The Problem with History: China’s Collective Memory in Sino-Japanese Relations

by

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For Mom, Dad, and Steven
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ............................................................................. 4  
List of Figures & Abbreviations ......................................................... 6  
A Note on Names .............................................................................. 7  

## CHAPTER ONE:
Introduction – The Problem with History ........................................ 8  
  The Historical Record .................................................................. 10  
  The Puzzle: Central Research Question ....................................... 12  
    - Systemic Arguments .............................................................. 13  
    - State-Centric Arguments ...................................................... 15  
    - Assessment of Arguments .................................................... 15  
  Core Concept: Collective Memory ................................................ 17  
  Central Argument ....................................................................... 19  
  Chapter Overview ....................................................................... 21  

## CHAPTER TWO:
First Phase – Elite Mechanisms Constructing Collective Memory ....... 23  
  Introduction ............................................................................... 23  
  The International Structure: Postwar Developments ................... 24  
  The Domestic Setting: Postwar Developments .......................... 29  
  Conclusion .................................................................................. 40  

## CHAPTER THREE:
Second Phase – The Weight of Public Opinion ............................... 42  
  Introduction ............................................................................... 42  
  The 1985 Demonstrations .......................................................... 43  
  History’s Opening ...................................................................... 46  
  Reshaped Collective Memory ....................................................... 55  
  The 2005 Demonstrations .......................................................... 61  


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 2010 Demonstrations</th>
<th>65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER FOUR:**

**Conclusion – The Universal Collective Memory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Claim</th>
<th>73</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions Regarding the History Problem</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Future of the History Problem</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Glossary of Chinese and Japanese Terms**

|               | 82 |

**Bibliography**

|               | 83 |
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LIST OF FIGURES:

Figure 1 – Monument to the People’s Heroes in Tiananmen Square, Beijing………………………………34

Figure 2 – Battle of Shanghai Baby……………………………………………………………………………50

Figure 3 – 2005 Demonstrations……………………………………………………………………………61

Figure 4 – Protestor Throws Eggs at Japanese Consulate………………………………………..62

Figure 5 – 2010 Demonstrations……………………………………………………………………………67

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

PRC – People’s Republic of China

CCP – Chinese Communist Party

KMT – Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)

US – United States

POW – Prisoners of War

WWII – World War II
NOTE ON NAMES AND FOREIGN WORDS:

Both Chinese and Japanese names are given in the conventional way with the family name first followed by given name, e.g. Mao Zedong. However, footnote references will follow the Chicago Manual Style of documentation for annotating authors’ names with the given name first followed by the family name, e.g. Yinan He or Ming Wan.

Most foreign words are italicized and are given with the characters of the language from which they originated. A Glossary of Chinese and Japanese Terms is given at the end of this thesis.
CHAPTER ONE
Introduction:
The Problem with History

Past experience, if not forgotten, is a guide to the future.

– Premier Zhou Enlai, 1972

The past, if not forgotten, can serve as a guide for the future.
By emphasizing the need to always remember the past, we do not mean to
continue the hatred. Instead, we want to draw lessons from history and be
forward-looking. Only by remembering the past and drawing lessons from it
can one avoid the repetition of historical tragedies.

– President Hu Jintao, 2005

China and Japan continue to give observers reasons to be ambivalent about the
strength of their political relationship. In November 2010, China’s Xinhua News
Agency conducted a survey of how Chinese youths between the ages of 15 and 35
years of age view Sino-Japanese relations. Only about 35% believe that there will be
an improvement in the next 5 years.

As two of East Asia’s most influential powers, their geographic proximity,
economic interdependence, cultural linkages, and shared “two-thousand year”
history show that both countries are deeply connected and that their strategic

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4 The phrase “two-thousand year history” or any variation of it was a recurrent expression used by Chinese and Japanese elites to allude to the exceptionalism that characterizes their long history of cultural, economic, and political interaction.
partnership could be immensely beneficial to each other as well as the East Asian region. Both nations are deeply involved in the economic, political, and social development of other nations around the globe, notably the United States (US). Hence, how China and Japan relate to each other affects the rest of the world. Despite their entrenched involvement, for decades, attaining mutual amity has been an ongoing struggle. Many are aware of the diplomatic hostility that exists between China and Japan, but few are cognizant of what the exact issues are and why they have arisen. In the same survey noted above, when asked what they thought of when Japan was mentioned, more than 67% of Chinese youths stated that they thought of historical issues.\(^5\)

The inspiration for this research project is a chronic concern in Sino-Japanese relations: the infamous “history problem.” Numerous scholars and journalists have assigned different meanings to this profound topic. But in this work, the history problem has a specific import; it refers to the way China has been set in opposition to Japan by Chinese actors who use accounts of their nation’s war history with Japan, especially the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945, to advance their own interests. The history problem is a decades-long issue that has triggered many diplomatic conflicts between China and Japan, and it persists to this day. Thus, the contemporary relationship between China and Japan cannot be properly understood without first exploring the historical narratives of their war history and the perceptions and viewpoints that have developed as a result.

China’s and Japan’s bilateral relationship is paralleled by few other countries precisely because of their documented, two thousand-year long history of interaction. Yet, it is the clashes between 1895 and 1945, particularly the conflict from 1937 to 1945, that have become a recurrent cause of diplomatic turbulence. In her discussion of history in Sino-Japanese relations, Caroline Rose appropriately describes this anomaly as “fifty years that overshadow two thousand,” beginning when Japanese annexed of Taiwan in 1895.\textsuperscript{6} In spite of two millennia of relatively peaceful relations, their recent war history appears to have established the emotional tone of contemporary Sino-Japanese relations. This eclipse is important because it directs our attention to that particular period of history.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

In order to assess the significance of history in Sino-Japanese relations, understanding the events that took place during their fifty-year war period is key. China and Japan clashed in two full-scale wars beginning with the First Sino-Japanese War from 1894 to 1895, after which Japan annexed Taiwan. In the Manchurian Incident of 1931, Japan captured the Chinese territory of Manchuria and created Manchukuo, a state controlled by the Japanese through a puppet government.\textsuperscript{7} But nothing compared to the suffering and shame that China experienced during the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945, which in part overlapped with World War II (WWII). Today most historians agree that approximately ten million Chinese


people died and possibly more were wounded during this war, although the exact numbers are still contested by scholars and government officials in China and Japan. In that second war, indiscriminate killing of Chinese civilians escalated after the Japanese invasion began, and the carnage intensified when Japanese troops captured Nanjing, Shanghai, and nearby cities. In Nanjing alone, more than 200,000 Chinese civilians and prisoners of war (POWs) were killed, about 20,000 women were systematically raped, and numerous cases of looting and destruction took place over a time span of about 6 weeks. This notorious event came to be known as the Nanjing Massacre. Other atrocities include the Japanese army’s infamous Unit 731, which used live POWs to test biological substances in cruel medical experiments, and the Japanese use of actual biological weapons, such as releasing plague-bearing fleas and poisonous gas, on Chinese civilians.

The Japanese also emerged from the war with psychological and physical scars, which would later set the tone for the country’s post-war treatment of the conflict. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the months of firebombing by the United States became ultimate symbols of Japanese national trauma in postwar Japan. The Japanese government estimated that approximately 3 percent of the total Japanese population died in WWII, including 1.7 million soldiers and 1 million civilians. Perhaps the most degrading outcome of all was Japan’s unconditional surrender and the subsequent seven years of Allied Occupation

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9 Ibid.
11 Yinan He. *The Search for Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 118.
whereby American leaders aimed to demilitarize and disarm Japan to guarantee that it would no longer pose a military threat.

The historical events described above form the contextual groundwork of the history problem. Sino-Japanese war history has become a subject of domestic and international diplomatic contestation engaged by various political leaders, activists, and other interest groups in China and Japan. Building onto my earlier definition, the history problem refers to a particular, unidirectional stream of confrontation: China as the “challenger” and Japan as the “defender.” Every diplomatic episode in this thesis describes a case in which Chinese actors challenged targets in Japan on issues concerning Japanese treatments of wartime history. These are the episodes that have captured a great deal of public attention globally, especially among academics who endeavor to explain this puzzle. And the history problem is indeed puzzling, for it seems to contradict two prevailing beliefs: first, that time can heal, or at least allow us to forget, all wounds and second, that increasing bilateral interaction should alleviate historical, especially wartime, grievances.

THE PUZZLE:
CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

Why do government leaders and sub-state groups engage in seemingly irrational history-related quarrels that go against national interests and that may endanger future relations with strategically valuable partners? Such a quarrel is the history problem in Sino-Japanese relations. To resolve this question, I will analyze how the problem has developed in China and how that development pitted China against Japan in their contemporary relationship. The answer I propose is unlike any existing accounts dealing with the history problem because I contend that the issue is
rooted in challenges to Chinese perceptions of Sino-Japanese war history. These perceptions have been institutionalized by China’s ruling elites for decades. Hence, when these understandings of history are challenged, quarrels may develop as a result, and these disputes can turn into extensive, large-scale protests. However, to understand why I have chosen this approach, it is important to first outline some of the current accounts of the issue.

Numerous works investigating the development and progression of the history problem have emerged, and they have identified numerous sources of the issue. Most of these works present arguments that can be categorized as systemic or state-centric. Systemic explanations examine the Sino-Japanese relationship from the perspective of their relative global or regional power, treating China and Japan as unitary entities, and explain the history problem in terms of differences in power between the two countries. State-centric arguments, on the other hand, claim that the history problem is really a result of manipulation by government leaders striving to meet domestic political ends.

Systemic Arguments:

Dr. Akio Takahara of the University of Tokyo maintains that the change in relative economic power between China and Japan (i.e. China’s rise as a global economic power) explains the emergence of the history problem because China’s rise has provided it with the wherewithal and self-confidence to seek retribution for Japan’s past war crimes. Similarly, there are others who argue that uneven currency exchanges, shifts in military power, trade imbalances, and disagreements over status
within the United Nations (UN) encourage Chinese leaders to instigate history-related conflicts with Japan. In short, systemic arguments maintain that ruling elites in China constructed the history problem as a method to meet domestic objectives, employing the “history card”\(^{13}\) against observable offenders in Japan when they deem it is necessary to prioritize their national goals over stable relations with Japan.

Mel Gurtov, among other scholars, propound another systemic argument that the degree of American and Soviet Russian influence and the Cold War alliance structure divided Japan and China along Capitalist vs. Communist and East vs. West lines, respectively. The Allied Occupation of Japan after WWII largely ignored Japanese war crimes committed throughout the Asian region – the Tokyo War Crimes Trials mainly dealt with the conflict between US and Japan.\(^{14}\) The Soviet Union, on the other hand, ardently supported China’s investigation of Japanese war crimes and even held its own trial for Japanese war criminals in Khabarovsk in 1949. Although these strategic lines of separation have been fading since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, proponents of this perspective argue that the alliance structure has left a legacy of mistrust between both nations, further aggravating the distrust that already existed after WWII.\(^{15}\)

State-Centric Arguments:


\(^{15}\) He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, 234.
A popular state-centric explanation for the history problem posits that the Chinese government mobilizes anti-Japanese nationalist behavior to further cement its legitimacy and generate national unity. China’s growing economic success has essentially reversed its role from “war victim” to “global power.” Although China can now boast industrial success, leaders continue to seek legitimacy domestically and internationally as a less-developed nation turned global power. Christian Wirth and Mark Peattie note that since the 1980s, Chinese leaders have strategically used the “history card” against Japan, exploiting its “victim” status to advance their own interests. For example, David Pilling argues that domestic disruptions such as the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 likely motivated Chinese leaders to play the “history card” to divert public attention away from internal disunity. In order to maintain their legitimacy and public distraction, government elites might have chosen an easy target like Japan to exploit.

Assessment of Arguments:

Both categories of explanations imply that the historical narrative being disputed is negligible, or at least trivial, in the history problem. Hence, in these approaches the issue is seen as a cover for seemingly unrelated motivations (e.g. economic, political, social). Furthermore, both arguments presume that war-related quarrels can be resolved rationally by establishing appropriate forums and

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arrangements for diplomatic negotiation. However, these accounts only capture a fraction of the larger issue at hand.

Supposing that proponents of systemic and state-centric arguments are correct, future history-related problems should have ended in 1982 when the first history-related quarrel occurred; but in reality, the history problem was only beginning. Chinese and Japanese leaders have tried time and again to resolve history-related disputes ever since the first incident occurred in 1982 with the Textbook Issue. In this dispute, Chinese elites furiously reacted to reports of officially sanctioned Japanese school textbooks that softened the language of the Japanese invasion of China during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Leaders in the Japanese Ministry of Education decided to change the sentence “Japan invaded China” to “Japan advanced into China.” After several rounds of negotiations with Japanese leaders, Beijing elites backed down and references to the issue completely disappeared from all official Chinese media. Even though negotiations were reached, other textbook-related issues arose in 1986, 2000, and 2005.

Diplomatic episodes concerning war history have actually erupted between China and Japan in a consistent fashion since the early 1980s and still persist today. Furthermore, the Textbook Issue arose decades after the Second Sino-Japanese War ended. The failure of broad, top-down arguments to account for the belated emergence and the persistence of the history problem suggests that something else is driving the diplomatic issue.

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18 Rose, *Interpreting History*, 82.
19 “invade” (shinryaku 侵略) was replaced by “advance” (shinkou 進行)
CORE CONCEPT:
COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The incongruity of current explanations for the history problem has led me to the concept of collective memory. There is a rich body of literature exploring the workings of collective memory in a variety of contexts. In this work I use collective memory to refer to the ideas that a society collectively holds about the past. Given this definition, there are a couple of critical elements essential to its usage in this thesis. First, there is a difference between collective memory, individual memory, and the historical record itself. Individual memory is built from past personal experiences and may be unreliable or distorted in a variety of ways, but it certainly can influence collective memory. The historical record, on the other hand, is a catalog of what historians claim actually happened in the past. It is constructed by professional historians who strive to compose the most “accurate” picture of history possible. Of course, even historians are not immune to the pressures and expectations of their society. In fact, many historians write history in accordance to what they intend to achieve by writing it. Societies can use history to serve its more immediate needs such as mourning war casualties, promoting social justice, or reinforcing a sense of national unity.

Second, it is important to distinguish collective memory from the official historical narrative. The official historical narrative is generally an account of a nation’s history that is created, reinforced, and evoked by political authorities more often than not to meet political ends. It is similar to collective memory in the sense that neither is entirely concerned with historical fact; rather, the politically endorsed narrative can profoundly shape the collective memories of society. Conversely, the official narrative can greatly influence collective memories as well. Both phenomena
are not always in harmony; in fact, they often exist in tension with each other in individual societies and such discrepancies can lead to powerful opposition.

The main point, however, is that collective memory functions in the present. Communities do not search for the factual record of historical events as an end in itself; rather, they create their own “usable past,” meaning, as I mentioned earlier, a narrative that can attend to the immediate needs of a society. Societies rebuilding after war, in particular, have many urgent needs; they must move beyond traumatic experiences and helplessness to foment a new sense of unity and a new national identity. To accomplish these goals, government leaders can manipulate collective memory by aligning it with the official historical account. Some methods of integrating official narratives with collective memory include erecting national monuments, holding annual events commemorating war incidents, and reiterating the official line in school textbooks, films, and media publications.

Thus, collective memory is also an important component of national identity formation. A nation’s history can affect how it perceives of its own identity and how this image is subsequently expressed is a part of a recurrent process. A nation’s self-image changes to adapt to a new social or political situation. This also means that states can embrace self-images that mirror their perceptions of threats posed by other nations, thereby provoking these nations’ distrust. In such cases, what is really being threatened is collective memory. History matters in this discussion because interpretations of the past are vital in characterizing a nation’s identity, and this identity can define a nation’s role in international society.

A nation’s history, however it is applied, manipulated, whitewashed, or exaggerated illuminates the fact that it matters. It matters what the narrative is, that
the narrative is agreed upon, and that outsiders also recognize it. A society needs to understand its historical account, for without it there are no national origins, narrative, or identity.

CENTRAL ARGUMENT:

I argue that the dynamics of collective memory explain why societies engage in history-related confrontations. Collective memory is powerful because it plays a large role in shaping historical narratives, national identity, nationalism, and in the case of China and Japan, it is as the root of the history problem. This memory can set the boundaries for the kind of historical narrative that a society embraces and articulates at any given point in time. Thus, it is a reflection of the social and political divisions of a community because various groups within a society can hold different perceptions of the past.

In China, because postwar governing elites enjoyed a monolithic control of institutions conveying myths about the nation’s recent war history, it is commonly argued that the governing elites used that control to shape collective memory in ways that they believed would advance Chinese national interests. And in so doing, the official historical narrative became integrated into the prevailing collective memory of Chinese society. In this thesis, I will demonstrate that this view holds only until the early 1980s because the official dominance of collective memory wanes after that time mainly due to the growing activity of non-governmental groups.

Contrary to widespread belief, contemporary Chinese public is informed by sources other than government propaganda. The opening up of Chinese society and the availability of advanced communication technology have created a space for
bottom-up discourse. Younger generations of Chinese society are well educated and informed about political issues, often observing the affairs of their neighbors and other countries around the world. They now have access to various channels of communication such as the internet through which they may articulate their opinions. Chinese youths, most of whom have never experienced war firsthand, are concerned about patriotism, national identity, and the historical accounts from which that identity is derived and reinforced. These interests explain why many young people became involved in the history problem; they have organized demonstrations, petitions, and boycotts targeting Japan for what they believe are inappropriate treatments of Sino-Japanese war history.

Because of popular involvement, divergences in official and popular historical interpretations have emerged, which it is why becoming increasingly difficult for Chinese elites to control collective memory. Although the Chinese government still limits freedom of expression with regard to historical issues, members of society still find ways to be heard, sometimes causing alarm among government officials when public messages have the potential of harming relations with Japan.

Thus, the history problem that has pitted China against Japan is a product of the way collective memory has developed in China as it shifted from being fully controlled by the government to looser control. This shift has led to collective memory contestation between China’s leaders and some members of society. In fact, I contend that one of the biggest issues for Chinese leaders today is reconciling public demands to resolve the history problem with the national interest of maintaining peaceful relations with Japan. If officials administer too much control of public discourse, members of the community may feel motivated to confront the government
for failing to handle the issue properly. For example, prominent political dissident and anti-Japanese activist Bao Ge created a coalition called the “All-China Alliance for Seeking Civil Damages from Japan” to demonstrate the government’s failure to protect public interests internationally (i.e. obtaining war reparations from Japan). Bao’s real intention was to delegitimize the government and mobilize anti-government nationalism based on elite failure to attain Japanese retribution for war crimes.\footnote{Minxin Pei, “Rights and Resistance: The Changing Contexts of the Dissident Movement,” in \textit{Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance} ed. Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden (New York: Routledge, 2010), 40.}

As I have suggested, the current literature examining the history problem in Sino-Japanese relations is incomplete because it fails to consider the impact of the collective memories. In fact, until now there has been no concrete academic work concentrating on Chinese collective memory. Nor is there extensive research that considers why or how the history problem emerged decades after WWII ended. More generally, the role of collective memory in social science accounts of international relations discourses has not been clearly specified. This thesis aims to resolve these deficits with a nuanced approach to exploring the history problem in Sino-Japanese relations.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW:

The best way to analyze the unique development of collective memory in China is to divide China’s postwar history into two phases. Chapter Two discusses the first phase from 1945 to 1985. First, I trace China’s postwar developments as they have been influenced by the international structure of the Cold War. Focus then turns
to the domestic sphere to analyze the transformations that China underwent since WWII ended in 1945. Both the international and domestic environments encouraged Chinese leaders to implement propaganda campaigns that ultimately shaped the hegemonic collective memory of society.

The second phase begins in 1985 and is explored in Chapter Three. I investigate the massive public disputes that emerged in 1985, 2005, and 2010 and document what led to them. This section highlights an important transition occurring in Chinese society; the weight of public opinion is having an effect on collective memory and pressuring authorities to carefully consider their foreign policy options before implementing them.

Finally, I offer some concluding remarks in Chapter Four. Here I summarize my findings and how they have answered my central research question. I will discuss the generalizability of collective memory and its role in international relations dialogue, drawing on the fact that little has been written on this relationship, even though many nations experience contention over historical matters at one point or another. I will then make some final statements about how both countries will likely proceed in the future.
CHAPTER TWO
First Phase:
Elite Mechanisms Constructing Collective Memory

INTRODUCTION

Collective memory is constructed in a variety of ways from many sources. To explore how it is created in China I return to 1945, when fighting between Japan and China ended, and the Second Sino-Japanese War became a historical event. This chapter discusses the first phase of the history problem, which I have set as beginning in 1945 and ending in 1985. This phase is highly crucial to my study of Chinese collective memory because, in many ways, how the war experience was treated during this immediate postwar period essentially created the history problem in Sino-Japanese relations.

Thus, this section will trace the development of China’s postwar period to investigate how leaders dealt with the war’s collective memory. The history problem’s first phase is largely characterized by the elites’ powerful role in shaping that memory by successfully integrating the official historical narrative of the war with it. Both the international political environment and domestic conditions motivated Chinese leaders to manipulate collective memory in pursuance of national goals. A major goal was generating unity by mobilizing support for Mao Zedong’s Communist regime. Determining how such goals developed requires a close investigation of international and domestic variables inspiring elite motivations to make use of collective memory. This exploration will lead to a better understanding of that memory’s role in developing the history problem.

THE INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURE:
POSTWAR DEVELOPMENTS

The events that unfolded immediately after the Second Sino-Japanese War ended in 1945 offer some insights into the international arrangement that separated China and Japan into conflicting coalitions. How the Chinese leaders operated within this international system lends some insight into the underpinnings of the history problem, which situated China at variance with Japan in matters of historical interpretation and war responsibility.

After World War II ended, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Kuomintang (KMT), or the Chinese Nationalist Party, resumed the civil war that had begun more than a decade earlier, and the next five years continued in domestic turmoil. This war is significant because it prevented society from having an appropriate time and space to deal with the previous war’s experience. In 1949, the civil war ended in a decisive victory for the CCP under Mao Zedong, creating the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Socialist leadership and ideology were officially installed in China. Even after the civil conflict ended, the war experience with Japan was essentially stowed away while China experienced a total transition as a new regime inaugurated its reign over the country.

As a communist country, China became officially supported by the Soviet Union, becoming subsumed into its sphere of support and influence in 1950. The Sino-Soviet alliance initially benefitted China, for it gained access to loans, machinery, and technical and military assistance enough to establish the foundation for military and economic modernization. This support system essentially tied

23 Ibid.
China to the Soviet Union and confronted the Japan-United States alliance. In fact, the Sino-Soviet alliance promised to aid China in the event of an attack by Japan or any of its supporters, as documented in the “Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance” signed in February 1950.\textsuperscript{25} Article I of the agreement stated:

The Two Contracting Parties undertake to carry out jointly all necessary measures within their power to prevent a repetition of aggression and breach of the peace by Japan or any other State which might directly or indirectly join with Japan in acts of aggression. Should either [sic] with Japan and thus find itself in a state of war, the other Contracting Party shall immediately extend military and other assistance with all the means at its disposal.\textsuperscript{26}

Five years after Japan surrendered, Chinese leaders still perceived Japanese militarism to be a real threat. The postwar alliance between China and the Soviet Union established China as an enemy of Japan within the bipolar international structure of the Cold War and the Korean War.

Japan, too, experienced a complete transformation after WWII, which fostered its close alliance with the United States. The 1945 Allied Occupation of Japan initially aimed to demilitarize and disarm the country to ensure that it would no longer pose a military threat, but this changed in the late 1940s when the Cold War arose in Asia, followed by the Korean War in 1950.\textsuperscript{27} In a speech in 1950, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson announced that Japan would be incorporated into America’s Pacific “defense perimeter.”\textsuperscript{28} After the Korean War began, American officials urged the Japanese government led by Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru to sign a security treaty that pressured Japan to rearm and grant the US full rights to the


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27} He, The Search for Reconciliation, 119.
use of military bases in Japan. This US-Japan Security Treaty maintained that stationed American forces would “contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East.”

This clause meant that Japan had to provide base facilities and other aid for American military encounters in China, Taiwan, or the Soviet Union.

From 1951-1952, the Security Treaty along with a peace agreement fastened Japan closely to the US and maintained the presence of American military forces there even after the Occupation ended in 1952 and Japan was declared an independent state. Prime Minister Yoshida had few other options but to become an ally of the US during the Cold War because signing the US-Japan Security Treaty would directly lead to the early conclusion of a peace treaty and the restoration of Japanese sovereignty.

The larger goal of securing autonomy ultimately forced Japanese officials to enter bilateral security agreements that drew China and Japan into opposing coalitions during the Cold War.

For the two decades after China and the US clashed in the Korean War, “containment and isolation” characterized American policy toward China. This policy necessitated active collaboration with Japan and encouraged leaders in Washington D.C. to push Japan to increase trade with and investment in non-Communist countries in Asia and to strengthen the economic and political stability of this region. In addition to using Japan to pursue its own economic goals, the US advanced Japan’s military involvement in their 1954 Mutual Defense Assistance

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28 Ibid, 120.
29 He, Search for Reconciliation, 120.
31 Ibid.
32 He, Search for Reconciliation, 121.
Agreement, which required Japan to augment its remilitarization process and take on more responsibility for its defense.\(^{33}\)

From the late 1940s to the early 1950s, PRC leaders grew increasingly suspicious of Japan’s close relationship with the US, which they believed was the ultimate imperialist country, especially when Japan began to negotiate treaties with the US and Taiwan. Japan’s cooperation with the “containment and isolation” strategy required it to develop formal relations with Taiwan, South Korea, and other American allies in Southeast Asia.\(^{34}\) To elites in Beijing, Japan’s official recognition of the Nationalist regime in Taiwan was an explicit defiance of their own authority and interests. They grew more resentful of American military assistance to the KMT in Taiwan. After the KMT was defeated in the civil war, President Harry Truman’s administration was reluctant to recognize the CCP regime and abandon the KMT government because such actions would have contradicted its campaign to persuade the American public and isolationists in Congress to endorse anti-Communist programs in Japan, Southeast Asia, and Europe.\(^{35}\) Leaders in Beijing were also bitter about Japan’s relationship with South Korea, which had been China’s opponent in the Korean War. Indeed, China was devoted to the socialist side and maintained several non-Communist, capitalist enemies.

Although the Cold War international structure divided China and Japan along strategic lines, the separation was superficial and inconsequential considering Beijing’s benign foreign policy preferences toward Japan in the early 1950s. Knowing that Japan and China were incorporated into opposing strategic camps

\(^{33}\) Ibid.
\(^{34}\) Rose, *Interpreting History*, 43.
\(^{35}\) Ibid.
might lead us to expect the two countries to have shared an intense mistrust and aversion. Anticipations of imminent armed conflict should have dominated foreign policy decision-making processes, primarily from the fear that they would be forced into a debilitating confrontation between coalitions. Mutual national recognition should have been impossible because bloc leaders would not have accepted friendship between their allies. If any mention of war history was brought up, it should have been done mainly to validate or bolster their official disapproval of the rival nation’s current policies.

Contrary to these expectations, Chinese leaders maintained a conciliatory attitude toward Tokyo throughout most of the first phase of the history problem because they were motivated by the larger goal of gaining diplomatic recognition from Japan.36 This conciliation was in part driven by Beijing elites’ desire to steer Tokyo away from American clutches, for CCP leaders believed that Japan and China were both victims of rogue military regimes: the Nationalists in China and the military clique that launched the Second Sino-Japanese war in Japan.37 Thus, Chinese officials never raised serious demands for war reparations because they feared doing so would hinder their “People’s Diplomacy” policy toward Japan. This policy was designed to promote friendly relations with Tokyo through long-term, cultural exchanges that would help to create a more favorable opinion of China in Japan to reverse Tokyo’s non-recognition policy of the PRC regime and weaken Japan’s security alliance with the US.38 People’s Diplomacy was also Beijing’s response to the American “containment and isolation” policy toward China. PRC elites believed

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37 Ibid, 145.
38 Rose, Interpreting History, 43.
that if they could build a coalition of socialist countries and smaller Western powers (e.g. Japan), they would be able to undermine international support for the US-led containment of China.\(^{39}\)

Though on the surface it seems that Chinese aspirations for diplomatic friendship with Japan were purely strategic, policies such as People’s Diplomacy are linked to collective memory. Although the Cold War’s structural limitations should have precluded Sino-Japanese cooperation, the war myths that elites produced to pursue domestic goals and formal Japanese recognition made cultural, economic, and political exchanges with Japan possible. As I will demonstrate, issues of Sino-Japanese war history did not materialize into mass public disputes during the first phase of the history problem because Chinese leaders successfully incorporated the official historical narrative into the prevailing collective memory. An account of international constraints must be combined with an account of internal political interests to understand the role of collective memory in Sino-Japanese relations during the first phase of the history problem. The following section will explore how Chinese elites used collective memory to advance domestic political objectives and how their strategy led to history-related disputes in the future.

THE DOMESTIC SETTING: POSTWAR DEVELOPMENTS

Domestically, Mao Zedong’s new government needed to make major changes after inheriting a war-wrecked country, whose recovery was further delayed by the outbreak of the Korean War. Formerly powerful capitalists, landlords, and the

bourgeoisie regarded the new Communist regime with suspicion, and some even carried out acts of subversion. Anti-Communist guerilla forces supported by the US and the KMT still operated in various parts of mainland China. Hence, to bolster the Communist revolution and cement class loyalty to the Party’s authority, Mao’s government made tremendous land reforms, suppressed counterrevolutionaries in the cities, and attacked capitalists in the Three Anti and Five Anti campaigns, which targeted private businesses.\textsuperscript{40} Often through violent means, these efforts were united with other radical campaigns to strengthen socialism.

These domestic obstacles prompted CCP leaders to institute a propaganda campaign to garner support for their regime and policies. In this context, elite-constructed myths intended to adjust Chinese history and build a Communist national identity that stressed the antagonism between Chinese Communists and capitalist and imperialist forces, specifically, the Nationalists in Taiwan, the Japanese military clique, and the US.\textsuperscript{41} The official historical account of the Second Sino-Japanese War, or what was called the “Great Chinese War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression,” endorsed self-glorifying myths that praised the role of the CCP in attaining national liberation.\textsuperscript{42} The role of Nationalist forces in the resistance operation was for the most part distorted. The official history portrayed the KMT as corrupt, reactionary, and tyrannical. KMT leaders were accused of acquiescing to and collaborating with the Japanese militarist regime, alleging that without the CCP, Japan would have conquered China.\textsuperscript{43} The narrative ignored the military assistance that China received from the US in fighting Japanese forces and neglected to mention

\textsuperscript{40} Schoppa, \textit{Guide to Modern Chinese History}, 107.
\textsuperscript{41} He, \textit{Search for Reconciliation}, 135.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
the larger US-Japan conflict in the Pacific War. The CCP claimed, instead, that American troops watched idly as the Chinese suffered and benefitted from the Second Sino-Japanese War by positioning China and Japan as rivals.\textsuperscript{44}

Contrasting its blatant denunciation of all Nationalists and American imperialists, the official Chinese war account specifically directed blame toward the military oligarchs that dominated the Japanese government before and during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The Japanese nation as a whole was spared condemnation, for ordinary Japanese citizens were regarded as fellow victims of corrupt militarists.\textsuperscript{45} In 1954, Premier Zhou Enlai informed visiting Japanese Diet members that “[the history of Japanese militarist aggression] is a thing of the past…. Chinese people are able to make a distinction between militarists and the people.”\textsuperscript{46}

This moderate stance on Japanese war responsibility was intended to uphold People’s Diplomacy and generate a positive impression of China in Japan. In addition, demonizing the military elites of imperial Japan supported the class-based Communist ideology, which became the foundation of the CCP regime and legitimized its authority.

Thus, official historical narrative specifically condemned Japanese militarists, and a number of policies were implemented to ingrain this account into Chinese collective memory. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, only high-ranking Chinese officials or cultural elites, largely operating as delegates of People’s Diplomacy, had the opportunity to visit Japan. Conversely, average Chinese people had no direct knowledge of postwar Japan, and public knowledge of contemporary Japanese

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 136.
\textsuperscript{45} Lind, “The Perils of Apology,” 146.
\textsuperscript{46} Yang, “Mirror for the Future or the History Card?”, 16.
society was limited to government propaganda. CCP leaders benefitted from a monopoly of the institutionalization of newly sculpted collective memories and myths. The space for public discourse was by and large nonexistent, and any divergent public opinions that existed had no channels of communication and were frequently kept private. Furnished with totalitarian manipulation of state power and infiltration of society, the CCP easily controlled and institutionalized collective memory.

Besides limiting access into and controlling information about Japan, another method of dominating collective memory was maintaining direct control over the content of school textbooks. The State Education Commission drafted Curricular Standards, or Teaching Guidelines, and delegated authors to fashion official textbooks according to those Guidelines. Since then, Chinese students were educated under the “One Guideline, One Textbook” system (yigang yiben 纲本). Middle and high school history textbooks published in the 1950s and 1960s judged the policies of the patriotic, revolutionary CCP favorably and contrasted them with the treacherous KMT and its policies. These books discounted key battles fought by KMT troops and instead provided detailed descriptions of Communist military achievements. Furthermore, official textbooks were intent on exposing evidence of Nationalist disloyalty to the nation. Such evidence included KMT’s wartime negotiations with Japanese imperialists and their “violent” acts against the “patriotic” community. Overall, official textbooks possessed one narrative: “The general story line, ingrained in every Chinese student, is that China was humiliated by Western

\[47\] He, Search for Reconciliation, 172.
\[48\] Ibid, 137.
powers. Then some well-meaning but misguided patriots took up the fight until they were properly led by the Communists, whose inevitable victory in 1949 started China’s recovery.”

Textbook treatment of Japanese wartime actions was generalized and cautious compared to the detailed accounts of KMT and CCP war deeds. When denouncing Japan’s long-held imperialist ambitions, the target was not the Japanese nation in its entirety but Japanese imperialism (ridi 帝), the Japanese military (rijun 军), or Japanese bandits (rikou 冢). Instead of identifying specific cases of Japanese brutality, atrocities were described using general terms such as “brutal killing, burning, and raping.” The only concrete war event referenced in textbooks was the Nanjing Massacre of 1937, the death toll of which was reported to be 300,000. Moreover, many textbooks criticized the KMT for failing to defend Nanjing just as severely as they attacked Japanese troops’ cruelty.

The institutionalization of Chinese war myths was also manifested in various commemorative events. During the two decades after the war, the PRC government erected a number of monuments celebrating the Chinese revolution. One of the most prominent memorials was the Monument to the People’s Heroes in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. Built in 1958, this thirty-six-meter obelisk commemorated the century-long struggle against foreign invasion and domestic reactionary forces. Ten sculptures illustrated revolutionary events in modern Chinese history, and only one

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51 He, Search for Reconciliation, 137
depicted scenes from the war resistance against Japan, indicating that this war was just one incident in China’s history of national struggle. Another commemorative event took place on the fifteenth anniversary of the Manchurian Incident on September 18, 1946 when CCP leaders published an editorial in the Liberation Daily newspaper (jiefang ribao). The article expounded three reasons why Japan had succeeded in invading China: Chiang Kai-Shek’s many traitorous actions, the reactionary rule of Japanese financial leaders and the military elites, and Japanese imperialists’ collusion with Americans. The tradition of issuing anti-KMT/Japanese militarists/US commemorative articles on war-related anniversaries continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s. These anniversaries included July 7 (the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War), September 2 (formal surrender of Japan), and September 18 (Japanese seizure of Manchuria).

The PRC government also pushed Chinese artists to spread official war myths in movies, theater, and literature. Revolutionary war movies accounted for approximately half of the films produced by the film industry between 1949 and 1952, the time period when the domestic and international state of affairs was most

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unstable.\textsuperscript{56} The production of revolutionary movies surged again at the end of the 1950s, corresponding to and suppressing internal and external conflicts. One disastrous internal conflict was the Great Leap Forward. Launched in 1958, this campaign was intended to communize and militarize Chinese society by implementing policies that would improve the community’s productive capabilities.\textsuperscript{57} The campaign resulted in a complete failure and eventually led to the deaths of an estimated thirty million people.\textsuperscript{58}

Instead of depicting such catastrophes, the content of revolutionary movies portrayed various periods of Chinese war history including the anti-Japanese War, the Civil War, and the Korean War. Most of the films portraying the Second Sino-Japanese War stressed the courageous CCP-led resistance movement and demonized the Japanese antagonists, the Nationalists, and Communist traitors, who were usually presented as having collaborated with the KMT.\textsuperscript{59} Almost all of these movies avoided exploring the traumatic details of Japanese war atrocities and the suffering of Chinese citizens. At the time, the political ideology guiding Chinese artworks asserted that any artistic efforts to portray “real life” or “human nature” by showing tragedy during the revolutionary struggle would propagate sentimentalism and humanitarianism, which would “dilute our hatred of imperialism” and “lower our morale.”\textsuperscript{60} What artists did instead was generate an ideal image of the intrepid Chinese Communist nation.

A communication vacuum also explains why elite-constructed historical narratives prevailed. Many Chinese war survivors and witnesses had their own

\textsuperscript{54} He, \textit{Search for Reconciliation}, 139.  
\textsuperscript{55} Wan, \textit{Sino-Japanese Relations}, 142.  
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{59} Rose, \textit{Interpreting History}, 35.
memories of the conflict with Japan and had formed extremely negative images of Japan, but they had no means of expressing their emotions to the government or the broader community. Moreover, many people accepted the myths targeting the small group Japanese military leaders, mainly because disagreements with this memory were forcefully suppressed.61

Through all these methods, the PRC regime was able to embed the official narrative distinguishing Japanese militarists from ordinary Japanese people into society’s collective memory. But besides the goal of garnering broad national support for their regime, PRC officials had other motivations for propagating their nuanced war myths.

During the 1950s and 1960s, PRC leaders avoided direct confrontation with Japan regarding war history because they desired diplomatic recognition from Japan. Communist elites adopted an exceptionally generous stance on war-related issues to convince the Japanese people of China’s goodwill. They also aimed to lure Japan away from the orbit of American influence. For instance, the largest obstacle for achieving political normalization during this time was really the Taiwan issue. Reflecting the structural restrictions of the Cold War, Japan still formally recognized the Nationalist regime in Taiwan, respecting the American “containment and isolation policy” against China. In its attempts to seek recognition from Japan, Beijing never required war reparations or repentance to be contingent on its formal relations with Tokyo, even when diplomatic normalization was finally achieved in 1972.62

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60 Ibid.
61 He, Search for Reconciliation, 173.
Ironically, KMT leader Chiang Kai-Shek was much more determined to seek restorative justice from Japan than Mao Zedong. During the civil war that followed the Japanese defeat, the KMT government assembled a large body of evidence detailing Japanese atrocities and presented it at the war crimes trials in Tokyo and Nanjing.\footnote{Philip Piccigallo, \textit{The Japanese on Trial: Allied War Crimes Operations in the East 1945-1951} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 173.} From 1945 to 1949, the Nationalist regime conducted trials in Canton, Hankow, Peiping, and Shanghai. They convicted 29.7 percent of accused Japanese war criminals, including 83 life imprisonment sentences and 149 death penalties.\footnote{Ibid.} PRC elites did, however, express criticism for what they perceived as lenient rulings of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial from 1946-1948, declaring that they maintained the right to try some prominent Japanese war criminals who had been released and returned to Japan by the KMT government.\footnote{He, \textit{Search for Reconciliation}, 129.} Nevertheless, this attitude changed considerably by the early 1950s when the CCP regime advanced its People’s Diplomacy.

Another motivation for establishing a nuanced Sino-Japanese war narrative was China’s war-wrecked economy. As a solution, PRC officials initiated informal trade relations with Japan. Setting a trend that would continue until diplomatic normalization in 1972, PRC leaders promoted a policy combining political and economic goals (zhengjing bukefen 政經不可分) in its relations with Japan, whose leaders actually desired a separation between politics and economics (seikei bunri 政經分離).\footnote{Rose, \textit{Interpreting History}, 44.} Because Chinese officials did not comply with Japan’s requests, zhengjing bukefen set the tone of their relationship until diplomatic normalization.
Political scientist R. K. Jain states, “trade was viewed and used as an instrument to persuade and pressurize Japan to recognize Beijing and modify its China policy.”

Combining political and economic endeavors also meant that diplomatic relations with Japan were more formally secured and that Chinese elites were well on their way to obtaining Japanese recognition.

The government’s successful myth-building campaign reinforced the official historical narrative and effectively merged it with China’s collective memory. Manipulating collective memory indicates its utility as a powerful unifying mechanism. In his most recent work Why Leaders Lie, John Mearsheimer argues that government elites create nationalist accounts of their nation’s history for two reasons: first, to encourage group unity and establish a sense of nationhood and second, to achieve international legitimacy. Mearsheimer notes that the deliberate spreading of nationalist myths is unremitting because “most individuals in the group need those stories to make sense of their own identity, and because they foster group solidarity.” Thus, collective memory is powerfully rooted in emotional understandings of national history, and these understandings have a strong unifying quality. Therefore, those who disagree with or disrespect such accounts confront that society’s collective memory. When collective memory is challenged, history-related problems can develop as a result, as evidenced by the Textbook Issue of 1982.

From the perspective of Chinese leaders, their counterparts in Japan respected their official narrative of the Second Sino-Japanese War, but this perception was reversed in 1982. In what is now called the Textbook Issue in Sino-Japanese

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69 Ibid, 74.
relations, Beijing elites reacted fiercely when Japanese newspapers reported that
Japan’s Ministry of Education had instructed writers of high school history textbooks
to gloss over the nation’s invasion of China.\textsuperscript{70} Furthermore, the state-led media began
a month-long propaganda campaign highlighting Japan’s wartime atrocities and the
dangers of a restored Japanese militarism.\textsuperscript{71} After several negotiations, Japanese
officials issued an ambiguous statement promising to make appropriate revisions to
the disputed textbooks. Almost immediately, the media campaign stopped reporting
on the issue.

Some scholars have argued that the Textbook Issue really evolved from Deng
Xiaoping’s immediate political goals as the PRC regime’s new leader in 1978. They
are not so much wrong as they only see part of the picture. Deng was radically
different from Mao in several ways. He shifted the regime’s focus from class struggle
to economic modernization because he aimed to weed out Mao’s legacy and
strengthen his own power and legitimacy within the CCP, both vital to successfully
implementing his economic restructuring and “Open Door” policy.\textsuperscript{72} Deng met
challenges from various members within the regime because they believed his
reforms would encourage a democracy movement, which did occur in late 1978.\textsuperscript{73}
Deng’s authority was hampered by inter-party struggles. Furthermore, the public lost
faith in the PRC regime the failure of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 that

\textsuperscript{70} James Reilly, “China’s history activists and the War of Resistance against Japan: History in
\textsuperscript{71} Whiting, \textit{China Eyes Japan}, 46-51.
\textsuperscript{72} Yinan He, “Remembering and Forgetting the War: Elite Mythmaking, Mass Reaction, and
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 54.
damaged the country socially and economically. As a solution, Deng instigated the Textbook Issue, departing from the earlier policy of non-confrontation with Japan.

Deng’s strategy is significant because it reinforced the collective memory that PRC elites had already institutionalized for decades. He believed that by lashing out at Japan for its historical “amnesia,” he could restore internal cohesion, essentially using collective memory to generate solidarity under his new leadership. As we shall see in the next chapter, the Textbook Issue helped to usher in the second phase of the history problem. Sino-Japanese war history disputes were only beginning.

CONCLUSION

Structural and political transformations that occurred during the period of postwar Sino-Japanese history from 1945 to 1985 encouraged Chinese leaders to construct myths to advance domestic interests. It is during this first phase of the history problem that China’s collective memory is institutionalized. PRC elites had a prominent role in constructing collective memory because they employed aggressive mechanisms to control divergent memories. Ordinary Chinese citizens had limited means of communication to articulate individual opinions and concerns. They also had few opportunities to travel to Japan during this phase, making it difficult to formulate opinions about postwar Japanese society that differed from the official line. Overall, the PRC regime enjoyed a monopoly of collective memory construction during the first phase of the history problem.

Circumstances changed dramatically in the second phase of the history problem. Popular opinion and independent movements have visibly arisen to actively

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seek justice for Japanese war crimes and contemporary mistreatments of Sino-Japanese war history. Thus, the next chapter will discuss the public’s role in exacerbating the history problem and how collective memory has become an incredibly sensitive issue in the second phase of the history problem. A discussion of the popular influence is necessary to provide a more comprehensive investigation of the linkages between collective memory and the history problem. Collective memories certainly do not emerge from one source. Generational changes, advancements in communication technology, and independent campaigns to address the history problem are a few factors that also contribute to the history problem and should therefore be carefully considered.

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75 He, “Remembering and Forgetting the War,” 54.
CHAPTER THREE
Second Phase: 
The Weight of Public Opinion

INTRODUCTION

Having established how Chinese leaders shaped collective memory by effectively uniting it with the official account of the Second Sino-Japanese War, I will analyze the second phase of the history problem, which I have determined begins in 1985 and is ongoing. This phase is distinct from the first because sub-state involvement has increased, or was allowed to increase, dramatically. Since the first history-related dispute in 1982, non-governmental groups, especially university students and others who had never experienced war, became increasingly concerned about Japan’s war responsibility. Younger generations of Chinese people are becoming more vocal about what they perceive is Japan’s disrespect for Sino-Japanese war history, and they are gaining support.

This new trend in the history problem suggests that public opinion has become more influential in China’s diplomatic affairs because ordinary citizens are actively responding to divergences between their collective memory and the version perpetuated by the regime. I will argue that the emerging collective memory of ordinary citizens have developed as a result of many factors including advances in information technology, new historical scholarship, more opportunities to travel abroad, and other factors. This chapter explores how the second phase developed and how collective memory drove its development.

THE 1985 DEMONSTRATIONS
The second phase of the history problem begins in August 1985 when Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro visited the Yasukuni Shrine, commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the Second Sino-Japanese War’s end. This singular event is important for several reasons. First, the shrine is a memorial in Tokyo that honors numerous war casualties, including General Tojo Hideki, Prime Minister of Japan during the war, and thirteen other Class A war criminals convicted by the Allied powers in the Tokyo War Crimes Trials. Class B and Class C war criminals were also enshrined there in 1959, but it was the fourteen Class A offenders, whose remains were moved there in 1978 that contributed to the history problem. It is a location that reminds many Chinese observers of their nation’s traumatic wartime experience and of Japan’s brutal military activities.

Nakasone’s visit to the shrine is also significant because it broke precedent. Past prime ministers visited the memorial in an unofficial capacity, but Nakasone’s visit was made in his official capacity as prime minister. In advance of the formal visit, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs cautioned Japanese leaders to “handle the matter with prudence.” After Nakasone’s appearance, however, Chinese foreign ministry leaders refrained from issuing a formal protest for fear of provoking an intense public response in China. In truth, PRC leaders’ resistance to protest reflected uncertainty and the divisions that existed at various levels within the government concerning the appropriate response to Nakasone’s visit. This ambivalence explains why student protests received official approval almost a month after Nakasone’s visit.

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77 Whiting, *China Eyes Japan*, 54.
and why the approval was rescinded a few days before the protests were planned to take place.

Nakasone’s official visit sparked the 1985 large-scale university student demonstrations that began in Beijing and spread to other Chinese cities. These protests were the first spontaneous mass demonstration in the post-Mao era that directly challenged the PRC’s authority. They were strategically organized in late August when classes resumed, using organized using the mail, telephone, and poster networks among school campuses. The event was initially approved by the PRC regime and was scheduled for September 18th, the anniversary of the Manchurian Incident of 1931. Three days before the protest, however, government authorities revoked their permission. CCP and Youth League officials tried to persuade the students to suspend their plans, and the vice mayor of Beijing personally appealed to the students but none of these efforts succeeded.

Several hundred students on the campus of Beijing University marched to Tiananmen Square where they were united with students from other campuses. The messages on wall posters and those shouted by protestors included “Down with Japanese militarism!” “Down with Nakasone!” and “Down with the second occupation!” – the last attacking Japan’s large role in China’s economic modernization. Japan’s prominence in China’s development was a chief reason why the Chinese foreign ministry eventually decided not to make a formal protest against Nakasone’s trip to Yasukuni Shrine. Japanese sensitivities needed to be respected to

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78 Whiting, China Eyes Japan, 67.
79 Schoppa, Guide to Modern Chinese, page 159.
80 Whiting, China Eyes Japan, 68.
ensure the continued transfer of investment and technology. Student demonstrators possessed no such concerns.

Beijing students distributed notices regarding their grievances and visited other cities to encourage support and further activity. Government attempts to address student complaints after the Beijing demonstrations failed to prevent a string of other campus protests in Xian, Chengdu, and Wuhan. Two weeks after the Beijing protests, about one thousand students in Xian staged a three-day demonstration, marching to provincial offices shouting slogans such as “Boycott Japanese goods!” and “Oppose the resurgence of Japanese militarism!”81 The next month, student congregations in Chengdu led to the stoning of Japanese cars. Fearing these demonstrations would cast China in a negative light, authorities locked the school gates and replaced the Japanese cars in the motorcade with Chinese ones. As in other protests, Chengdu demonstrators voiced messages condemning Japan’s power in China’s economy. Students in Wuhan plastered anti-Nakasone posters on the walls of their cafeteria.82 This sequence of demonstrations had the effect of nationalizing them.

Furthermore, foreign press reports highlighted the anti-Japanese slogans and behavior of the protestors, turning the demonstrations into an international issue. Debates regarding Nakasone’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine arose in Japan as well, and due to the highly negative domestic and international reactions he received, Nakasone stopped his visits thereafter. But that did not the end of the Yasukuni problem. Caroline Rose argues that by the 1980s, history-related problems such as the Yasukuni Shrine issue emerged because “there was now the political space for them

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81 Whiting, China Eyes Japan, 68.
82 Ibid.
to do so.”83 She is referring to how the opening up of Chinese society has allowed for less-restricted communication. Thus, war-related topics had up until then been stifled for decades, but has finally come out in the public domain. Being out in the open meant that historical narratives could be reinterpreted and contested, thus making it possible for collective memories to be reshaped.

HISTORY’S OPENING

Greater academic and political freedom enabled researchers to retrieve archives and reinterpret experiences from the war, being less restricted by the constraints imposed by the CCP on historical archives. As elucidated in the previous chapter, after the CCP’s rise to power in 1949, the party strictly controlled the articulation of China’s history. Mao promoted a state-centered, unitary view of history and changed it “only enough to enable it to continue and flourish.”84 After Mao’s death in 1976, however, the government recognized that it would be politically beneficial to finally acknowledge the “wartime sufferings of the Chinese people.”85 The rationale followed that unearthing the events of the Second Sino-Japanese War would recast Chinese history and culture to cope with the post-Mao regime’s failure to create a culture and patriotism of its own. As revealed in the previous chapter, Deng Xiaoping struggled with inter-party tensions and legitimacy issues. Therefore, the PRC began to restore detailed accounts of the war with Japan by commemorating them. Reinterpretations of the role of Communists and Nationalists, funding for

83 Rose, Sino-Japanese Relations, 11.
memorials and museums, and so forth, were developed. In following this trend, Deng launched a patriotic education campaign in the 1980s. This political backdrop helps to explain why academics achieved freer access to historical materials during the 1980s.

Overall, the post-Mao government’s new interest in wartime history was the result of a generational change in leadership. Sino-Japanese relations were affected by the passing of what Yang Daqing calls the “well-diggers,” – a small group of leaders on both sides who were able to achieve a degree of respect between the two countries throughout the 1970s since normalization of diplomatic relations in 1972. Until the early 1980s, there was a stable group of Chinese officials committed to managing affairs with Japan. One such politician was Liao Chengzhi, who passed away in 1983 and was president of the Sino-Japanese Friendship Society and Minister of the Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs. Because of their language competence and extensive experience, Liao and his associates were thoroughly familiar with the details of Japan’s political and economic processes. This cluster of individuals also developed shared policy interests and even had personal relationships with their Japanese counterparts in business circles. The passing of this generation of leaders left the rest of the post-Mao regime with something of an experience vacuum, cutting the close ties that Liao and others established. Moreover, this shift came at a time when the role of mass media in bilateral relations increased, along with channels of popular communication.

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86 Rose, Sino-Japanese Relations, 52.
88 Kurt Radtke, China's Relations with Japan: The Role of Liao Chengzhi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 11.
89 Ibid, 12.
Because of government efforts to restore China’s wartime history its may seem as though Chinese leaders intentionally aggravated the history problem, but in reality the issue transformed after details about the war became more accessible. The 1985 student protests signified a new era of collective memory had arrived—one that enabled young, private citizens to examine their history outside of government propaganda. This was a trend in China that grew in subsequent decades. By the 1990s, war history was becoming an incredibly popular topic, which was engaged not only by scholars but also by students and other sub-state interest groups.\(^90\) Having better access to hitherto stifled wartime details (even those details that exaggerated Chinese suffering) present one reason why a younger generation of citizens became interested in accounts of national suffering.

Another reason for the increase in popular engagement with history had to do with anti-Japanese sentiments imparted by family members who had suffered or experienced personal loss in the war. In 1986 Allen S. Whiting interviewed a Beijing man who asserted, “Young people hate the Japanese. They cannot forget the war and the brutal behavior to so many for so long.”\(^91\) Yet, how could young people have previously forgotten the war if they never lived to see it? The answer to this was not that they were influenced by official propaganda, as Whiting discovered when he questioned a young Beijing researcher: “We all feel bitterness from our families, without any propaganda. Our father, our mother, our grandfather – they all suffered so much for so long. We cannot forget that.”\(^92\) In Nanjing, a young scholar fiercely asserted, “What Japan has done in the past will be remembered forever! If the

\(^91\) Whiting, *China Eyes Japan*, 77-78.
\(^92\) Ibid, 78.
Japanese government won’t admit it, Chinese feelings will be greatly harmed.”

Such statements exhibit genuine anti-Japanese emotions among Chinese youth. In fact, the youth “spoke for a wide sector of the urban populace in attacking Japanese attitudes toward the war and Japan’s present ‘economic invasion.’” The association of Japan’s past imperial aggression with the country’s present role in Chinese affairs became the root of anti-Japanese antagonism among youths.

Scholarly historical studies also made an impact upon younger generations of Chinese. They usually exhibited a recurring theme of vigilance against a revival of Japanese militarism, reinforcing the official narrative of history. Scholarly works on the subject of Sino-Japanese relations can be divided into two categories. One group acknowledges wartime conflicts, but focuses on mutual benefit and cooperation. An example of their work is a major study called the *Collected Papers on the History of Sino-Japanese Relations.* It is a collection of papers from a conference of twenty-three academics in August 1982, celebrating the tenth anniversary of diplomatic normalization between China and Japan. None of the authors focused on the Second Sino-Japanese War, although one did mention the First Sino-Japanese War form 1894-1895. All the chapters adhered to the theme of Sino-Japanese friendship. However, the final chapter exhibits a different tone:

> In Japan there are some forces that always cause trouble, that use every pretext to spoil Sino-Japanese relations, that strive to beautify past aggression against China and other Asian countries, and moreover carry out all kinds of activity in vain attempts to revive Japanese militarism.

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93 Ibid.
94 Yang, “Mirror for the Future,” 42.
96 Ibid.
97 Whiting, *China Eyes Japan,* 44.
This warning likely resulted from the textbook controversy that had broken out two months prior to the conference.

The second scholarly group concentrates on the negative aspects of Sino-Japanese relations but also includes rhetorical reassurances of postwar relations. Whereas the volume mentioned above completely ignores the Second Sino-Japanese War, a textbook called *A Brief History of Japanese Imperialist Aggression Against China* provides a detailed account of the events that transpired from 1937 to 1945 in more than 200 pages. The cover conveys a picture of a crying, burned baby in a bombed railway yard – a powerful image that was one of the most widely distributed pictures of China from WWII.\(^9\) It reinforced the overall message of the book. Published in 1984, the book focuses on “fifty years of Japanese imperialism’s insatiably greedy aggression against China … [which] caused the Chinese people to suffer endless hardships … and seriously threatened the existence of the Chinese nation.”\(^9\)

The negative tone is lucid, but it is geared toward a specific purpose. The introduction of the book specifically states that it analyzes the social basis and volatile nature of Japan’s aggression to “help the vast readership, especially young readers, to understand the ferocious features of the Japanese militarist ruling group and the resulting disaster…. “\(^10\) Following this statement are repeated endorsements of patriotism. Although the text does abide by the official policy, by noting that

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99 Whiting, *China Eyes Japan*, 45.
100 Ibid.
contemporary Sino-Japanese relations are good, the negative tone quickly returns and dominates the entire work. This book attempted to arouse nationalistic pride and apprehension by raising an awareness of the war’s traumatic events, and by warning the Chinese people of the possibility that the past will repeat itself. This was a possibility supposedly made more possible by developments in Japan (e.g. the actions of right-wing conservative Japanese leaders who aim to whitewash Japanese war atrocities).

Both of these scholarly accounts converge in their warnings against the return of Japanese aggression, though this concern receives very different emphasis in the two works. Although this theme is at least superficially balanced by statements of overall friendship (in deference to government policy), it presents an indirect attack on Japan that could be articulated more fully in written work designed for larger audiences. Furthermore, both accounts support the institutionalized official narrative. The occurrence of this theme in works created for college students made it more likely that this apprehension of renewed Japanese militarism will become part of their perspective in adulthood. One such work is a 552-page college textbook called *The Foreign Strategy of Japanese Imperialism, 1931-1945*. First published in 1975, 11,000 copies of a second edition were printed in 1983.\(^{101}\) Taken as a whole, the textbook gives an exhaustive chronicle of Japan’s imperialistic invasion. Its extensive range of chapters, articles, and documents made it ideal for seminars and advanced courses.

Finally, another major factor that influenced Chinese youth to develop negative images of Japan was the mass media. As discussed in the previous chapter,\(^{101}\)

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\(^{101}\) Whiting, *China Eyes Japan*, 46.
not long after the Japanese Ministry of Education authorized the publication of textbooks downplaying Japanese military aggression, official Chinese protests and media campaigns ensued for two months.\textsuperscript{102} The Chinese press conveyed remarks by jurists, academics, and leaders of China’s mass organizations. Recollections of those who had experienced or witnessed the conduct of Japanese troops during the war frequently appeared.\textsuperscript{103} Television programs conveyed graphic pictures depicting the after effects of some massacres and delivered eyewitness accounts. Photographic exhibitions portraying the painful events of the war were held in numerous cities to coincide with the anniversary of the war’s end in August.\textsuperscript{104} Political cartoons, photographs, and films were accompanied by severely worded headlines, captions, and commentaries that explicitly warned against the restoration of Japanese militarism. One film entitled “Four Generations Under One Roof” came out in 1985 and illustrated, in ghastly detail, the afflictions a Chinese family suffered as a result of the Japanese occupation and aggression.\textsuperscript{105} Numerous Chinese people agreed that the strong emotions the film aroused might have played a role in the student demonstrations that year.\textsuperscript{106}

Central to this media operation was the China Youth Daily (\textit{zhongguqingnian bao 中华青年报}), the official youth newspaper with a circulation of about three million. One treatment of the textbook issue presented two disturbing photographs, one of young Chinese man about to be decapitated and the second of a mutilated corpse. The complementing caption claimed that the 1937 Nanjing

\textsuperscript{102} Wan, \textit{Sino-Japanese Relations}, 161.
\textsuperscript{103} Rose, \textit{Interpreting History}, 2.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Whiting, \textit{China Eyes Japan}, 195.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
Massacre had caused 340,000 deaths and it objected to the censorship of this mass murder in Japanese textbooks.\textsuperscript{107} On August 15, the anniversary of Tokyo’s surrender announcement, practically the entire paper was devoted to this event and the textbook controversy. An article entitled “The Bloody History Must Not Be Written Off” vividly described the events following Japan’s seizure of Manchuria in 1931. Captions recapitulating these events were placed alongside pictures of sword-bearing Japanese soldiers beheading people and destroying buildings by fire.\textsuperscript{108} Perhaps the most heated treatment came from one commentator who entitled his article “Beware of the Revival of Japanese Militarism.” Initially directing his remarks to a Chinese audience, he wrote as though he was speaking directly to Japanese militarists. He declared:

\begin{quote}
Are the officials of the Ministry of Education mentally unbalanced? Or do they misread the almanac? No! Of course not, they consider themselves smart. A few Japanese constantly bear in mind the profit they gained from the invasion of China and the war in Southeast Asia. Their hope of realizing their dream of reviving militarism is indefatigable. Their attempt to deceive the younger generation through education is deliberate. Their intention to revise history and to beautify militarism under the cover of ancestor worship is carefully thought out. Nevertheless how could historical facts written in blood be concealed by lies written in ink? Your ‘samurai’ forebears used innocent Chinese to test bacteriological warfare and used them as living targets. They dismembered and chopped up Chinese captives who were tied to trees. You forced Chinese to dig holes and bury themselves alive. You adopted such savage means as the ‘iron maiden,’ pulling out fingernails, branding, belly cutting, electric grinding, and flesh eating to persecute Chinese compatriots. Thus even the German fascists labeled Japanese soldiers as a ‘group of beasts.’\textsuperscript{109}
\end{quote}

The author concluded that Chinese youth should thank the Japanese Ministry of Education for compelling them to be “even more alert and sober thirty-seven years

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{107} Ibid, 47.
\bibitem{108} Jenner, \textit{The Tyranny of History}. 28.
\bibitem{109} Rose, \textit{Interpreting History}, 49.
\end{thebibliography}
after the war.”110 A few days after this article was printed, another article was issued portraying paintings of wartime brutality. The images depicted stacks of naked bodies, dismembered women, and decapitated heads in grisly detail.

The Japanese government received harsh criticism from domestic and international groups as well. Public demonstrations erupted in Tokyo, participated in by members of China-friendly organizations, teachers, textbooks writers, and women’s groups. In South Korea, demonstrations arose in Seoul, and rallies took place in Taejon, Taegu, and Inchon.111 Some South Korean storeowners boycotted Japanese goods, some taxi drivers refused to take on Japanese passengers. The chief newspapers of North Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and other countries had significant coverage of the textbook controversy and also cautioned against the renewal of Japanese militarism. The issue even received coverage by the Western press including among others The New York Times and The Times, following the events as they developed through July, August, and September.112

Despite the intensity of the controversy, as suggested by the degree of regional and international press coverage and the reactions of the Chinese and other Asian governments, the issue promptly disappeared from press reports and was resolved – or at least defused temporarily. It was defused after the Japanese government issued a vaguely phrased statement that agreed to set up a procedure to update textbooks every three years to revise the “faulty” textbooks earlier and to establish an inquiry into textbook authorization criteria.113 After further reassurance by the Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko, who visited Beijing to celebrate the

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110 Ibid.
111 Rose, Interpreting History, 2.
112 Ibid.
113 Wan, Sino-Japanese Relations, 156.
tenth anniversary of diplomatic normalization, the issue was abandoned by the press and even resumed a positive tone in regard to the past, present, and future of Sino-Japanese relations.\textsuperscript{114} It is impossible to determine every motivation behind the embittered media campaign. The synchronized focus of all Chinese media on the 1982 Textbook Issue—and the synchronized disappearance from press reports—is an indication that the media campaign was directly motivated by the PRC regime.

As elucidated in the previous chapter, Deng formally protested against the Textbook Issue because he needed to foster domestic cohesion under his leadership, and so he tapped into Chinese collective memory by targeting a common enemy, Japanese militarists.

**RESHAPED COLLECTIVE MEMORY**

Of course, neither the media nor the government has a monopoly on attitude and collective memory formation. However, the amalgamation of all the influential elements described above—everything from the post-Mao regime to aggrieved relatives who witnessed the war—reshaped the public’s collective memory. Together, they all created an environment in which those without firsthand experience of the war could reinterpret their nation’s history, and thus reinterpret their collective memory, forcing them to decide who they are as Chinese citizens, associating themselves to those who have suffered in the war. In this context, the collective memory of the public has diverged from the official historical narrative.

An explanation for this divergence can be derived from group polarization theory. It essentially contends that when moderate-minded individuals form groups

\begin{footnote}{114} Wan, *Sino-Japanese Relations*, 163.\end{footnote}
with other like-minded people, the group’s attitude shifts a great deal to an extreme. This explains why younger people express equally strong, if not stronger, emotions about Japan’s war responsibility and its reliability as a partner in political or economic affairs compared to those who had actually experienced the war. Even if a Chinese youth has no real ties to a known war victim, knowledge of the war’s painful events can unite a community. The collective memory of war offers fertile grounds for cultivating nationalism, resentment, and doubts about self and national identity. It can also marshal vigilance against a perceived threat such as the revival of Japanese militarism, perpetuating a negative attitude of Japan.

Sunstein’s account is supported by He Yinan, who argues that Chinese youths developed more extreme views after being influenced by peers. She explains that in China when patriotism became the buzzword in public discourse, everyone wanted to be an ardent patriot in order to win social status and respect, so that more people began to advocate extreme views on both past events and current policies, proclaiming uncritical love for China and their desire to defend it from aggressive foreigners. The idealization of patriotic warriors generated visceral anti-Western sentiments, of which Japan was the main target. Although the official historical narrative still maintained that the Japanese military clique should be distinguished from ordinary Japanese people, the Chinese public chose not to accept the more nuanced story that the elites were advocating.

An example of these arguments is a recent phenomenon on the internet called “indignant young people culture” (fenqing 憤青). Fenqing youths use the internet to make unrestrained (or intentionally uncensored) insults against the Japanese culture, people, and government, showing evidence that young Chinese people are diverging

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from the official narrative and are forming another version of collective memory. Chinese people who have ties with Japan are blasted as “traitors” (hanjian 汉奸).

Fenqing culture has many radical followers among young urban Chinese. Of course, fenqing youths do not represent the entire Chinese population, but they are vocal than average Chinese citizens and have set the tone for foreign policy debate on the internet, which is, relatively speaking, the most open and dynamic setting for public discourse in China.

As this popular version of collective memory consolidated it came to have a powerful effect on the history problem. Various large-scale opinion polls conducted since 1985 have demonstrated that the Chinese public has retained a largely negative view of Japan as a nation, as opposed to Japanese militarists. These polls indicated a greatly heightened public awareness of Japan’s past violence in China, and a worsening trend in popular perceptions of Japan.

For example, a nationwide survey conducted by China Youth Daily in 1996 found that 93.3 percent of respondents considered “Japan’s attitude toward the history of aggression” to be the main obstacle to developing better Sino-Japanese relations. 74.7 percent also believed that “Japanese politicians revising militarism” is another hurdle. The same survey revealed that when asked what they would most likely think of when the word ‘Japan’ was mentioned, 84 percent answered “the 1937 Nanjing Massacre” and 81.4 percent said “Japan’s war aggression to China.” The word “cruel” was a term that 56.1 percent chose to describe the Japanese

116 He, “Remembering and Forgetting the War”, 60.
117 He, “Remembering and Forgetting the War”, 61.
118 Ibid.
people. Another large-scale survey found that the percentage of people with positive views about Japan decreased from 26.8 percent in 1994 to only 6.3 percent in 2004, and those who hold a negative view of Japan rose from 38.5 percent in 1994 to 53.6 percent in 2004. Even taking into account the timing and methodological bias of these polls, it is clear that a majority of the Chinese public came to hold a negative perception of contemporary Japan, disagreeing with the official narrative.

Besides public opinion polls, condemnation of Japan also became a popular theme in the large number of nationalistic publications that emerged in China since 1985. One such work was a book published by the People’s Liberation Army in 1987 called *The Great Nanjing Massacre*. It provided a grim, in-depth account of Chinese suffering during the massacre, and sold 150,000 copies in the first month after its release, and was reprinted over and again to meet market demand. Since then, many books carrying this theme of war atrocities appeared, often on the initiative of local governments and private publishers.

Unofficial mass media also earnestly pursued the subject of anti-Japanese patriotism. For example, the best-selling book series *China Can Say No* was written and edited by Zhang Zangzang, Zhang Xiaobo, Song Qiang, Tang Zhengyu, Qiao Bian, and Gu Qingsheng, six nationalist, self-proclaimed academics who consider themselves as “speakers for the emboldened Chinese public—daring to criticize and demand from its government.” Published in 1996, the serial often voiced an abrasive hatred not only of Japanese soldiers who committed atrocities, but also of the

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120 Ibid.
122 He, “Remembering and Forgetting the War”, 60.
Japanese people and culture. Japanese people were portrayed as inherently evil:

“Japan is an immoral neighbor…immoral in the past, immoral in the present, immoral in politics, immoral in economics, etc.”

Here again is a stark difference between elite and public collective memory.

Anti-Japanese sentiment continued in the 1990s, but instead of targeting the small group of Japanese militarists, who were the usual objects of scorn in official propaganda and protests, hostility was now aimed at the Japanese nation and its people as a whole. This was due to critical shifts in the proponents, nature, and manifestation of anti-Japanese nationalism in China. Instead of being solely state-led, recent expressions of nationalism have been society-driven, as shown by the increasing number of grassroots nationalist groups. The *China Can Say No* series is one manifestation of this phenomenon, but perhaps nothing demonstrates this shift in blame more than the content of some popular internet websites.

*As fenqing* culture has shown, the internet is an incredibly valuable medium for individual and group expression. Since 1994, when the PRC decided that it would be commercially viable to connect China’s networks to the worldwide web, the internet’s popularity has exploded. Internet users in China grew rapidly throughout the next decade to 87.5 million users in 2004, and by the middle of 2005 China had a total of 103 million internet users, second only to that of the United States. In China’s ten largest cities, approximately 47 percent of all households own at least one computer, and in Beijing, this number climbs to 66 percent. 12 percent of all Chinese ages 18 and older, or about 100 million people, use the internet. A nationwide Gallup

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poll revealed that Chinese internet users are 85 percent male, 40 percent are between the ages of 21 and 25, and 86 percent of them have college degrees. Certainly, the internet functions as a valuable instrument in the daily lives of young and educated, urban Chinese.

The internet rapidly became an effective channel for expressing and mobilizing Chinese nationalism, especially the anti-Japanese attitudes fostered by the popular collective memory of Sino-Japanese war history. Since the internet was introduced into China’s commercial sector in 1994, nationalistic websites, chat rooms, and blogs have proliferated, and a majority of these websites explicitly carry an anti-Japanese focus.

For example, the Coalition of Patriots Web (aiguo zhe tongmen wang 爱国者同盟网) is one of China’s most influential nationalist, anti-Japanese websites. It was created in 2002, and by 2006, the website had garnered 101,978 registered members for its online forum. In August 2003, a Japanese ammunitions cache from the Second Sino-Japanese War was discovered in Heilongjiang Province in northeastern China. After the cache was searched, a mine exploded killing one person and injuring 43 others. As a result, the Coalition of Patriots Web joined six other popular anti-Japanese websites to organize an online petition demanding reparations from the Japanese government for the victims of the explosion and the removal of all chemical weapons that were also left in China after WWII. In September, merely one month after the mine exploded, more than one million signatures had been gathered

and delivered to the Japanese embassy in Beijing.\textsuperscript{129} Kureshige Anami, the Japanese ambassador to China, was accustomed to surveying Chinese websites, but the sheer volume of signatures and online criticisms greatly worried him. By the end of 2003, he predicted that anti-Japanese comments and news items could prompt the deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations in the near future.\textsuperscript{130}

**THE 2005 DEMONSTRATIONS**

Ambassador Kureshige was correct, for popular anti-Japanese nationalism has only gained strength in the years following the ammunitions cache incident. For example, in April 2005, Japan’s bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and a new Japanese school textbook downplaying Japan’s aggressive behavior during its occupation of China in the 1930s and 1940s caused an extraordinary uproar in China.\textsuperscript{131} From April 2 to 17, violent anti-Japanese mass demonstrations organized mostly by students took place in about twelve cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang, Chengdu, and Guangzhou. Enraged protestors marched to the Japanese consulate in

\textsuperscript{131} Zhang, “The Influence of Chinese Nationalism,” 15.
Shenyang, the former capital of Manchuria, or the territory that Japanese troops seized in the Manchurian Incident of 1931. Roughly 20,000 demonstrators in Shanghai destroyed Japanese vehicles manufactured by Honda and Nissan, and vandalized Japanese restaurants. Most people shouted, “Japanese pigs get out!” and threw paint, rocks, eggs, and tomatoes over the riot police at the Japanese consulate. More than 6,000 people rallied in Beijing, where two Japanese citizens were beaten at the embassy and Japanese goods were boycotted. In Chengdu, protestors wrecked a well-known Japanese supermarket. Although anti-Japanese campaigns are not at all new to China, the 2005 demonstrations surprised observers around the world, including the Chinese government.

The 2005 uproar is highly significant because it exposes the complex tensions between the PRC regime, private citizens, and the internet media. Sun Wei, a college junior who participated in the protests in Beijing, declared, “It was partly a political protest and partly a political show. I felt a

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133 Ibid.
little like a puppet.”135 In a sense, the protest was a political performance. In response to the protests, Tokyo officials demanded that Chinese leaders protect Japanese citizens and property in China, issue an apology and provide compensation. Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura cautioned, “it is possible that Japan-China relations as a whole, including on the economic front, could decline to a serious state.”136 Nonetheless, his Chinese counterpart, Li Zhaoxing, fiercely rejected Tokyo’s request for an apology and compensation. He blamed Japan for causing the demonstrations, declaring, “the problem now is that the Japanese government has done a series of things that have hurt the feelings of the Chinese people … especially the treatment of history.”137 Premier Wen Jiabao echoed this sentiment and stated that China would obstruct Japan’s bid to join the UN Security Council unless it sincerely apologized and atoned for wartime atrocities.138

But anti-Japanese nationalism is a mass phenomenon, not an elite one, for PRC leaders calculated every action and statement during the protests. Initially, Chinese authorities may have given protestors some space to release some of their virulent hostility, but they may have also used the demonstrations as a means to support the government’s rejection of Japan’s request to be on the UN Security Council. For instance, Chinese riot police allowed Beijing demonstrators to “take

138 Ibid.
turns throwing rocks, then told them they ‘vented their anger’ long enough and bused them back to campus.”139

Whatever political space protestors received from the government at first was not enough to alleviate their sincere anger and frustration, displaying the tension between elite and public interests in reacting to Japan’s mistreatment of history. The traditional media, which are easier to control, such as print correspondence, radio, and television, completely avoided reporting the protests mounting a coverage blackout. But government efforts to control the rallies and align public opinion with their own agenda failed due to the activists’ ability to take advantage of digital communication technologies. Information about online petitions, details about the times and locations of demonstrations, routes of marches, and slogans to shout were exchanged through cellular text messages, emails, online forums, and chat rooms.140 Compared to radio, television, and print media, these newer forms of information technology are much more difficult to restrict and pose a vital challenge to the government’s traditional mechanisms of social control. This challenge was revealed by Shanghai leaders’ failed attempts to use cellular phones and the internet to discourage students from pursuing their plans. Prior to the Shanghai demonstrations planned for April 16th, authorities issued text and email messages reminding participants to use the proper channels for voicing opposition. Policemen and paramilitary troops were deployed in various cities where rallies took place but very little was done to prevent violent behavior.141 Elite officials were taking an enormous risk by meddling with the potent nationalist passion of Chinese communities. The scale, intensity, duration, and level

of violence in these protests made them the first major public upheaval since the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989.

THE 2010 DEMONSTRATIONS

Five years after the 2005 protests, another round of mass demonstrations erupted on an even larger scale, and again government leaders struggled to control unruly demonstrators in officially sanctioned protests. In September 2010, a Chinese trawler boat collided with two Japanese naval vessels in the waters off of a disputed chain of islands named Senkaku in Japanese and Diaoyu in Chinese. Consequently, Japanese authorities arrested the Chinese vessel’s crew, and the PRC reacted furiously.  

Beijing deferred midlevel diplomatic meetings, terminated exports of rare earths minerals vital to Japan for manufacturing electronics, and arrested four Japanese businessmen. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu stated, “If the Japanese side really values its relations with China, it should immediately correct its mistake and let the Chinese captain return unconditionally so as to refrain from further damage to the bilateral relations.” Japanese authorities finally released the boat captain, who was detained longer than the rest of the crew, the day after Jiang’s remarks were issued in the hopes of repairing already intense anti-Japanese public opinion in China. In response to the captain’s release however, Jiang asserted:

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141 Ibid.
China has fully expounded its solemn position in the Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I would like to reiterate that the Diaoyu Island and its affiliated islands have been China's territory since ancient times. Japan's actions seriously violated China's territorial sovereignty and the human rights of the Chinese nationals. China certainly has the right to demand apology and compensation from Japan. We hope Japan take concrete actions to enrich China-Japan strategic relations of mutual benefits.\(^{145}\)

Instead of rejoicing in the fact that Japan has been made to appear weak in surrendering to Chinese demands, Beijing made new charges for compensation and an apology – the same type of requests that were solicited in history-related disputes.

A major reason why Beijing officials persisted in drawing out the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands boat incident is the force of domestic public opinion. A November report in *The Economist* explains that the clash triggered the largest anti-Japanese protests since the 2005 demonstrations, with thousands marching on the streets of several cities.\(^{146}\) Mass public opinion presented a challenge for Chinese leaders to let go of the issue. The article continues:

> What is puzzling, however, is that these only erupted on any scale a full three weeks after the captain’s release. Perhaps officials tacitly approved of the demonstrations at first. But by the end of October students were being ordered to remain on university campuses over the weekend as some cities tried to prevent further unrest.\(^{147}\)

These government attempts to contain public turbulence are strikingly similar to the efforts of 2005; both demonstrations transpired in similar ways. Initially, officials recognized that great numbers in the community were outraged and thus gave them the opportunity to vent their frustrations in officially sanctioned demonstrations, but


\(^{147}\) Ibid.
they eventually needed to rein in the crowds. Ian Johnson sums up the event quite well in his article for *The New York Times*:

> The issue is tricky for Beijing because it needs to balance nationalists’ demands with ties to one of its most important trading partners. In recent years, China has discouraged nationalists from pushing the issue and sometimes censored Internet forums, although some chat rooms on Wednesday [September 8, 2010] had angry calls for boycotts of Japanese goods. 148

The real issue for Chinese leaders is learning how to balance the demands of nationalists with relations to one of their most important economic partners. Zeng Jianhong, a scholar of Sino-Japanese relations at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences stated, “This is an issue that no Chinese government can give in to. But China does not want a conflict with Japan over this issue.” 149

Indeed, one of the key challenges for Chinese leaders today is maintaining equilibrium between domestic and elite political interests.

Even though the 2010 demonstrations were not explicitly concerned with history, they are important overall for the purposes of this work because they, along with my study of Chinese collective memory in the history problem, have confirmed my finding that popular opinion is a force that Chinese leaders must acknowledge and

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to which they must respond appropriately. Using sincere anti-Japanese nationalism for official purposes is a dangerous game, and PRC leaders risk severely tarnishing their own legitimacy, as well as another potential anti-PRC uprising as during the Tiananmen Square Incident, should they mishandle public anger and resentment.

CONCLUSION

More and more, sub-state groups are reshaping the history problem and even redefining Chinese patriotism and identity. Despite all censorship measures the state takes to control rebellion and conflict, advanced technology and a better-informed public are expanding past restrictions to the freedom of information and expression in China. Writing in 1995 Geremie Barme explains, Chinese “patriotic sentiment is no longer the sole province of the Party and its propagandists ... nationalism is functioning as a form of consensus beyond the bounds of official culture.” This is demonstrated in the other ways non-governmental groups have tried to seek justice for Japan’s past wrongdoings. Individuals or groups who suffered from Japanese war crimes entered more than 60 lawsuits in Japanese courts, demanding compensation and an apology or acknowledgement of their suffering.151 These lawsuits have led to the creation of various non-governmental groups in both China and Japan aimed at providing financial and legal assistance to victims. Furthermore, the civilian compensation campaign uncovered new evidence of Japanese wartime atrocities in China, further elevating public awareness of Japan’s actions during the WWII.152

149 Ibid.
151 Caroline Rose, Sino-Japanese Relations, 69.
One of the underlying assumptions of the state-led nationalism hypothesis is that the Chinese masses have been misinformed as a result of government propaganda, officially sanctioned education, and overall censorship. I have demonstrated that these assumptions only see a fraction of the picture. Edward Friedman, for example, argues that the Chinese government’s patriotic campaign focused excessively on the wartime atrocities of Japanese soldiers, without relaying the fact that subsequently Japan has transformed into a democratic and peaceful country.\(^{153}\) There is some truth in this argument, especially in the 1980s when the state-controlled media were still the main source of information for the Chinese people, and had the capacity to significantly shape the public’s image of Japan. However, access to nongovernmental sources of information about the world outside of China has improved greatly over the last two decades, largely due to the information revolution. Chinese contacts with Japanese people have also grown due to expanding trade ties, tourism, and educational exchanges.\(^{154}\)

In addition, state-driven anti-Japanese nationalism does not explain why anti-Japanese sentiment is strong amongst Chinese people overseas, including those in Japan. Some of the most well-known anti-Japanese activists such as Feng Jinhua, the chief editor of the Coalition of Patriots Web, studied and worked in Japan for several years during the 1990s.\(^{155}\) In 2005, the US-based Chinese civilian group “Alliance for Preserving the Truth of the Sino-Japanese War” instigated a global signature campaign disputing Japan’s bid for membership on the UN Security Council. The campaign was supported by Chinese communities around the world and eventually

\(^{153}\) Friedman, “Preventing War Between China and Japan,” 103.  
\(^{155}\) Ibid.
garnered 46 million signatures that were subsequently presented to United Nations Security General Kofi Annan on July 1, 2005.\textsuperscript{156}

A number of studies have demonstrated that the Chinese government has been losing control of nationalistic discourses within the nation. For example, the sustained 1990s compensation campaign for Chinese victims of Japanese war crimes was initiated and led by activists outside the government. Furthermore, political officials discouraged the campaign because they feared a possible weakening of social stability.\textsuperscript{157} When supporters of the campaign attempted to pass a bill on civil compensation from Japan through the National People’s Congress (NPC), which is the legislative body of the Chinese government, the response they received was that such actions “should not be encouraged.”\textsuperscript{158} It is important to note here that one of the major driving factors behind the compensation campaign has been Japanese civilian and human rights groups established during the 1990s to help Asian victims of wartime aggression seek compensation. The initiative to issue lawsuits in Japan by Chinese war victims arose from a volunteer group of Japanese lawyers.\textsuperscript{159} This and other external actors made the Chinese compensation movement part of an international effort to seek retribution from Japan.

Moreover one scholar, James Reilly, discovered that increasing public attention in the past two decades to Japanese war atrocities has been largely driven by a group of “historical activists” who have gained increasing academic independence.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{156} Peter Hays Gries, “Chinese Nationalism, China’s ‘New Thinking’”, \textit{China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 252.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Yang, “Mirror for the Future”, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Wang Guoping, “The Rocky Journey of Seeking Compensation from Japan by Chinese Civilians”, \textit{Huanqui} December 2004.
\item \textsuperscript{159} Rose, \textit{Sino-Japanese Relations}, 69.
\end{itemize}
and political autonomy from the state.\textsuperscript{160} This further supports the argument that anti-Japanese nationalism in China has become a society-driven movement rather than wholly a state-led endeavor.

A crucial characteristic of the history problem today, the complex and often conflicting relationships between the Chinese government and popular nationalists confront the simplistic state-centered model of nationalism. Nationalists come from across the entire political spectrum. Many anti-Japanese activists are also opponents of the Chinese government. Thus, their anti-Japanese activities often carry an implicit and sometimes explicit agenda challenging the Chinese government’s legitimacy. For example, in 1994 Bao Ge, a prominent anti-Japanese activist and political dissident, challenged the legality of the government’s 1972 decision to renounce its right to collecting war reparations from Japan, asserting that it was unconstitutional and against the wishes of Chinese citizens.\textsuperscript{161} Bao had previously been jailed for two years for his involvement in the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstration. On the eve of Japanese Emperor Akihito’s visit to China in 1992, Bao declared that he would initiate a hunger strike, or even self-immolation, if the Emperor did not issue an apology to China. Since then, Bao has been detained frequently for his promotion of democratization and war reparations in China. Eventually, he was expelled to the US in the late 1990s.\textsuperscript{162}

Far from being manipulated by the government propaganda, many young nationalists in China are well informed and possess a more sophisticated understanding of historical and contemporary issues between China and Japan. They


also often pursue agendas different from those of the government, and are critical of
the government’s policies and actions. For example, discussions about Sino-Japanese
relations on the internet are often characterized by bitter criticism of the government’s
supposedly cowardly policies toward Japan. Such sentiments worry Chinese elites
because they cast doubt upon the legitimacy of their regime, and the issue of
legitimacy is extremely critical in an ideologically weakened post-Mao government.

Hence, the complex nature of contemporary anti-Japanese nationalism
challenges the simplistic state-centered perception Chinese nationalism, which
explains how a popular collective memory has developed in recent decades. Despite
the growing level of tensions between vocal groups in China, political elites nations
have displayed evidence of pragmatism and flexibility toward each other. However,
in the future, policy decisions will be increasingly constrained by an increasingly
nationalistic, proactive, organized, and expressive society in China. This is a more
recent trend that will be further redefined by future interaction.

CHAPTER FOUR
Conclusion:
The Universal Collective Memory

CENTRAL CLAIM:

History-related problems are certainly not confined to China and Japan. Emotionally tinged accounts of history also affect bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea, Israel and Palestine, the United States and Vietnam, Britain and India, and Turkey and Greece, to give a few examples. What unites these accounts is the fact that they are based on warfare and other traumatic events, and how such narratives of national suffering are treated is of great consequence. Treatment includes reparations, trials, punishing of war criminals, accounting for war casualties, commemorations, and documentation, among other things. These treatments of national history contribute to the way collective memory is formed in all societies because they create a mechanism that filters carefully selected images, narratives, and facts to communities.

Collective memory is as relevant in present and future as it is in the past. As this thesis has shown, this is especially true of China and its relationship with Japan. The persistence of the history problem today is a strong indicator that something else is driving the issue – something that is rooted in the nation’s history, self-image, pride, and identity.

History-related disputes are too often attributed to political, economic, or socio-cultural motives. My study has shown that collective memory certainly carries weight in political matters; it is a powerful phenomenon that has led to the history
problem in Sino-Japanese relations. Collective memory must therefore be incorporated into conventional political science discourse.

This thesis has demonstrated the importance of collective memory in the study of domestic and international politics by analyzing its role in driving the history problem in Sino-Japanese relations. I have argued that when collective memory is challenged, diplomatic conflicts can develop between and within nations, as it did in the history problem that has set China in opposition to Japan by Chinese elites who use accounts of Sino-Japanese war history to advance their own interests.

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE HISTORY PROBLEM:

The history problem is a product of the Chinese government’s attempts to integrate official narratives of Sino-Japanese war history with collective memory. This strategy was meant to pursue domestic objectives – namely, unifying a war-wrecked country under the authority of Mao’s Communist regime and ideology. Since Mao’s rise to power in 1949, the elite’s perpetuation of self-glorifying and other-disparaging myths dominated Chinese society, forming a hegemonic collective memory.

Chinese officials have used various mechanisms to manipulate collective memory. After the Communists won the civil war in 1949, PRC leaders had several motivations to filter out negative images of Japanese society from official historical narratives and propaganda campaigns. As a new ruling establishment, the CCP needed to unify the war-torn country under its leadership; and in order to generate public support, leaders created national myths that glorified the Communists and condemned the Japanese military elites who initiated the Second Sino-Japanese War.
PRC leaders also advanced the goal of achieving political recognition from Japan because they feared the country was becoming an American puppet and would consequently limit Communist power.

Because of its totalitarian control of political power and complete infiltration of public life, the Chinese government successfully institutionalized official war myths as the dominant collective memory in the first phase of the history problem. The truth about Japanese war atrocities became almost taboo, and it was aggressively repressed. During this phase, national myths largely shaped the prevailing collective memory. Chinese elites tried to shape a nuanced collective memory that made a distinction between the Japanese people and the militarists.

But Chinese elites were not only successful because they enjoyed hegemonic control of collective memory. In order to appear honest or convincing to the general populace, national myths usually stem from deep-seated perceptions and genuine emotions that already exist in the community. Those who witnessed the war, especially the war crimes, bore disgust and resentment for Japanese militarists. These emotions were consistent with elite war myths. Also, ordinary Chinese people had no opportunities to travel to Japan, and thus to understand the transformations that occurred in postwar Japanese society in efforts to differentiate itself from prewar Japan. Thus, to ordinary Chinese citizens, especially younger generations of Chinese who had never experienced the war, the diffusion of elite-constructed myths in society was largely successful.

But as time continued and political power changes over to Deng, a critical transition occurred in China. By the second phase of the history problem, elite domination of collective memory weakened, as demonstrated by the first massive,
student-organized anti-Japanese demonstrations in 1985. The opening up of Chinese society, more opportunities to travel to and live and work in Japan, and the availability of the global internet created a space for popular discourse among young Chinese citizens. Of course, students and other sub-state groups had been influenced by decades of propaganda conveying official myths, but the fact that they defied government appeals to suspend their demonstrations signals the beginnings of collective memory contestation. Contestation here refers to divergences in elite and public interests in responding to challenges to Chinese collective memory. Even though CCP leaders possessed their own strategic reasons for permitting the anti-Japanese protests, they underestimated the strength of public anger over visits to the Yasukuni Shrine and Japanese textbooks camouflaging war atrocities. Demonstrators disagreed with the way authorities handled the discrepancy, and for the first time, the gap between elite and public desires to settle historical accounts with Japan was brought to the fore.

Public demonstrations since 1985 have revealed mass dissatisfaction with how the Chinese government has handled war-related disputes. Chinese leaders have demanded halts to Yasukuni Shrine visits, revisions to Japanese history textbooks, and apologies for past atrocities. However, such demands have been strategically moderate to avoid harming economic relations with Japan. But when leaders sense that their power may be undermined or threatened by rebellious domestic forces, they may resort to allowing quarrels over sensitive historical issues to occur and persist, forgoing stable relations with Japan. This was revealed in the 2010 demonstrations when PRC elites suspended exports of rare earths to Japan.
Indeed, public pressure is increasingly straining political initiatives in China. Chinese officials have proclaimed that a more sensible and cooperative relationship with Japan is desirable. Some scholars agree with Greg Austin and Stuart Harris who note that the Chinese government has made significant efforts to control anti-Japanese sentiment to prevent them from disrupting the government’s overall foreign policy objectives, especially Japanese economic cooperation.\(^\text{163}\) However, the government’s ability to maintain control of popular anti-Japanese reactions is weakening. This is visibly reflected in the enormous anti-Japanese protests of April 2005. Even though the government allowed the demonstrations to take place, Beijing instructed state media not to run reports on them because they feared disturbing already heightened public anti-Japanese sentiments. However, within days, eyewitness accounts, photos, and video clips of the demonstrations proliferated on Chinese websites.\(^\text{164}\)

There are several major reasons why contemporary popular opinion has become vociferous and biased in condemning Japan for past wrongdoing. First, the collective memory that younger generations of Chinese possess has been filtered down to them from patriotic education campaigns, resentful family members, scholarly historical studies, mainstream official media, and peers, among a number of other factors. Second, as mentioned before, the gradual opening of up Chinese society has created more space for public discourse, emotional venting, and policy advocacy in China. With greater communication ability, Cass R. Sunstein argues that group polarization is possible. An “echo chamber” often forms when moderate-minded

\(^\text{163}\) Austin and Harris, *Japan and Greater China*, 62.
individuals communicate with people who have similar views, resulting in more extreme views being shared by the entire group. The *fenqing* culture is a good example of group polarization.

Because of this filtering mechanism, the Chinese public does not recognize several important factors. For example, many Chinese youths are not aware that the Japanese society was, and still is, divided about Japanese accounts of Sino-Japanese war history. Independent Japanese efforts to forge a more truthful version of wartime history have gone unheeded by anti-Japanese nationalists in China. Even the Japanese government is divided on the issue. Edward Friedman explains, “Chinese youth insisted on standing up against Japan as their elders had not. No attention was paid to the difference between Japan in 1935 and in 1985.”165 This mentality is revealing. It suggests that while Chinese youth are becoming more assertive and proactive in confronting Japanese interpretations of the war, they are simultaneously disregarding (or ignorant of) contemporary Japanese efforts to repair past mistreatments of war history.

Collective memory is no longer entirely elite-driven. The myths propagated by Chinese elites during the first phase of the history problem explicitly condemned only the small group of Japanese militarists who they believed propelled the Second Sino-Japanese War. But in popular perceptions blame has shifted from Japanese militarists to contemporary Japan as a whole. Chinese popular collective memory has rejected or at least reshaped the myths portrayed in the official historical narrative. This shift is an indication that, the nationalists driving the history problem are

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165 Friedman, “Preventing War Between China and Japan”, 104.
redefining Chinese nationalism and patriotism; Chinese leaders have less control over popular thought formation today than during the first phase of the history problem.

THE FUTURE OF THE HISTORY PROBLEM:

The Chinese government has shown little signs of abolishing the collective memory it has created. Collective memory seems to serve elite interests in every period of Chinese history, including the present. Later this month, China will reveal what may be the largest presentation of the official historical narrative in the grand opening of the National Museum of China. As Ian Johnson reports, “The museum is less the product of extensive research, discovery or creativity than the most prominent symbol of the Communist Party’s efforts to control the narrative of history and suppress alternative points of view, even those that exist within the governing elite.”166 Hence, in efforts to control the historical narrative, sensitive historical issues are deliberately neglected. For example, the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 that resulted in millions of deaths was briefly mentioned in three lines of text under a single photograph in a back corner of the two-million-square-foot museum.167 Poised to be the largest museum in the world, it is the ultimate display of the elite historical narrative.

Because the filtering mechanism is still firmly in place, the Chinese public is finding it difficult to conduct more open communication. Even though the internet, cell phones, and other technology has provided the public with better communication

capabilities today, the government controls all provider networks and can therefore limit the use of these avenues. Johnson explains that few countries can compete with China in so completely suppressing the shades of gray about their past. One result is that the Chinese public rarely has access, even on the Internet, to versions of history that differ from party propaganda, and popular support for some nationalist causes is sometimes even stronger than the party’s own stances. Many Chinese are bewildered, for example, that some Tibetans or Uighurs are dissatisfied with Chinese rule or that Japanese and Taiwanese might have differing views of China’s claims on their territory.  

Here again we see that Sunstein’s group polarization argument certainly pertains to the Chinese public. Even more disheartening is the fact that government officials are still arresting individuals with alternative viewpoints – namely, anti-government attitudes. For example, earlier this month the authorities detained Ai Weiwei, a renowned artist who is also known for his anti-government sentiments, as he tried to board a plane to leave the country. His friends and associates were taken into official custody. His arrest supports the notion that the Chinese government controls public communication, which means that officials judge what can be said when and where. Thus, the PRC still maintains dominance over Chinese collective memory, but as this thesis has shown, leaders have more reason to be cautious about such control.

However, even with all the control mechanisms in place, the public has discovered ways to overcome them to reshape elite-constructed collective memory, as we have seen in the massive demonstrations held in the last two decades. If leaders continue to suppress sensitive war topics, alternative viewpoints, and public interests to seek retribution from Japan for past war crimes, more demonstrations and acts of

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167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
rebellion will develop in the future. Chinese politicians are well aware that this is a potential outcome of their efforts to control collective memory. In many of the policies they implement, the regime’s stability and legitimacy is held as a priority. More often than not, this is done at the expense of the people who desire to voice their individual viewpoints, unless of course these viewpoints agree with government policies. This explains why, for example, most of the exhibits in the National Museum of China valorize the CCP regime. But the regime cannot maintain its legitimacy without appealing to society. The government’s legitimacy will weaken if leaders continue to suppress public interests and viewpoints. More mass eruptions will also emerge in consistent fashion as it had in the past to plague the regime in the future.
GLOSSARY OF CHINESE AND JAPANESE TERMS
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE IN TEXT)

shinryaku (侵略) – invade

shinkou (進行) – advance

yigang yiben (一纲一本) – One Guideline, One Textbook system

ridi (日帝) – Japanese imperialism

rijun (日军) – Japanese military

rikou (日寇) – Japanese bandits

jiefang ribao (解放日报) – Liberation Daily Newspaper

zhengjing bukefen (政经不可分) – Chinese policy of combining political and economic goals

seikei bunri (政经分離) – Japanese policy of separating political and economic goals

zhongguo qingnian bao (中华青年报) – China Youth Daily Newspaper

fenqing (愤青) – “indignant young people” internet culture

hanjian (汉奸) – Chinese traitors

aiguozhe tongmeng wang (爱国者同盟网) – Coalition of Patriots Web
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