison would further our understanding about the influence of nationalist propaganda on elite university students, a group likely to take on leadership roles and thus have a great impact on Chinese society in the future.

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