

Alternative Online Chinese Nationalism: Response to the Anti-Japanese Campaign in China on Hong Kong's Internet

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In April 2005, a series of anti-Japanese demonstrations broke out in China. Scholars such as Liu Shih-diing proposed that these events were a milestone in the development of China's "online nationalism." Based on Liu's analytical framework, this paper studies the concurrent and subsequent response of Hong Kong's "cybermen" to the anti-Japanese discourse prevalent within the mainland Internet community from April 2005 to March 2007, analyzes the reasons behind the differences, and previews a likely pattern of online Chinese nationalism should political circumstances in Beijing one day more approximate those of present-day Hong Kong.

In April 2005, a series of anti-Japanese demonstrations broke out in China and South Korea to protest against "Japanese militarism" and Tokyo's bid for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Liu Shih-diing published a perceptive article in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* in November 2006, describing these events as a milestone in the development of China's "online nationalism" (Liu, 2006). However, is this form of Chinese nationalism to be found throughout China and/or the Greater China Region? Do the mainland Chinese Internet users described in Liu's article – Who we will call "cybermen"? – have a different nationalist attitude than their compatriots living on China's periphery in places such as Hong Kong? If Liu's observation were correct and representative of contemporary Chinese politics, would it be applicable for an eventually democratized China of the future?

Based on Liu's analytical framework, this paper attempts to do the following in three parts: (a) study the concurrent and subsequent response of Hong Kong's cybermen to the anti-Japanese discourse prevalent within the mainland Internet community from April 2005 to March 2007; (b) analyze the reasons behind the differences; and (c) preview a likely pattern of online Chinese nationalism should political circumstances in Beijing one day more approximate those of present-day Hong Kong. To parallel major mainland Internet sources used by Liu, such as the Strong Nation Forum (SNF, Qiangguo Luntan), Internet forums focusing on political discussion established in Hong Kong will be our primary sources of reference. Major forums studied include the following:

- The Yahoo! Hong Kong Forum (YHKF)¹: An extension of The Yahoo! Hong Kong, ranked as the most-visited forum in Hong Kong by Alexa Internet's statistics. Yet political discussion is relatively unheated².
- The Hong Kong Discussion Forum (HKDF)³: Founded in 2004, claims to have 2 million registered members. It ranks as the second most-visited website in Hong Kong.
- The Uwants Forum (UF)⁴: Founded in 2003, managed by the Uwants Company

Limited and consists of 200 thematic forums. It claims to have over 1,200,000 registered members, ranking it as the third most-visited forum in Hong Kong.

- The Xocat II Forum (XIIF)⁵: Specializes in discussion relating to social science subjects in general.
- The Hong Kong Golden Forum (HKGF)⁶: Popular among the youth when it relates to computer hardware and software, generally seen as pro-democratic in Hong Kong.
- Japanese Knowledge Forum (JKF/Zhiri Bowu)⁷: A forum supported by The Chinese University of Hong Kong Student Union, and the students and professors in its Department of Japanese Studies. It aims to promote Japanese culture in Hong Kong and to exchange opinions in Japanese culture and politics.
- The History Forum KTzone (HFKTZ)⁸: A forum focusing on history.
- The Diaoyu Islands Defending Forum (DIDF)⁹: Run by the Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyu Islands (ACDDI), whose members are mainly activists.
- The Leftwing Forum (LF)¹⁰: A forum established by a local student named Li Roufou whose position it is to support the legacy of the New Leftists on the mainland.

Anti-Japanese Nationalism Online: Comparison between Mainland China and Hong Kong

In 2005, when mainland nationalists launched a series of physical demonstrations against Japan, “crowds” also gathered at Victoria Park, Hong Kong’s trademark of protest, and marched to government headquarters. But it was reported that only about 500 people participated in the protest, a disapproval similar to that shown for the Japanese bid for the UNSC permanent membership, a rightist version of a Japanese history textbook, Japanese prime minister Junichiro Koizumi’s visit to Yasukuni Jinjya and Tokyo’s sovereignty claim over the disputed Diaoyu (Senkoku) Islands, etc. (HK police, 2005). In comparison with the protest on the mainland, Hong Kong was entirely peaceful and there were no reports of damage to Japanese supermarkets or cars. As emphasized by one of the organizers, Albert Ho, vice-chairman of the Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyu Islands (ACDDI), “we shall not shatter glass or overturn cars, but we shall express our deepest sense of anger against Japan” (Anti-Japanese protests, 2005). Unlike other larger-scale demonstrations organized in Hong Kong in recent years, such as the notable July 1st demonstrations in 2003 and 2004, the anti-Japanese demonstration in Hong Kong was far more formality-oriented with relatively little passion shown among the crowd. Similar responses toward anti-Japanese Chinese nationalism in Hong Kong are also found in the local Internet community, which has never been as fervent as its mainland counterparts when foreign affairs are the topic of discussion. The differences between Hong Kong and mainland forums in response to anti-Japanese nationalism have three well-defined features and are described as follows.

Rational Cynicism Against Mainland Fenqings

To start with, the rationale for anti-Japanese Chinese nationalism was, in principle, shared by Hong Kong cybermen. However, most Hong Kong cybermen – regardless of their sentiments toward Japan – saw themselves as rational critics, but labeled the fervent anti-

Japanese mainland nationalists as “fenqings” (furious teens)¹¹. Some users in Hong Kong, exemplified by the following posted in the JKF, juxtaposed fenqings with disdained Japanese rightists:

Fenqings and Japanese rightists are basically the same: nationalist, and subjective. They share the same mentality, except in different positions... The kind of people who are unable to think are the same in any place, aren't they? (Message ID351, 2005)

The appearance of this sort of argument in Hong Kong forums was significantly more frequent than on the mainland. From the logic they demonstrated, many Hong Kong cybermen identify themselves as Chinese nationalists and in registering mild protests against the Japanese cannot be simply described as pro-Western liberals. But at the same time, they were desperate to exhibit their disapproval of extreme anti-Japanese behavior in China. As one suggested in the HKGF, Hong Kong patriots were not coming from the SNF, “whose cybermen are all but fenqings” (Message ID894554, 2007).

Such cynicism ran parallel with rationality in the Hong Kong cyberworld. Many messages in the SNF and other mainland forums were not only expressional but also functional, as they served the purpose of mobilizing participants to join the anti-Japanese demonstration or signature campaign. For instance, messages similar to the following were repeatedly found in the SNF:

Kofi Annan has already pledged his support to the Japanese application for UNSC Permanent Membership. I am inviting my fellow countrymen to sign our names to express our opposition online.... For those who do not want to sign, please forward this to your friends. (Message ID4210, 2006)

In fact, the entire anti-Japanese demonstration in Shenzhen and Beijing was “cyber-rooted” (China's cyber-warriors, 2005). This mode of online mobilization is by no means unfamiliar to Hong Kong cybermen, whose contribution in mobilizing participants for the July 1 demonstrations from 2005 to 2007 is well noted. Even on and before 1 July 2007, when the demonstration had waned considerably in Hong Kong compared with that of 2005, various messages were still posted mobilizing fellow users to join the protest (Message ID976441, 2007). However, there was almost no effort made in the Hong Kong cyberworld to mobilize other users to join the anti-Japanese demonstration, suggesting most Hong Kong cybermen were disinclined to organize massive nationalist movements themselves. Instead, a cool rational calculation of the effectiveness of any anti-Japanese movement was commonly found. Even non-violent and politically correct movements organized by fellow Hong Kong citizens, such as those aimed at signalling Chinese sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands, were dismissed as representing “extreme nationalism”. A representative use of this calm and rational approach is seen in a posting titled “fenqings are as pitiful as Japanese youngsters”:

The protestors for the Diaoyu Islands from Hong Kong and Taiwan are patriotic. However, have they ever thought about the effectiveness of such protests? Screaming and shouting cannot force the Japanese government to relinquish their claim over the

Diaoyu Islands. They'd better think of more practical means. Nationalism is not extremism! (Message ID4353112, 2007)

Understanding of the Japanese Arguments

Another feature of the Hong Kong cyberworld's response to anti-Japanese Chinese nationalism that was largely absent on the mainland was the high degree of understanding of the Japanese arguments, no matter whether the arguments were being endorsed or not. For instance, Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Jinjya, which received constant criticism from Chinese leaders like Premier Wen Jiabao¹², as well as mainland cybermen, went almost unnoticed by the Hong Kong cyberworld (Wen Jiabao, 2007). In the SNF, most cybermen strongly disagreed with categorizing the Yasukuni Jinjya issue as a religious issue, and regarded the worship as a cult owing to the presence of souls of "Class A" war criminals like Hideki Tojo (Message ID613611, 2006). Yet many Hong Kong cybermen who expressed a slight degree of anti-Japanese sentiment found the visit to be a "normal activity" of the Japanese, and chose to dismiss its political implications:

I am not speaking on behalf of the Japanese. But actually, paying respect to war heroes' souls is understandable. Whether they are top-level war criminals is not a problem. The only problem is the social status of the visitor, Koizumi. If Koizumi is an ordinary citizen, then everyone would accept it, right? If so, why bother? (Message ID703472, 2006)

In addition, some cybermen in Hong Kong seemed to be able to gather information released by the Japanese. For instance, a user of the HFKTZ simply treated those being worshipped in Yasukuni Jinjya as martyrs:

Besides the eleven top-ranking war criminals from WWII, Yasukuni Jinjya hosts many heroes and martyrs from the founding stages of modern Japan. Koizumi's visit may not represent his agreement with the war criminals. It may only represent his respect for the founding heroes of Japan. (Message ID703472, 2006)

Another typical example showing Hong Kong cybermens' general understanding of the Japanese argument – and subsequently their distance from the mainland Chinese – took place on 23 June 2006. On that day, two Chinese men reportedly attempted to attack a Japanese policeman in Tokyo, resulting in the death of one and the arrest of the other. In response, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked for a full investigative report, and mainland forums were again crowded with anti-Japanese messages. In contrast, most Hong Kong cybermen saw this as a minor issue that deserved no official diplomatic response. Quite a number of cybermen, such as the author of the following post on the JKF, even accused Beijing of stirring up trouble, as if it was only a local incident involving no foreigners:

Can such minor stuff be regarded as a Sino-Japanese diplomatic issue? The Chinese government is just so tense. Why doesn't it simply attempt to govern the Chinese mobs in Japan? (Message ID69, 2007)

In a similar vein, many Hong Kong cybermen wish to be thought of as experts on Japan: even the pro-Beijing LF feature many rational analyses such as the following:

Abe Shinzo may repeat the deeds of Junichiro Koizumi to gain more support from the extreme rightists. Strangely, although there are few extreme rightists in Japan, their influence in the economic and political arenas is not small. We are just not sure whether the Japanese seniors in the politics and business sectors have strong passions for the rightist thoughts or not. (Message ID8457, 2007)

Localization vs. Nationalization: Absence of Criticism toward Beijing, Abundance of References Made to Hong Kong

Although mainland forums are still heavily censored, according to Liu's study, some extreme anti-Japanese opinions had gone far beyond the official line (Liu, 2006). For instance, the online critics Zaopao.com compared the PRC regime directly with the weak late Qing dynasty:

Now we are in a critical moment. We hope Beijing is not imitating the government of the late Qing dynasty. Weakness would encourage the arrogance of our enemy.... We are unhappy to witness a successful China being as weak as the late Qing in handling Sino-Japanese relations. (Message ID903, Zaopao, 2007 July 9)

This post is cross-referenced in many mainland forums, such as the China918 Forum, which was later renamed the Patriotic Alliance Website (Wang, 2007). Since anti-Japanese protests in China were nominally illegal, some 40 protestors were arrested by the police. (Shanghai arrested, 2007) Not unexpectedly, the arrests were heavily condemned by mainland cybermen. Following that, on 22 April 2005, three mainland discussion forums hosted by the "Chinese Federation of the Diaoyu Islands Defenders", China918 and Guangdong918, were shut down by the government (Some anti-Japanese, 2005).

Indeed, it is not uncommon for Chinese nationalists to criticize their government by speaking in a patriotic tone. Dating back to the Belgrade Embassy Bombing in 1999, many online messages on the mainland have explicitly targeted the regime for its weak response toward the U.S. (Sang, 1999). Similar criticism of Beijing's Japan policy after 2005 has indeed helped channel anti-government sentiments as well (Message ID113817, 2006). In contrast, Hong Kong cybermen – who are usually more critical of Beijing than their mainland colleagues – expressed far less criticism of Beijing's Japan policy and took no advantage of the situation to advance their criticism of the central government, not even the like-minded Hong Kong new leftists on the LF (Message ID8507, 2007). The focus of nationalists in Hong Kong who had shown anger toward Japan in local forums was rarely directed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, perhaps partly owing to the "one country, two systems" principle, which allowed no diplomatic and national defensive issues to be handled in Hong Kong. Lacking an inclination to take part in national diplomacy, Hong Kong citizens criticized Beijing's official foreign policy, not unsurprisingly, somewhat mutedly.

One of the only exceptions to this in Hong Kong in recent years was found in an article

that questioned Beijing's concessive attitude to Russian territorial claims. This was titled *When the Kuril Islands Become Sakhalin Islands*, which was published in the mainstream media platform Apple Daily as well as on the author Lin Ji's Internet blog diary (Lin, 2007). Yet, the article received little attention from either the press or from the Internet, in sharp contrast to the online movies and commentary articles on local politics produced by the same author. He has a record of receiving tens of thousands of hits for one of his entries ridiculing the Hong Kong government's celebration of its tenth anniversary (Message ID8507, 2007). More importantly, the focus of the article – criticizing Hong Kong Observatory for its use of the Russian name – still targeted the HKSARG only, instead of Beijing.

As a mark of difference, it is unlikely that mainland cybermen would link Sino-Japanese relations to provincial politics in Guangdong or Shanghai. Yet when Hong Kong cybermen attempted to distance themselves from the anti-Japanese fenqings on the mainland, instead of commenting further on Chinese politics or Chinese diplomacy, they were more inclined to use the differences to talk about local politics in Hong Kong. In particular, many Hong Kong cybermen made reference to the official promotion of patriotic education as an attempt at decolonization of the Special Administration Region (SAR): “the increasingly intensive anti-Japanese sentiment mobilized in Hong Kong is mainly owing to patriotic education promoted after the handover in 1997” (Message ID8, 2006). In the radically pro-democratic HKGF, many cybermen tied the anti-Japanese demonstration in China to the growing anti-Japanese sentiments featured in Hong Kong's history syllabus:

Questions in the history examination for college entrance only emphasize facts. Students trained in this system would focus on Japanese war crimes of the past, rather than Sino-Japanese cooperation of the future. National humiliation in the past should not be forgotten, of course, but we need to face the future. (Message ID978601, 2007)

Limitations of Collection Sources

Before explaining the differences found between mainland and Hong Kong Chinese cybermen's responses to anti-Japanese nationalism since 2005, we need to acknowledge the limitations of the collection sources for this article. First, theoretically, is the establishment of the Internet aimed at promoting the free flow of information without geographical boundaries. We can only distinguish mainland and Hong Kong forums by two features: their different domain names and the different modes of Chinese used. In the Internet community, there are two major Chinese-character input systems: Traditional Chinese (coded in “Big5”) used in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and Simplified Chinese (coded in “GB2312”) used on the mainland. However, it is possible for Hong Kong cybermen to post messages on mainland forums by using Simplified Chinese, and the other way around. The HKLF, for example, is famous for the presence of mainland-originated members. It is technically impossible to completely separate the forums from one another, even though a differentiation between the two regions is obvious at present.

Second, on the mainland, the Party's Propaganda Department (PPD) is responsible for containing anti-Japanese demonstrations, both physical and virtual, to a controllable level (Xu, 2005; Liu, 2005). On 17 April 2005, the Jiefang Daily propagandized the importance of

preserving stability, calling protesters to act “calmly and reasonably” (*lengjing lizhi*) (Shanghai government, 2005). Two days later, Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing told the PPD that “the masses ... must believe in the Party and the government’s ability to properly handle all issues relating to Sino-Japanese relations” (Foreign Minister, 2005). In response to Li’s instructions, the PPD issued new guidelines for websites and media, resulting in the disappearance of most incendiary articles about Japan from mainstream online forums, effectively banning the latter. In contrast, online censorship basically does not exist in Hong Kong. It might, therefore, be logical to assume there is an even greater contrast between the two online environments while censorship is lifted from the mainland one day.

Lastly, owing to the fact that Sino-Japanese relations have not become a very hot topic among the Hong Kong Internet community, we have to reference ten different forums to remap the mosaics. For instance, anti-Japanese nationalism has never been given focus in the Independent Media Hong Kong (*Xianggang Duli Meiti*), a left-wing interactive forum in Hong Kong famous for its tendency to mobilize Internet users to participate in local political issues (The Independent Media Hong Kong, 2007). In addition, it is possible for some Hong Kong cybermen to mention the topic in passing, perhaps as part of their discussion on pop culture, but their comments are nonetheless recorded by our research. In other words, while anti-Japanese sentiment on the mainland would likely be more powerful if censorship was lifted, it may already be overstated in Hong Kong.

Interpreting the Differences

In the *Journal of Contemporary China*, Yang Guobin once argued that with the popularization of Internet usage on the mainland, anti-Japanese ideology was likely to spread fast and wide. This would both mobilize the mainland public to become engaged in additional activities and also muster an anti-Japanese public across the border (Yang, 2003). While Yang’s former prophecy is probably correct, the latter is yet to happen in Hong Kong. There may be three major reasons for the different responses to anti-Japanese nationalism seen in the mainland and Hong Kong forums discussed above. The first two relate to anti-Japanese nationalism in Hong Kong in general, and the third – more central to the argument of this article – is about the relationship between anti-Japanese nationalism and its online format in particular. These explanations are important to China in the sense that they may provide a reference point for ascertaining anti-Japanese nationalism in China should full democracy ever be granted to the country, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

Reaction toward Patriotic Education after the Handover

As expected, Chinese nationalism was never encouraged during Hong Kong’s colonial period. National education in Hong Kong at that time featured a de-politicized curriculum, talking about Chinese culture and history only from the Anglo-centric approach (Luk, 1991; Sweeting, 1996). Hong Kong citizens were, however, also discouraged from full integration with London. As a result, local identity in Hong Kong has only recently gradually developed, particularly since the 1970s (Lui, 2002). After 1997, former Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa explicitly voiced his concerns about an identity confusion in respect to regional and national contexts and suggested promoting “national education” (*guomin jiaoyu*) in Hong Kong. The

Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education (CPCE) of the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) is responsible for promoting national education in the SAR via a soft approach such as television programs and advertisements (RoadShow Civic Education Series, 2006). In 2004, the CPCE and the Commission on Youth jointly set up the Working Group on National Education (NEWG) to formulate strategies and plans to promote national education to the general public. The Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) is responsible for designing a new curriculum for students. For instance, the topic of “national identity and Chinese culture” has been added to the subject of “general studies”. As questioned by the HKGF user introduced in the last section, the new design of the history syllabus expects students to merely remember hard facts, which could end up increasing anti-Japanese sentiment among the next generation.

However, anti-Japanese nationalism was yet to be propagandized by the new education system for a series of reasons. First, unlike the mainland history curriculum, that of Hong Kong focused on British colonial rule more than the Japanese invasion of China, making anti-Japanese nationalism a less notable theme from the start. As one person said in the XIIF, “the tragedy perpetrated by the Japanese on the Chinese will not be easily acknowledged by the new generation of Hong Kong” (Message ID167892, 2006). Second, according to a research survey, many frontline teachers educated in the colonial curriculum were strongly hesitant about promoting patriotism in schools. Conscious of avoiding brainwashing the new generation, they taught national education in a way that usually resulted in discouraging students to react to China’s modern history nationalistically (12% of schools, 2007). Third, despite the dual nationalist and democratic identity possessed by many local politicians, as previously discussed, national education – interpreted as a top-down attempt by the central government to indirectly influence Hong Kong – had been a target of attack by pro-democratic politicians:

Without doubt, the people promoting national education aim at assimilating our next generation into agreeing with the political values of the mainland. The national educator believes that assimilation would bring harmony to Hong Kong, eliminate opposition parties and dismiss anti-PRC sentiments. Yet, should that happen, Hong Kong will no longer uphold “one country, two systems” as its administrative principle. “One country, one system” will be the case. (Wong, 2006)

This partly explains why anti-Japanese democratic politicians failed to produce a large pool of anti-Japanese young people among their supporters. Lastly, some attempts to promote national education, such as a short advertisement clip called “Our Home, Our Country” which uses the Chinese national anthem “The March of the Volunteers” as theme music, were considered old-fashioned, causing some youngsters to label anti-Japanese sentiment and patriotism unstylish. For instance, several online messages commented that the short advertisement was “hard to put up with” (Message ID756019, 2006).

The Role of Japanese Culture in the Hong Kong Identity

While mainland Chinese remain rather resistant to Japanese culture (and are interestingly more receptive to Korean idols), Japanese culture in Hong Kong has since the 1970s, with increasing financial transactions and trade taking place between Hong Kong and Japan (as represented by the influx of Japanese movies, idols, music, video games and all kinds of trendy utilities), been well merged into the local scene¹³. More importantly, this process overlapped the stage in the 1970s and 1980s when local people were developing their sense of a Hong Kong identity. Even the Hong Kong activists who initiated a social movement against Japan's sovereign claim to the Diaoyu Islands in the 1970s were heavily influenced by the influx of Japanese culture at the time. As a result, Chinese nationalists in Hong Kong have always taken a more rational stance toward Japan, as their innate emotions about Japanese culture were completely different from those found on the mainland. It is thus very difficult for people in Hong Kong to entertain boycotting Japanese products, both practically and emotionally, in the way mainland cybermen have proposed. The psychological complexity of the Hong Kong Chinese can be observed from messages such as the following:

Do you know the Japanese constitution? How much do you know about Japan? You know nothing about Japan, but you are now initiating an anti-Japanese protest. I am against your behavior and see it as a silly and ignorant decision. Could you please understand more about Japan before getting furious about her?! (Message ID8, 2006)

The importance of the above message, which was aimed at mainland cybermen initiating anti-Japanese protests, is its subtle reference to the fact that one of the themes of Hong Kong's local culture was to complain about the mainland's ignorance, or misunderstanding, of their compatriots in Hong Kong. The post implied that while there was a lack of understanding among mainland cybermen on Japan, from Hong Kong's perspective, a similar misunderstanding among the same people could also be applied to Hong Kong.

When the cultural aspect is taken into consideration, the stereotypical image of mainland anti-Japanese feelings in Hong Kong becomes even more destructive. It can best be seen from the controversies aroused by mainland Chinese actresses Zhao Wei and Zhang Ziyi. Zhao positioning herself alongside the Japanese military flag as a fashion statement sparked a massive Internet protest, which ended up with a nationalist physically assaulting her at a concert (ZhaoWei, 2001). Likewise, Zhang was seriously criticized by mainland cybermen as a "hanjian" (traitor to the Han ethnicity) because of her leading role in the movie "Memoirs of a Geisha"; geishas are mistakenly seen as low-ranking Japanese prostitutes in China. Zhang was asked to give up her Chinese citizenship, or to "verify" her loyalty to China by committing suicide (Zhang Ziyi, 2006). Therefore, when more serious anti-Japanese demonstrations are launched on the mainland, Hong Kong cybermen tend to make immediate reference to these two widely circulated examples which represent the parochial judgment and misunderstanding of mainland Chinese about external cultures, and resort to self-restraint against actively echoing their mainland fellows' views. For instance, when the anti-Zhang online movement became the finale to the anti-Japanese movement in 2005, most Hong Kong cybermen commented on it negatively, calling it "blind nationalism," and found it totally unacceptable. This was because the so-called wrongdoings of Zhao and Zhang were

considered quite permissible by Hong Kong's mainstream society:

Have you ever seen “Memoirs of a Geisha”? I have. The movie talks about Japanese society in the Warring period, and describes humanitarianism in detail. I don't think it is promoting any feudalist thoughts. Zhang is starring in a real society and representing the lower-class... It is only a social history movie; has it promoted any ideology? I cannot understand the reasons stated by the mainland extreme leftists against this film. (Message ID4991, 2006)

Multiple Identities of Anti-Japanese Organizations in a Free Society

A number of non-governmental organizations have been set up in Hong Kong whose aims are to demand compensation from Tokyo for the Japanese occupation of the territory from 1941 to 1945. There are also now anti-Japanese organizations developing on these grounds. The Hong Kong Reparation Association (HKRA) founded by pro-Beijing activists is a typical example. (Hong Kong Reparation Association Website, 2007) It has, however, close ties with its maternal political organizations. Notably, the HKRA frequently co-organizes anti-Japanese protests with the pro-Beijing political party the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB), which was proudly included in their website's front page. They tend to promote anti-Japanese nationalism to the public in Hong Kong only for their own political interests; their identities rest on their political stance, not their anti-Japanese take.

Another prominent anti-Japanese organization is the Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyu Islands (ACDDI) (Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyu Islands Website, 2007); the ACDDI can be considered the HKRA from the other side of Hong Kong's political spectrum. When many HKRA members were seen as having dual membership with the DAB, the ACDDI was set up by pro-democratic politicians, many of whom belonged to the Democratic Party (DP), or the more radical League of Social Democrats (LSD)¹⁴. For example, Albert Ho Chun-yan, vice-president of the ACDDI, is currently the secretary-general of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China as well as the chairman of the Democratic Party (Hong Kong). Chan King-sing, an active member of the ACDDI who went to the Diaoyu Islands in October 2006, is the convener of a tiny political party called the Saving Force of Democratic Hong Kong (Minzhu Jiugang Liliang), mainly formed by exiled democrats from the mainland, and a committee member of the radical democratic party, LSD. When it comes to nationalist issues, mainstream pro-democratic politicians in Hong Kong indeed never go beyond Beijing's line. However, to the public, the anti-Japanese gestures of the ACDDI and its members are more like part of their social activist movements than anything else. Since organizing social movements is a major way for the democrats to gain social influence and challenge the establishment in Hong Kong, ironically, the anti-Japanese stance assumed by Hong Kong democrats is often taken at merely face value by the public.

In his paper, Liu repeatedly stresses the bottom-up, autonomous “network struggle” as being the trademark nature of his coined online Chinese nationalism. However, as previously indicated, such a bottom-up network was formed not only against Tokyo but also against Beijing – as a euphemist way to advance Chinese rights to discuss official censorship. In

Hong Kong, where freedom of expression still exists, there is no need for politicians and cybermen to overuse anti-Japanese discourse for their own political purposes, or for the sake of activating civil society. Since Sino-Japanese relations have been viewed by the general public in Hong Kong as one of the many calculations used by politicians from all sides for gathering their own political momentum, those opting for an independent and autonomous civil discussion online have simply tended to avoid joining the anti-Japanese debate, no matter their personal views.. And those interested in politics would simply be attracted by the more prominent policies, without need to speak out indirectly via an authorized nationalist tone. To a certain extent, the anti-Japanese politicians are already alienated from the public in Hong Kong and only manage to absorb new members from their other political identities and affiliations. The relatively aloof response of the Hong Kong cyberworld toward Sino-Japanese relations, contrasted with the concurrent hot debates on other local political topics online in Hong Kong and the heated discussions on Japan in mainland forums, is simply an extension of the above.

Conclusion: Previewing Chinese Online Nationalism after Democracy

To summarize, we found the response of Hong Kong cybermen to anti-Japanese nationalism differed from that of their mainland counterparts in four ways. There was a general display of rational cynicism toward the labelled mainland fenqings; more understanding was expressed of the Japanese point of view; there was a relative absence of criticism of Beijing's official Japan policy; and more references were made to local politics in Hong Kong. These differences might be explained by the reaction in Hong Kong toward patriotic education promoted after the handover and the role played by Japanese culture in the Hong Kong identity. Yet, more importantly, anti-Japanese sentiments in Hong Kong are also diluted by the multiple identities of anti-Japanese organizations, whose members – having stronger identities in other political fronts in a free society – find it unattractive to exploit the anti-Japanese debate to voice their other opinions. The remaining question is: Would the same situation be observed in mainland China should freedom of speech and press one day mirror Hong Kong?

We have stated earlier that if online censorship were to be lifted in China solely on nationalism, fiercer anti-Japanese sentiments might be witnessed. However, if censorship were lifted for all topics in China, the answer is likely to be different. As a matter of fact, the current political structure in China makes the nationalist discourse one of the only platforms for ordinary citizens to use in order to apply the strategy of “kicking the ball from the side (chabianqiu)” if they wish to promote their freedom, interests and identity. They, indeed, have no or little intention of pressing the party-state to act on their expressions. The subtlety of this has not gone entirely unnoticed. Liu Shih-diing also remarks that the ordinary citizens in China are developing their own form of nationalism (renmin minzuzhuyi) – “an autonomous political domain that is independent of the state nationalism” (Liu, 2006). Ordinary people have no other option but to use the online forum. This freely accessible network provides an outlet for the public to discuss Chinese politics. By using extreme wording or postings, activists can garner public attention and package the political message in terms of nationalism, which seems to stand for the state. Once the new generation of Chinese had been equipped with the art of using split identity in the nationalist discourse, this became their platform for

carrying out public discursive rights. Christopher Hughes analyzed the discourse of various identified Chinese nationalists and found that most of them were “either not particularly interested in nationalism or [were] highly skeptical concerning its possibilities for solving the problems faced by the Chinese state” (Hughes, 2005). Considering the fact that public discursive rights have generally been lacking in the People’s Republic since its establishment, mainland cybermen have achieved much from taking part in the nationalist discourse.

Yet, should full democracy and civil rights be granted in China, online users would no longer need to use nationalist discourse to speak for their intrinsic values and basic rights of expression. At such a time, no matter whether Beijing opts for a stronger Japan policy or not, at least within the online community fervent anti-Japanese sentiment is likely to be toned down significantly. This may not happen to as unresponsive a degree as observed in the Hong Kong Internet forums today, but the extravagant atmosphere described in Liu’s article is also unlikely to recur.

Notes

¹ The Yahoo! Hong Kong Forum Yahoo! 香港討論區 hk.message.yahoo.com; accessed on 15 December 2006).

² Alexa rankings for discuss.com.hk (alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details, accessed on 12 July 2007). Same for the quoted rankings of other forums in the following section.

³ The Hong Kong Discussion Forum 香港討論區 (www.discuss.com.hk, accessed on 15 December 2006).

⁴ The Uwants Forum 香港討論區 (forum.uwants.com, accessed on 15 December 2006).

⁵ The Xocat II Forum XocatII 討論區 (forum.timway.com, accessed on 15 December 2006).

⁶ The Hong Kong Golden Forum 香港高登討論區 (forum.hkgolden.com/default.asp, accessed on 15 December 2007).

⁷ The Japanese Knowledge Forum 知日部屋討論區 (www.cuhkacs.org/~benng/Bo-Blog/index.php?go=category_18, accessed on 15 December 2006).

⁸ The History Forum KTzone 歷史討論區 (www.ktzhk.com/forumdisplay.php?fid=77&sid=K45nL, accessed on 15 December 2006).

⁹ The Diaoyu Islands Defending Forum 香港保釣論壇 (forum.diaoyuislands.org, accessed on 20 February 2007).

¹⁰ The Leftwing Forum 香港左翼論壇 (<http://leftwing.hk-dn.com/bbs/index.php>, accessed on 20 August 2007).

¹¹ In Cantonese, the character “*fen*” can be pronounced to mean human waste.

¹² On 3 April 2007, Wen again commented that the issue was something ‘deeply hurtful to Chinese emotions’ and demanded the Japanese stop visiting the shrine.

¹³ Japan is Hong Kong’s third largest trading partner after mainland China and the U.S., and Hong Kong is Japan’s ninth largest trading partner. Bilateral trade in 2006 totaled 4.41 trillion yen, with Japan’s exports accounting for 4.24 trillion yen and its imports for 177 billion yen.

¹⁴ Interestingly, members of the Civic Party, a new pro-democratic party in Hong Kong gaining increasing popularity, are trying to deviate further from the nationalist line and avoid declaring high-profile stances in Sino-Japanese relations.

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