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# The Expression of Alternative Nationalism in China's Weibo

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The Expression of Alternative Nationalism in China's Weibo

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## Introduction

Weibo emerged in Twitter's shadow as an innovative Chinese microblog. Chinese speakers understand the literal meaning of Weibo (微博) as microblog: *wei* means micro and *bo* means blog. Due to Weibo and Twitter's similarities, Weibo is often seen as the equivalent to Twitter, only with Chinese characters instead of Latin script. Yet, this analogy only holds true at a superficial level. Indeed, they share many characteristics; both Twitter and Weibo promote identity development and facilitate rapid communication. However, Weibo cannot be regarded as Twitter's equal for one reason: Weibo serves as one of the primary open discussion spaces in a nation governed by those who employ censorship tactics. Thus, it provides a rare public space for citizens to express their opinions in a communal arena where the confines of censorship rules are diluted.

This thesis examines Weibo as a public space and explores the prevalence of alternative nationalism in microblogs. Through my examination of an array of microblog posts, a unified identity emerged around this concept of alternative nationalism.<sup>i</sup> This unique segment of nationalism (here deemed "alternative nationalism") diverges from the state-sponsored patriotism omnipresent in China, and involves critically thinking through one's opinions of, and participation in, an event involving national and domestic issues. The resistance to state-sponsored nationalism seen among a portion of Weibo users mimics that of a grassroots movement. Its goal is to challenge the official narrative about domestic issues in the sphere of social media. As Weibo attracts new users at an exponential pace among the upper-middle Chinese class,<sup>ii</sup> microblogs continue to

revolutionize social media and the ways people interact with one another, identify with their country, and participate in protest.

Weibo's entanglement of communication and rapid idea-exchange raises questions about the Chinese people's use of this medium and, in turn, its impact on Chinese society. Has Weibo changed the Chinese people's approach to, and participation in, nationalism? Can Weibo be used as a tool to unify the Chinese people under a shared sense of alternative nationalism? By examining the Diaoyu Islands Dispute, this thesis will try to answer these questions. I will analyze the online discussion that highlights different nationalistic opinions and the stratification of Chinese society.

The Diaoyu Islands Dispute is a conflict that has haunted both the Chinese and Japanese people for eons. The dispute serves as a structure through which I will interpret, and expand upon, the issues presented on Weibo, particularly focusing on period of recent protests in the People's Republic of China (from here on I will refer to the PRC as China or the Mainland). The diverse reactions to this conflict both online and offline point to severe socioeconomic divide, which increases the stratification of ideas between different social classes. Weibo posts illuminate these distinctive types of nationalism that link to divisions in China's class system. The introduction of new social media widens the gap between the ideas and information circulated among the online group and the isolated offline group. The interconnectivity assumed online increases the awareness of diversified ideas for social media participants; the majority of whom belong to the upper-middle class. This particular study reaches out to examine the questions that will arise over the next decade, questions of how social media will affect our relationships with each other, and with our states.

This thesis examines the issues and sentiments presented on Weibo concerning the Diaoyu Islands protests that occurred in September 2012. These issues include dissatisfaction with the Chinese government, continued hostility towards Japan, and tension between Weibo users and radical protesters in the streets. I argue that Weibo serves as a much-needed enabling space. However, the case of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute shows that two polarized types of nationalism, alternative nationalism and radical patriotism that exist primarily online and offline respectively, instead *amplify* the gap between the upper-middle and lower class. Weibo users tend to seek a bilateral discussion and also to focus on the government's shortcomings in other areas of politics and development. The absence of the lower class from this online dialogue only increases Weibo users lack of awareness of what people in the lower classes think. All the while Weibo's privileged commentators express their opinions in a safe, anonymous space where they may discuss controversial subjects without taking to the streets in protest. This outlet for dissent may work for a while, but in the final analysis, I argue Weibo cannot provide an effective discussion space without more balanced and diverse participation. Weibo has the potential to create mutual understanding through disseminating information equally in a future where all citizens command a deeper view of their country and their own national identity.

The study of current technologies presents numerous and impossible difficulties to the researcher. The largest challenge is that of quantifying and analyzing information that constantly expands and evolves. My initial motives for researching Weibo stemmed from my confusion by, and obsession with, the use of censorship in China; however, the research has morphed into its own being that revolves not around the idea of omnipresent

censorship (which is nearly impossible to avoid in the modern-day). This research instead revolves around the constellations of identities present both in online and offline China. The contradicting features of what constitutes a citizen, and the varied levels of participation in civil society, have only become more confusing with the advent of social media. Not only does this research examine a contemporary technological *use* of social media, it also looks at contemporary issues and the ways in which social media *shapes* our views of these issues. Thus, this research opens a crevice through which we may understand the implications of a present-day society, whose future forms of public expression may be confined to only one hundred and forty characters.

In this paper, I will give a brief history of Weibo in China, and the controlled atmosphere into which this seemingly limitless virtual sphere was born. Censorship in China is certainly not the all-encompassing, demonic tool many Westerners make it out to be, however, the Chinese government's censorship techniques will be familiar to the reader as part of the government's broader motives and methods of censorship. Next, I will discuss various theories on collective identities, public and private spheres, and information flow that apply, and give shape to, the concepts supporting my claims about social media and national identity. I will give a brief history of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute as it pertains to my research, particularly looking at the history of protest online and offline.

As I discuss Weibo and nationalism, I provide a sample of Weibo posts that illustrate my points, and that also exemplify the evolutionary and creative qualities of discussion forums. I group this series of Weibo posts, which I translated and analyzed, into three sections: 'Community and Weibo', 'Online and Offline Discontent through

Weibo’, and ‘Anti-Patriotism and Weibo’. The ‘Community and Weibo’ section looks at the issue of class divide on Weibo and the formation of collective identities; the ‘Online and Offline Discontent through Weibo’ section analyzes the signs of online and offline protest in Weibo posts and the ways in which Weibo users are not satisfied with the status-quo; lastly, the ‘Anti-Patriotism and Weibo’ section, looks at the idea of alternative nationalism and its appearance in Weibo users’ posts.

Guobin Yang commented on studying the Internet in his book *The Power of the Internet in China* that, “studying the Internet did indeed feel like shooting a moving target. But as my research and writing evolved, the ‘moving target’ theory became unconvincing. A ‘living record’ theory seems more appropriate.”<sup>iii</sup> I hope that my research will shed light upon the living record that Weibo offers during times of tension and conflict in China.

## **Weibo Users’ Identity in the Public Sphere**

### ***Discourse on Weibo and its Functions***

Social media sites are a recent invention in the global online community.<sup>iv</sup>

Microblogs are an even newer phenomenon within social media. Consequently, no substantial research has yet been published on the topic of Weibo. However, scholarship on Twitter sheds light on Weibo’s intricacies and appealing qualities because the two media are so similar, particularly in terms of effectiveness, brevity, openness, and its facility of organization. Furthermore, much of the theory behind Weibo mimics that found in the study of the Internet generally, which reveals a great deal about Weibo’s purpose and community. Both Twitter and Weibo stand in the virtual public sphere, where members of civil society from the upper-middle class amalgamate a collective

identity based on the ideas circulated there. From this pool of participants, leaders may surface. But more importantly, a great number of individuals are drawn to this social media to learn how to live online and connect with the online community.

From the outset, the Chinese government supported the Internet as a way to connect, develop, and modernize China. This initial goal rings true in the widespread use of Weibo. Leading academic institutions worked with Western universities in 1994 to build the infrastructure needed to install a virtual connecting system that would eventually become the Internet. The government encouraged this idea of joining campuses together across China.<sup>v</sup> Yet this Internet did not embrace the bilateral participation seen now on social media sites, and instead served as a source of passive consumption. Approximately 12 years later in 2009, Weibo emerged as a microblogging site and changed the way netizens (Internet citizens or users) consumed information by promoting interactivity.<sup>vi</sup>

These facts provide a clear outline of the Chinese state's motives to promote and assist in the development of the Internet. It did so both in an effort to advance China's progress to match the level of other developed nations, and to ensure easy control of what would become a critical evaluation and surveillance mechanism.<sup>vii</sup> Recent leaders, such as President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, recognize the importance of learning about the public's opinion through the Internet and social media sites.<sup>viii</sup> For example, in 2010 Premier Wen Jiabao went online to chat with citizens to show his dedication to connecting to the Chinese people through the Internet. In addition to observing netizens' actions online, the Chinese state also uses the Internet as a channel for the dissemination of propaganda and state-sponsored media.

Although the Chinese state will scrutinize the Internet, it is ultimately up to the independent website providers to monitor the contents on their websites:

The state legislation stipulates that all Internet Service Providers (ISP) and Internet Content Providers (ICP) are responsible for what is published on their websites, and those who violate that rule may face the consequences of the state's 'reprimanding, rectifying, imposing financial fines on, and, in serious cases, temporarily or even permanently closing down Web sites.'<sup>ix</sup>

This law thus simplifies the state's role in censorship and in determining the Internet's content. If subversive or controversial information emerges online, the state must not target the individual, but can easily punish the website provider. These procedures shift the responsibility of censorship from the state to the individual providers, further distancing the state from its role as executive censor. Thus, Weibo's administration must monitor and regulate what occurs on Weibo. Nevertheless, it is ultimately the state that decides what falls into the category of subversive and not. Some Weibo posts slip through the censor's net. The posts that are caught are quickly removed. Weibo users think carefully before they publish a post conveying subversive or radical ideas. Most censorship techniques consist of making the process more difficult than a user would willingly fight against. The purchase of a Virtual Private Network (VPN) allows some Internet users to evade these hurdles and access potentially subversive material by connecting to a private network outside of China.

Weibo was not the first microblog in China. It was preceded by microblogs such as Jiwai.de and Fanfou.com, but it has become the most successful microblog in the Mainland in recent years because of its accessibility and rapidity.<sup>x</sup> The name, Weibo, references the specific types of posts users write: short and concise messages that could

be classified as micro. Weibo connects citizens across borders, advertises new ideas, and provides forums in which netizens are able to relate to one another over mutual interests. This social media has expanded the opportunities the Internet has to offer China.

The headquarters of Sina Weibo Corporation are located in Beijing with financial headquarters in Shanghai. It was founded with the mission statement:

SINA is committed to bringing the opportunities of the Internet to the global Chinese community, delivering the opportunities of China's New Economy to the world, furthering the development of China's Internet sector through wireless, broadband, e-commerce and business-to-business initiatives, educating the public on the Internet environment in China, etc...

Charles Chao is the current Chief Executive Officer and President. He has previously worked as a news correspondent for Shanghai Media Group. Sina Weibo also cooperates with a variety of other web-based companies and media partners, such as Yahoo and eBay.<sup>xi</sup>

The creation of microblogging websites, such as Twitter in 2006, sparked a way of communicating that soon went viral and revolutionized social media universally. Microblogs have altered the ways we perceive and engage with information online. The information posted on microblogs disseminates quickly through the channels linking bloggers together. The foundation of such technology is buttressed by the trend of quick, short news postings and the emphasis on hyper-interactivity. Microblog users' blogs automatically update their followers. Users can also link websites in their posts, and engage with others in the microblogging community by commenting or linking into a discussion topic using a variety of symbols, such as hashtags (#).

Weibo shares many of Twitter's functions. Both social media sites allow users to access and post on their Weibo by computer or smart phone. Weibo also limits its bloggers to writing no more than one hundred and forty characters at a time in one post. This length is the equivalent to seventy to eighty words in English.<sup>xiii</sup> By limiting posts to one hundred and forty characters, the creators of both social media effectively force participants to be brief and catchy. Users can link to videos, photos or other sites in their blog posts to highlight a particular point or to reference an outside event. Once the user posts the blog, it shows up on its followers' feed, but also exists in the public domain. Users can also respond to other users' posts or repost particular entries. Easy internal search engines allow users to find discussion forums or connect to others also blogging about the same topic. They can also record a micro-journal or post pictures under their albums on their profiles.

On Weibo, users find easy ways to establish connections and communicate. Each user can list an affiliation with a school or business to find friends more easily. In addition to following one's friends and acquaintances, users can also follow celebrities, organizations and news sources. Connecting to different users in this virtual public sphere is simple when a Weibo user can easily navigate its pages and feeds to find updates on events, follow discussions on specific topics, or engage in conversations about issues. Unlike the Chinese social media site Renren (人人), which closely resembles Facebook, Weibo allows its users to connect over a variety of topics and post blogs directed at all users to voice their opinions, rather than simply communicate with friends, and learn about events. Weibo's layout is fairly easy to access and follow (See Figure 2 on page

37). Furthermore, its bright colors, neatly organized profiles and constantly updating screen attract and entertain the eye.

The current number of registrants on Weibo is five hundred million, which makes it one of the most critical methods of communication in China.<sup>xiii</sup> As Weibo's functions become more advanced, and the Internet decreases the cost of communication, the number of Chinese citizens who register a Weibo account increases at a rate of approximately twenty million users per month.<sup>xiv</sup> Microblogging's appealing qualities increase the number of people who are engaging in the horizontal communication in this virtual sphere.

The use of Weibo mirrors Twitter's patterns of use with the distinction of censorship rules. Microblog posts are published by the minute on Weibo. Human censors struggle to effectively take down all of the controversial or subversive posts within a second or even within a week. It takes time and effort to track down specific posts, particularly when Weibo users actively avoid the censors. For example, Weibo users continue to write microblogs packed with euphemisms to avoid or trick the censor's searches. Even technology enabled censors barely match the rate Weibo users publish posts when posts are filled with euphemisms and vague references. As a result, many posts are circulated and seen by thousands before they are taken down. This fact highlights the importance of Weibo and the creation of a forum in which censorship cannot be as encompassing or thorough. Weibo does require real name registration, but many users find ways to get around restrictions. Despite the fact censorship rules limit the full realization of unrestricted information on Weibo, microblog posts still exist in the realm of a virtual public sphere.

The concept of a public sphere can be divided into sectors; each one occupied by different elements of the public as a whole. One such sector emphasizes the political rights of its citizens and the protection of these rights. Another sector may include the communication of ideas about specific cultural traditions.<sup>xv</sup> The general public sphere encompasses qualities that people hold in common. In this space of expression, they communicate incidents of concerns, from which indicators of commonality materialize. The prevalence of the Internet opens up the possibility for new types of virtual public spheres to emerge. These spheres are public because there are, ideally, no restrictions to information posted online.

Jürgen Habermas, a German sociologist and philosopher, developed the idea of the public sphere in 1962.<sup>xvi</sup> He continues to provide critical observations about society, media, public opinion, and democracy. Most notably, in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Habermas explores the intersection of the private and government. He traces the idea of the public sphere from feudalism in medieval Europe to the time of Marx and Engels:

The public sphere no longer linked a society of property-owning private persons with the state. Rather, the autonomous public...secured for itself (as composed of private persons) a sphere of personal freedom, leisure, and freedom of movement. In this sphere, the informal and personal interaction of human beings with one another would have been emancipated for the first time...<sup>xvii</sup>

Habermas' analysis of the public sphere provides a foundation for much of the current theory on the public's role in holding authorities accountable.

The idea of the Internet as a public sphere is controversial. David Kurt Herold argues against the interpretation of the Chinese Internet as a public sphere, particularly

because it cannot “be seen as an egalitarian tool for the equal expression of opinions by all the citizens of a state.”<sup>xviii</sup> Poor socioeconomic status precludes the possibility of all citizens accessing the required technology to engage in this sphere of society. Furthermore, the Chinese state imposes censorship laws that limit the traditional idea of a free public sphere in China.

Ideally, both Weibo and Twitter are examples of virtual public spheres, and although these quintessential forms of microblogging reflect the characteristics of communication in a public sphere, further inquiry into Weibo’s workings highlights the fragmentation of its audiences. The disproportionate ability for upper-middle class members to express themselves on Weibo eliminates the possibility of Weibo embracing all parts of a true public sphere. Not every person has access to the Internet and social media. Therefore, these media and spheres cannot be public in the traditional sense but are rather public (no cost and accessible) to those who have computers or smart phones, and choose to connect to these spheres. Weibo users are concentrated in the larger and more developed cities. Among the 500 million registered Weibo users, 46.8% of bloggers have a bachelor’s degree or higher.<sup>xix</sup>

Weibo’s success lies in its interactivity and connecting facilities. Looking at the number of participants, it is clear Weibo is a monumental form of communication. Yet this method of communicating is confined to the upper-middle class. Of these registered users, 43.9% have a disposable income of 1,000 to 2,999 RMB per month (approximately 160 to 480 USD per month).<sup>xx</sup> Weibo appeals to a range of ages, but the majority of Weibo users are younger than 35 years old, with 40% between 25 and 34 years of age.<sup>xxi</sup> Due to greater accessibility to technology in metropolitan areas and more concentrated

wealth, urban dwellers make up the largest portion of Weibo users. Generally, these populations reside in Tier One cities. Location, population, and economic statistics determine which cities fall into the categories of Tier One, Two, or Three. For example, Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing are Tier One cities.<sup>xxii</sup> This classification is useful when determining which populations access Weibo more frequently, or which are more concerned and knowledgeable about certain issues. A survey conducted in 2012 by McKinsey found that 95% of China's Internet users who live in Tier One, Two, and Three cities participate in a social media site.<sup>xxiii</sup> Approximately, 85.4% of all Weibo bloggers live in a Tier One, Two, or Three city.<sup>xxiv</sup>

These figures draw a picture of the typical Weibo user. The greater number of individuals in more affluent or developed cities, the more influence they hold as a collective group in the virtual sphere of Weibo. It is imperative to recall that those most likely to adopt new technologies as a means of communication are also those most likely to be involved in nuanced protest.<sup>xxv</sup>

The virtual sphere of social media allows for a more fluid form of networking and communication to evolve between users across regions and between cities. Although a user's own personal privacy restrictions can be implemented at the click of a mouse, social media users continue to consent to public sharing.<sup>xxvi</sup> Weibo, as Twitter does, encourages openness and natural networking. Users are not confined to interacting exclusively with their friends but can seek out solidarity from other people or organizations. This process can be self-gratifying, but also encourages certain types of uninhibited behavior in this flowing sphere. The idea of having a public profile directly

relates to that of “living online” and experiencing all the elements of the Internet as a new person who interacts with other online characters.

Within the particular group on Weibo, the identity of a Weibo user as that of an active participant connected to the online community becomes integral. When one brings his or her personal concerns into the virtual sphere of Weibo, an individual presents a specific identity that revolves around those concerns. Guobin Yang mentions Ann Swindler’s scholarship that examines public life’s role in an individual’s identity formation, particularly through the engagement with the public sphere.<sup>xxvii</sup> I would add that Weibo, as a space for participation in virtual public life, encourages the development of an imagined collective identity as a group. Similar to the ideas Benedict Anderson presents in terms of nationalism, this collective identity is “imagined because the members ... will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>xxviii</sup> Online discussions generally center on dominant ideas, such as alternative nationalism, but extend past the discussion’s confines to describe the rest of Weibo or China. Building on the external identities, the free flow of information influences Weibo users’ new virtual identities.

Weibo’s functions specifically promote this collective identity due to the prominence of discussion forums within its virtual territory and the lack of face-to-face communication. Users united within forums share ideas and discuss mutual concerns. The dialogue builds off the initial post; users either respond to the user who posted the initial post or to subsequent comments stemming from the initial post. Additionally, the function of hash-tagging a topic also encourages the collectivity of a group centered on

an idea.<sup>xxix</sup> This collective identity emerges around other specific online activities, such as participating in linking to certain topics, following celebrities, and commenting on posts. Social media serves as a structure to channel identity formation based on communal information. Each of these interactions is somewhat imagined; Weibo users interact assuming their imagined community exists as a certain collection of individuals.

The prevalence of the discussion of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute among Weibo users exemplifies a collective mentality. Many users contributed to this online body by expressing their dissatisfaction with the protesters' actions or by presenting a counterpoint. All such engagement in the discussion revolved around the assumption that users command a level of knowledge about current affairs. Regardless of the ideas published online, simple actions of interactivity, either by writing a post or responding to another post, create a constellation of posts around one topic. The result of discussion forums is a potpourri of conversations that contribute to the collective identity of Weibo users as those who investigate the conflict and opinions on the Diaoyu Islands Dispute and the meaning of alternative nationalism.

Within this community, certain individuals may stand as leaders or pioneers in trending new ideas and influencing others. These scarce leaders accrue followers due to attractive, appealing blogs, creative thoughts, or their status in society. In Eytan Bakshy, Winter Mason, Jake Hofman, and Duncan Watts' paper "Everyone's an Influencer: Quantifying Influence on Twitter," the authors define influencers as "individuals who disproportionately impact the spread of information or some related behavior of interest."<sup>xxx</sup> Each person commands a different amount of influence depending on his or her position in society, how many people follow their microblog, and how much of what

he or she posts is believed by his or her followers. Weibo and Twitter provide ideal spaces to conduct research about individual influence because the way to exert influence is constant: one hundred and forty character posts.<sup>xxx1</sup>

Microblogging also provides a space and the tools for leadership and personal growth to occur within this specific frame. “Micro-messaging can be a surprisingly effective medium for thought leadership. It rewards clear thinking; it’s good for sharing and re-sharing ideas and links; and it can provoke thoughtful reflection.”<sup>xxxii</sup> This phenomenon occurs to some extent on Weibo. Murong Xuecun is an example of a microblogger who expresses himself on Weibo through posting reflections about society.

Murong Xuecun serves as an intellectual leader in the Weibo sphere. For the purposes of this thesis, he stands as an outspoken commentator on Chinese society and investigates domestic behavior through his microblogs. He is also a harsh critic of the censorship policies in China. His microblogs are reposted anywhere from two hundred to thirteen thousand times, which may show a public trust or admiration. A couple thousand users typically respond to the initial posting, which illustrates the reciprocal feelings or charged discussion topics. The Chinese government tends to overlook Murong Xuecun’s harsh critiques of Chinese society and the government’s censorship policies, so long as these critiques seem relatively harmless.

The reasons behind this action are complex. One explanation is that Murong Xuecun adds to the list of successful Chinese authors (as he is somewhat well-known in the Western world), thereby helping the Chinese government prove itself worthy on the international stage. A perfect example of this same yearning was the Chinese

government's desperate desire to host the Olympics, or for a Chinese person to win the Nobel Peace Prize (even though one has, he is not recognized as a legitimate winner in the government's eyes).<sup>xxxiii</sup> The Chinese government hoists Murong Xuecun upon its shoulders and claims his new international status as an elite writer as an example of Chinese culture's authority. His presence at international conferences further represents Chinese culture's status in the scene of "World Literature." Because of his background as an Internet literary idol, it is plausible that most of Murong Xuecun's fans also read his online literature and follow with other intellectual figures in similar circles. Of course, some Weibo followers may simply enjoy reading his dynamic microblogs.

Leaders do surface naturally through their participation in Weibo, however the acquisition of a leadership role is not the goal of Weibo. Social media in China revolves less around the idea of making oneself a leader as it does around participating in discussions or "living online."<sup>xxxiv</sup> Everyone on the Weibo site plays the role of an audience member. Users frequently hide behind ambiguous names, which may influence them to post their true opinions with more ease, without fear of being criticized by acquaintances. This openness encourages new thoughts or perspectives. Or, an alternative interpretation exists that people are more likely to express opinions on Weibo that have been suppressed in other areas of daily life. In comparison to Twitter, Chinese microbloggers have little access to resources to express themselves freely in offline public spaces. They may turn to Weibo to discuss their controversial opinions. On Weibo, users can find solidarity in expressing opinions shared by other users, even those that target the state. Furthermore, the simple process of posting one's opinion constitutes participation in this virtual society. The sheer number of online Weibo participants

reduces the likelihood of becoming an online celebrity. Generally, this colossal number of participants serves to augment previously established celebrity profiles in the Weibo realm.

Each actor that participates in social media makes up the base of social media's position as an element of civil society. Simple actions, such as "liking" a post or reposting an entry, exemplify the variety of ways to engage with civil society. Weibo provides another level of civil society, an area between the government and private sector that depends upon "citizen participation in public life."<sup>xxxv</sup> Participation in this level of civil society manifests itself through short posts and emoticons instead of vocalizing thoughts and conveying dissatisfaction through violence or shouting in physical spaces.

In Guobin Yang's article, he explores the question of how the Internet and civil society in China interact. Civil society affects the Internet, and vice versa. He writes, "Civil society facilitates the development of the Internet by providing the necessary social basis—citizens and citizen groups—for communication and interaction."<sup>xxxvi</sup> Although Guobin Yang wrote this paper in 2003 on the Internet, the notion that the Internet facilitates communication, and thus communication facilitates the development of the Internet, runs parallel to the ways Weibo operates. Weibo facilitates communication between individuals. The use of Weibo to contact others or "civil society" shapes Weibo and determines the norm of its usage. A deeper understanding of Weibo helps one predict its possible appearance in the future. How will the current fanatical participation in Weibo alter the future of its use and features? Will it continue Weibo's role as a space for progressive nationalistic thoughts to evolve?

What Guobin Yang fails to mention, or elaborate on, is that this interdependent relationship only revolves around those who have access to the Internet. He broadly defines “civil society” as “the intermediate public realm between the state and the private sphere.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> In the realm of Weibo, discussion groups are confined to a specific class in civil society that exists between the state and private sphere. This specific sphere within civil society consists mainly of members who come from the upper-middle social class and have a similar background of education and lifestyle. The extent to which comments posted on Weibo can provoke societal change fluctuates. The exclusive circulation of Weibo users’ opinions magnifies the pre-existing social discrepancies in Chinese society.

However, microblogs do encourage an ever-expanding discussion within this virtual sphere. Each post builds off the previous one, or adds an additional opinion to change the shape of the conversation. I will give an example of this in the section ‘Community and Weibo.’ The initial post releases an idea into the Weibo forum and each subsequent comment will add to the discussion of the initial idea. This flow of posts makes Weibo a communal site as it encourages group discussions, thus resulting in a collective identity. This collective group demands the space for free discussion by continuing to use the provided forums to engage with one another in novel and thought-provoking ways.

Weibo’s methods of transmitting information differ from those used in other areas of the public sphere, for example those used by the mass media. This difference is the role of citizen participation in communicating information on microblogging sites. It is in these virtual spheres that citizens engage with one another, relay news, and express new ideas. Guobin Yang states, “In China’s case, the Internet can better meet people’s needs

for personal expression and public participation than conventional media can.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> Because China holds strict control over conventional media, the Chinese people seek alternatives to express their opinions and obtain information. Weibo provides one such pathway. Guobin Yang mentions the “expansion of individual rights and urban public spaces, the proliferation of popular protest, [and] the decentralization of the media” in terms of the Internet.<sup>xxxix</sup> In particular, Weibo’s influence on the public’s opinion of the media inspires some citizens to shift their trust from mass media sources to upper-middle class citizen journalists and other unofficial sources found online.

Because citizen participation with civil society is critical to its perpetuation, Weibo users’ comments hold great weight in relation to the future of the media in China. As the popularity of citizen journalism increases, China’s online restrictions may tighten in response to this fluid stream of information. Tied to the threat of citizen journalism lies the threat of popular protest flourishing on Weibo. Weibo’s unifying powers—namely connecting users who hold similar opinions through discussion forums—allow thoughts of protest to develop more quickly and reach a wider audience, thus increasing the possibility of an influential online protest.<sup>xl</sup>

Although Weibo cannot take credit for the birth of popular protest or democracy within China, it can claim responsibility for the unification of individuals across China’s vast expanse in the realm of online China.<sup>xli</sup> It has provided the tools to organize and assemble virtually. Some claim that the Internet serves as the leading public sphere to promote democracy within countries. Weibo, being one of the primary facilitators of communication in China, makes up an important component of promoting the free flow of information. Presently, registered Weibo users make up approximately 35% of China’s

population, thus restricting a portion of China's population from engaging in critical conversations on Weibo.<sup>xlii</sup> Democracy inherently involves the entire population and, as a consequence, Weibo cannot stand as a democratic model. However, Weibo may provide the initial blocks needed to create a democratic state, or to fuel a population's desire to push for democracy through a space of expression.

Weibo creates invisible networks in the online world when the physical world cannot provide effective or realistic networks across regions. Just as the Internet builds "networks of activism that are disorganized and dispersed in the physical world,"<sup>xliii</sup> Weibo generates relationships between participants, particularly those who share a general ground of action or thought. Zixue Tai found that Chinese cyberspace "is dominated by people in their twenties and thirties" which is historically proven to be the group of people most likely involved in protest or action.<sup>xliv</sup> New ways to spread information in a predominantly anonymous setting have altered the power structure of communication. The transfer from those in traditional media to civilians has given individuals a fresh sense of political activism.<sup>xlv</sup> Because of the rigorous procedures to obtain permission for a protest, there is a strong likelihood that the number of protests in this virtual sphere will only increase.

This virtual sphere attracts users from the upper-middle class who have access through their possession of technology. Interaction and engagement with other participants form a collective identity with the imagined whole. Simple use also alters one's own identity and opinions, either through reinforcement or through the introduction of new ideas, such as alternative nationalism. Weibo incorporates the habit of living online as an inseparable portion of living offline.

## Methods

While writing this thesis, I relied on the scarce research previously published on social media and Weibo. Scholarship on the history and studies of the Internet were more plentiful. To support my hypothesis that opinions about the Diaoyu Islands Dispute that contain elements of alternative nationalism emerge on Weibo, I searched for relevant examples of such microblogs. Because of the copious number of microblogs concerning the Diaoyu Islands Dispute, such that I could not possibly sift through all of them in one lifetime, I chose to primarily analyze those found through the profile of Murong Xuecun, a contemporary Chinese author of online literature. Previously, I translated a chapter from Murong Xuecun's novel *China, in the Absence of a Remedy*.<sup>xlvi</sup> This novel analyzes corruption, ignorance and pyramid schemes in contemporary Chinese society. His fame in Chinese intellectual circles makes Murong Xuecun a perfect channel to find users' responses or online opinions about the Diaoyu Islands Dispute.

In Figure 1, we see an example of Murong Xuecun's Weibo profile as a typical user would see it. On March 27, 2013 he had posted 1899 microblogs, he had 1114 followers and 3,669,931 fans. Under his "about" label he writes: speak the truth, speak the people's talk, not a lover of money, not afraid of death, the direct route is the Daoism mentality, defy scolding, use stupid skills, and do not use petty tricks. He listed his education at China University of Political Science and Law in Beijing as well. Each of these labels links with other Weibo users who also identify with these values or ideas, and a click will take the user to their pages.<sup>xlvii</sup>

The case studies included are examples of posts written by those in Murong Xuecun's circles on Weibo. Generally, these posts exemplify the types of microblogs

written to discourage protesters from engaging in radical patriotism, or to offer critiques of the political conditions in China. Although these samples of text only provide an initial foray into the type of posts found on the vast span of Weibo, each post nonetheless makes up an important part in understanding the whole of Weibo.

There are more limitations when researching social media than there are advantages. The sheer number of posts provides a daunting task in analysis and comprehension. Furthermore, the online vernacular constantly changes to involve new references or interpretations, a decisive challenge to a translator. Finally, the researcher must assume the information and opinions found online reflect some amount of truth, otherwise there is no way to create a sound conclusion from examining the virtual world. However, it is possible these posts are creations by real people who may skew their online identity or alter their views to fit a different persona.

During my research, I found the best way to explore Weibo was to examine one topic. This limitation provoked focused and more in-depth research. Next, I applied time constraints on the posts I would examine. This limitation dictated the number of posts I examined, particularly because I concentrated on Murong Xuecun's circle to theoretically turn the spotlight to those in the intellectual virtual circle.

As a non-fluent Chinese speaker, there are numerous limitations to comprehending and translating posts. Furthermore, my opinion comes from that of an American analyzing a conflict deeply seated in the Chinese national spirit. This profound emotional connection to the Diaoyu Islands Dispute is not something I can grasp, nor should I try to. My research and opinions cannot help but be tainted by my perspective;

however, I simply present one piece of evidence and await other scholars to approach the same subject with a new viewpoint. The increase in scholarship cannot demean the validity of research on contemporary technology when the subject matter is as complex and has as many layers as social media.

Murong Xuecun's Profile (Figure 1)

**33位新粉丝, 查看**  
**粉丝**  
**23条新@我, 查看**  
**@我**  
**1条新邀请, 查看邀请**

**新浪认证**  
 知名作家。长篇小说《成都, 今夜请将我遗忘》、《天堂向左, 深圳往右》; 最新小说《原谅我红尘颠倒》  
 申请认证

**慕容雪村 (设置备注)** <http://weibo.com/hawking>  
 一穷汉耳。一死汉耳。一痴汉耳。尤以为王。爽又句洁。与此世。 ...  
 | 北京 海淀区 | 毕业于中国政法大学 | 标签 ·  
 已关注 |  取消 |  私信

1114 3669931  
 关注 粉丝  
 1899  
 微博

**他的主页** | **个人资料** | **关注/粉丝** | **相册**

**全部 微博**

**全部** | 原创 | 图片 | 视频 | 音乐 | 标签 | 心情

转发好文 // @包菡菡: 前两天看James Fallows的<中国航空>, 里面有一句话令人印象深刻: 民众不满的不是财富, 而是特权. 同样, 令草原上牧民不满的, 不是国家要求以恢复生态的名义禁牧, 而是在勒令禁牧的同时却允许矿企和风能企业不顾环境成本地开发. 一个自始至终都很沉默的牧民在采访中突然蹦出一句话: “说得一个”

**@包菡菡**   
 我为NYT中文网的撰稿<草原哀歌> <http://t.cn/zThbsWO> 2011年夏天, 一个蒙古族的朋友带我上了包头达茂旗禁牧区的草原. 在国家要求恢复草原生态的口号下, 牧民被每年每亩6元的草场补贴买断了基础的劳作方式. 然而对草原的掠夺并未停止. 牧民们疑惑, 为什么不许放牛羊, 却允许无休止地开矿、抽地下水、栽种风机?

3月27日 00:20 来自新浪微博 (35) | 转发(1766) | 评论(229)

今天11:30 来自iPhone客户端 (22) | 转发(382) | 收藏 | 评论(100)

小郝谢谢老郝点评. 结尾处的那个梦确实很糟糕. 但也是没办法. 英文版和法文版都已经翻译完了, 估计年内会出. 这两个版本肯定不会有那个糟糕的梦。

**微关系**  
 我们之间的共同关系

共同关注 (11)

伊能静 姚晨 李冰冰 徐小平

我关注的人也关注他(9)

李冰冰 李承鹏 庄羽 路金波

他的粉丝还关注了

韩寒 宁财神 沧月

**微相册**  
 10,000,000+人在用

### ***Diaoyu Islands Dispute Protest: A Historical Perspective***

In September 2012, protests broke out in a dozen Chinese cities to object to the Japanese government's supposed purchase of the Diaoyu Islands from their private Japanese owner. According to a *New York Times* article published on September 11, 2012, the Japanese government sought to prevent a radical individual from purchasing the Islands in the likelihood that problems between China and Japan would escalate.<sup>xlviii</sup> This action of nationalization shifted the conflict's foundation and sent a wave of protests sweeping through both nations. Feelings of nationalism intensified and some protests became violent.

The contested islands lie between China and Japan in the East China Sea to the Southwest of Japan. They are in close proximity to important shipping lines, fishing grounds, and oil reserves.<sup>xlix</sup> Currently three nations, Japan, China, and Taiwan, claim sovereignty over the islands. The slightest modification in either government's stance over official ownership creates a whirlwind of concern, often expressed through passionate protests. To further complicate these relations, a UN report in 1968 documented the presence of oil close to the Diaoyu Islands. This report ignited fresh disagreements over the true sovereign of the islands. The country with sovereignty over the islands logically controls the oil and any other natural resources found in the Exclusive Economic Zone.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after this report was published, much of the Chinese Diaspora and Hong Kong residents were enraged about the debate over the islands' sovereignty. Many of the protesters demanded that the international community recognize China as the true sovereign. Despite these protests, the islands remained under Japanese control. Although

the oil near the Diaoyu Islands amounts to approximately \$6 trillion USD, the dispute extends beyond the common conflict over oil to a more profound reflection of nationalistic values.<sup>li</sup> The dispute follows the pattern of historical tension between China and Japan in that each power does not wish to succumb to the other's demands, particularly while the international community watches.

The current dispute balances precariously on the interpretation of Chinese historical records and the territorial negotiations after World War II. Since 1895, Japan, the United States and, debatably, China have all controlled the islands. According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China's sovereignty over the islands is "fully proven by history and is legally well founded." After the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, the Diaoyu Islands were ceded to Japan. The Treaty of San Francisco in 1951 returned Taiwan to China. According to the Chinese government, the Diaoyu Islands should have been logically included in this return. Additionally, the Japanese accepted the terms stated in the Cairo Declaration of 1943, cited in Clause 8 of the Potsdam Declaration. According to the Cairo Declaration, all territories Japan took from China shall be returned. The Chinese government frequently refers to the Treaty of San Francisco and the Cairo Declaration as legitimating documents to secure the Diaoyu Islands as part of China's territory. Because foreign relations were tenuous after the 1950s, the Chinese government did not voice its concern over the ultimate control of the islands when questions arose in the following years.<sup>lii</sup>

In recent history, particularly after the Tiananmen Protests, Chinese leaders have sought to legitimize their rule through the improvement of China's economy. To maintain a strong economy, the government put forth the idea that "the political stability provided

by CCP rule is necessary.”<sup>liii</sup> The achievement of nationalist goals helps to solidify the façade of the CCP’s patriotic agenda. Yet some nationalist goals cannot be properly satisfied, such as those that demand aggressive, military action in the international arena. The Diaoyu Islands Dispute represents a critical event in China’s modern history. It symbolizes the dichotomy between achieving nationalist goals and maintaining harmonious foreign relations.

Historical tension, including war crimes, various territorial disputes, and colonization, echoes through these two nations’ pasts. The Chinese people continue to hold hostility towards Japan, thus the Diaoyu Islands Dispute cannot be solved quickly or easily. No simple answer exists. However, “failure to pursue Chinese claims aggressively when nationalistic issues arise” may result in the de-legitimization of the government.<sup>liv</sup> In the past, “Chinese leaders pursued economic development at the expense of nationalist goals.”<sup>lv</sup> The transformation of the Chinese economy to its current position as a global superpower could allow the CCP’s reaction to take the form of military action. The Diaoyu Islands Dispute has expanded to “spill over borders and increase the likelihood of international conflict.”<sup>lvi</sup>

Because of the sensitivity of this territorial dispute, protests have occurred throughout the years over the sovereignty of the islands under various circumstances. Erica Strecker Downs and Phillip Saunders explore the 1990 and 1996 instances of disagreement over the Diaoyu Islands, both of which shed light upon the evolution of the Chinese people’s thinking and the materialization of protests over time. Each instance is a response to Japanese groups’ assertive claims over the Islands. Before each breakout, the

CCP advocated for anti-Japanese sentiments domestically so as to maintain authority locally, while preserving stable economic relations with Japan.

In 1990, shortly after the Tiananmen Massacre, an announcement was made that Japan's Maritime Safety Agency intended to mark the Japanese lighthouse on the islands as a supposed official navigation mark.<sup>lvii</sup> Anti-Japanese demonstrations broke out in Hong Kong. "The Chinese leadership sought to quell expressions of anti-Japanese sentiment by imposing a blackout on coverage of the protests occurring overseas, while the Beijing municipal government refused permission for rallies on university campuses and increased security in the university district," write Downs and Saunders.<sup>lviii</sup> The chaotic immediacy of tempering the protests' publicity in China speaks to the CCP's attempts to tailor public information. The CCP soon bore the brunt of the Chinese university students' frustration as the students learned of conditions abroad. Some questioned their right to freedom of speech.

Because these protests occurred at a sensitive time in Chinese history, the government was particularly precautionary when dealing with student protesters so as not to spur antigovernment protests. However, by suppressing blatant patriotism and anti-Japanese protests, the government preached two standards: advocating for a more rational nationalism in response to Japan's actions, while simultaneously purporting strong patriotic values in other domestic areas. Furthermore, after the Tiananmen incident, China's economic isolation from some countries provided greater motivation for the government to subdue domestic turmoil, to withhold any aggressive language on the issue, and to appeal to the international community.<sup>lix</sup>

The 1996 protests began, again, because right-wing Japanese nationalists placed a lighthouse on the Diaoyu Islands. One Chinese activist drafted a petition that pushed for the authorization to send warships to take apart the lighthouse, while those in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan led anti-Japanese protests. David Chan, a pro-China activist, drowned while attempting to place a Chinese flag on the islands. His death sparked even more intense anti-Japanese protests in pan-China. In both cases, “China’s leaders sought to quash expressions of anti-Japanese sentiment [in the Mainland] for fear that they would damage Sino-Japanese relations and might turn into antigovernment protests.”<sup>lx</sup> The CCP was effective, until recently.

Although the fear of antigovernment protests remains omnipresent in the Mainland, the CCP has taken fewer measures to quiet the protesters. In 1996, the government censored online messages that called for anti-Japanese protests.<sup>lxi</sup> In contrast, during the most recent protests, the CCP instead censored “让中日关系回归理性——我们的呼吁,” or “Return Sino-Japanese Relations to Rationality Petition—Our Plea,” which calls for logical international relations.<sup>lxii</sup> The censorship of a more rational document starkly contrasts the CCP’s position sixteen years ago. Radical patriotism is a growing phenomenon in China. A group of Mainland activists that currently seeks to protect the Diaoyu Islands (hence their name 保钓, or “protect the islands”) has gained recognition in recent years because of their attempts at landing on the Diaoyu Islands and their online presence to collect donations.<sup>lxiii</sup> This group shows the increasing prevalence of the Internet in Chinese civil society and the government’s increasing tolerance for anti-Japanese sentiments.

The frequency and magnitude of anti-Japanese protests shows the spread of patriotism within certain populations in China. Yanan He also believes “anti-Japanese movements clearly indicate a rising tide of popular nationalism in China,” supported by the “scale and frequency of spontaneous anti-Japanese protests.”<sup>lxiv</sup> However, individuals who support a mutually beneficial situation amend He’s claim to emphasize that the spread of radical patriotism is not universal.<sup>lxv</sup> Perhaps, because the September 2012 protests are not the first occurrence of anti-Japanese protests in Greater China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) allowed the protesters to continue staging demonstrations due to the Mainland’s current superior economic status. In contrast to previous occurrences, the government was not acting as the voice of reason to quell the protesters’ anger. As a result, protesters did not direct their attention to the CCP’s shortcomings. As the government has not assumed the role of reasonable authority, Weibo provides a much-needed channel for an alternative attitude to surface. Those opposed to the anti-Japanese protests voice their opinions and question the necessity of the anti-Japanese protesters’ actions through this social media.

Downs suggests another interpretation of the prevalence of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute. She claims that Chinese students use the Diaoyu Islands Dispute as a scapegoat for their hostile emotions towards the Chinese government. She claims that it is “a safe means of expressing resentment against the CCP.”<sup>lxvi</sup> With the emergence of Weibo, the “educated” Chinese have a chance to communicate their dissatisfaction with the CCP. There is no need to use the Diaoyu as a symbol of their bitterness but can rather express this resentment online in a straightforward manner. Although there are many flaws to this argument, the protests in 1996 did show an increase in antigovernment sentiment and

“criticism of the CCP’s performance was much stronger in the 1996 case.”<sup>lxvii</sup> The magnitude of Weibo’s power cannot be overstated. Unlike Twitter, Weibo serves as the primary political tool to express frustration towards the state. The Chinese government strictly controls public gatherings and continuously improves online censorship methods. Weibo supplements the lack of physical protests that neglect feelings of frustration towards the Chinese state.

Access to information concerning diplomatic negotiations could increase Weibo users’ criticism of the CCP. This criticism may invite unwanted international scrutiny. Yanan He writes, “Advocating patriotism is the safest language for Chinese societal elites to openly critique domestic and diplomatic policies and advance their own political agenda.”<sup>lxviii</sup> This logic follows Downs and Saunders’ argument that the Diaoyu Islands Dispute acts as a safe way to criticize domestic issues shielded by patriotism. Intellectuals began to voice their opinions about the Diaoyu Islands Dispute in 2002. Their goal was to raise awareness about the diplomatic concerns and possible devastating results of international conflict. Ma Licheng and Shi Yinhong, two Chinese intellectuals, asserted a change in international policies that promoted economic prosperity and cooperation, divergent from an anti-Japanese stance tainted by memories of war crimes. The responses to Ma’s and Shi’s arguments online were negative. Some Chinese netizens went so far as to call them “traitors,” a complete turnaround from the opinions now floating around Weibo.<sup>lxix</sup>

The CCP still supported rational diplomacy in 2005. In that year, the Central Propaganda Ministry deliberately visited campuses for the purpose of discouraging protests and advocating for peaceful, friendly relationships with Japan. Much of this

language echoes the “Return Sino-Japanese Relations to Rationality Petition—Our Plea,” written in 2012.<sup>lxx</sup> Perhaps the technological advances in Chinese society are changing the essence and practice of nationalism in the physical world to that which holds its roots in nationalistic radicalism. Conversely, it is changing the way people see protest. Instead of energetic civil citizens protesting, online protest throws physical protest into a dirty light and links it with patriotic radicalism in China. In May of 2005, “The state-controlled mass media, in combination with major online channels of communication, joined the official call for ‘rational patriotism’ and social stability.”<sup>lxxi</sup> Eight years later alternative nationalism comes to the forefront on Weibo.

Within China, opinions and reactions to the Diaoyu Islands Dispute varied drastically in 2012. Some who vehemently oppose Japan’s claims of sovereignty over the Islands expressed their discontent by taking to the streets, boycotting Japanese businesses, and even violently attacking embassies mid-September 2012. This group of protesters was composed primarily of individuals who are of low-income and are less educated. Protests broke out in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing, Qingdao, and over 50 other major cities.<sup>lxxii</sup> Many of the protests were extravagant and loud; protesters targeted Japanese businesses and the few Chinese citizens who appeared to support Japan. The most famous incident occurred in Xi’an in September 2012. A Chinese man, Li Jianli, was driving a Toyota Car (a Japanese brand) down a crowded road. Protesters stopped him and dragged him out of his car to physically abuse him in the streets. As a result, his skull was cracked in four places. The police did little to stop the protesters and now Li Jianli is suing his local government for medical bills and property damage.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

Weibo reflects the opinions of those opposed to radical behavior in the physical world. Li Yinhe circulated one example, “Return Sino-Japanese Relations to Rationality Petition—Our Plea.”<sup>lxxiv</sup> She is a sociologist and activist, primarily for LGBT rights in China. The document does not fall into the category of a Weibo in the traditional sense; it is not one hundred and forty characters long. However, because it was circulated on Weibo and elaborates on alternative nationalism, it is relevant to the conversation. The document calls for a civil discussion between the Japanese and Chinese people to prevent future conflict over the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands. This document was taken down from the general domain, but is still available on certain parts of Weibo.

Some Weibo users’ comments that subscribe to a type of alternative nationalism starkly contrast the opinions of those who have expressed their anti-Japanese stance in offline China, particularly the posts that promote a bilateral dialogue. The fact that one must have access to a computer or handheld device capable of connecting to Weibo discussions further complicates its role in Chinese society. Users that are particularly active in the online Diaoyu Islands Dispute dialogue have mastered the techniques of linking and following, posting, and blogging. These users most likely have personal computers or handheld devices. In turn, those who actively participate in political discussions on Weibo passively exclude those who cannot afford devices to access Weibo or who are not well-versed in Weibo’s intricacies.

This section illustrated the role of social media and Weibo in the Chinese context, and examined its general functions and the ideas that sparked its creation. Weibo stands as a fraction of the public sphere that consists of members of the upper-middle class primarily. To access this virtual sphere, users must dedicate time and money to

participate and engage with the Weibo community. Individuals form identities through online interactions and establish a habit of living virtually. This online identity rarely results in celebrity status; instead, Weibo encourages its participants to connect to other users and to explore areas of interest rather than to pursue virtual distinction. This premise explains the necessity of discussion forums, particularly during times of tension, such as the Diaoyu Islands protests. The history of the Diaoyu Islands constructs a narrative of protests focusing on the Islands, possibly in lieu of citizens' ability to criticize the Chinese government. The government previously provided a voice of reason, one absent from today's political atmosphere. Weibo satisfies some Chinese citizens' urge to return to rationality and to analyze the Diaoyu Islands Dispute with regards to both China and Japan's needs. Recalling the theory behind Weibo's functions and users' experiences, we will continue our exploration of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute and Weibo in the context of contemporary alternative nationalism in microblogs.

## Map (Figure 2)<sup>lxxv</sup>

### **Weibo: Tiny Text in a Large Context**

The manifestation of alternative nationalism in the context of Sino-Japanese relations surfaces through Weibo. While this idea of alternative nationalism sweeps through the dynamic virtual community, it further elaborates on an entire historical process. Participation in this stream of written words on Weibo pushes ideas and discussions forward to create a collective identity. This system allows for a variety of non-linear narratives to be published in real time, which deepens users' feeling of connectivity to other users. "While sovereignty, and having a voice in the official public sphere, are lacking offline, they are perceived and voiced in cyberspace, where new spaces for solidarity are formed and counter-narratives voiced," acutely states Aouragh.<sup>lxxvi</sup> In a world where individuals connect over vast expanses, geographical distances mean little in the construction of communities based in Weibo.

In this section, I will analyze and highlight the discrepancy in class as discussed on Weibo. I will also give examples of the dialogues that exist in varying tiers that emphasize the need to evaluate domestic issues as a community. I will give examples of Weibo posts focused on domestic discontent. These posts elucidate the ways virtual protest has changed how individuals express their opinions in an online community. Weibo users' opinions on the mass media's responsibility to the public, and its role in the continued perpetuation of a single narrative surface, further illustrate the scope of alternative nationalism's significance.

### *Community and Weibo*

On Weibo, the virtual community is identifiable by the use of euphemisms and other insider language, the production of communal discussions, and the audience to which posts are directed. The analysis of social media as an effortless democratizing tool is misleading. The assumption that social media will increase connectivity and accessibility between different groups in society through a horizontal discourse cannot prove true in most socioeconomic circumstances. Weibo is easily accessible to a portion of the population, yet the discussion that occurs online only serves to amplify the isolation of those uninvolved in the virtual sphere. The unilateral dialogue among Weibo users concerning the protests represents the ways in which various class tiers approach the Diaoyu Islands Dispute.

This post was written by 听海观涛 2013 on September 17, 2012, responds to Murong Xuecun's satirical post mocking the Chinese mainstream media and redirecting complaints:

Post: 有人说我不支持中国对钓鱼岛拥有主，错了，我绝对支持。我只是讨厌保护过程中出现的狂妄、暴和残忍的情绪。我还觉得,中国平民没必要直接对日本喊话，喊了也未必能听到，基本属于自己气自己。我们更应该注本国政府，要喊话也是对本国政府喊话，而此事的要点就是，首先要教政府学会怎听话。

Translation: Some people say I don't support China's sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands, wrong, I absolutely support China. I am just against the process of protecting the islands in which all sorts of wild presumptuous, violent and brutal emotions have appeared. I still think that normal Chinese people don't need to shout at Japan because they might not hear it and it will only make ourselves [the Chinese people] angry. Rather, we should pay direct attention to our own government, if we shout, we should shout to our own government, the key point is, first we need to teach the government how to listen to us.<sup>lxxvii</sup>

The author uses the term “support” and “protect” to positively reinforce his or her opinion of China's sovereignty over the Islands. The author continues by mentioning the

protests and the brazen display of raw emotions and violence on behalf of the Chinese people. Through the assertion that “we” should not shout at Japan and instead redirect “our” energy towards the government, the author groups the online community in one declaration of a desired action. Additionally, the blogger writes that normal Chinese people should not engage in this radical behavior. This response addresses the subject of nationalism in Weibo posts by providing constructive criticism in response to the protesters’ reactions to the Diaoyu Islands Dispute. Moreover, the post suggests an alternative course that includes a stronger focus on the government’s role and their unsatisfactory response to the Diaoyu Islands Dispute.

Weibo users form a collective identity that materializes through their involvement in discussion forums. Here is a sample of randomly selected posts that were written in response to the aforementioned post. The initial post received forty-two likes, 8565 reposts, and had 1317 discussion responses. Many of the responses contained words of agreement or accolades, while others criticized Murong Xuecun’s opinion. Simply looking at the sheer number of times this post reappeared through other users’ blogs illuminates the rapid and far-reaching scope of certain posts. As is apparent after reading these posts, the process of engaging in a discussion forum continues as messy and organic.

正版齐天大圣: 说得很好.<sup>lxxviii</sup>  
Translation: Said very well.

↓

無以為念: 同感.<sup>lxxix</sup>  
Translation: Same feeling.

↓

与风有 ▪ : 听了你或者你这 ▪ 人的话就等于亡国灭 ▪ .<sup>lxxx</sup>

Translation: Listening to you or your kinds of people speaking is just the same as national subjugation and genocide.



落寞后的执著: 一个人民不信任的政府有什 ▪ 可看的 徒增烦恼.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Translation: What is there to see in a government not trusted by its people - it (watching the government) would only add to your worries.



夏明宇 2012: ▪ 忘了现在间谍手段无孔不入,民间声音也在其范畴.如果人民集体哑巴,请问什 ▪ 叫做民意!<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Translation: Do not forget the current spies' methods that penetrate everywhere, peoples' voices are one of these ways. If people are collectively mute, what is the popular will?



陌之寒: 教政府怎 ▪ 听话跟民众对日本喊话让日本听见, 难度和实现程度上在我国都差不多.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

Translation: To teach the government how to listen is basically as useless as the people screaming at Japan, the difficulty and the level of achievement is almost equal in our country.



快乐诊所\_舒汉锋: 爱国需要理性,狂热不等于爱国,当年受慈禧愚弄的义和团,所作所为绝对是误国!<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

Translation: Patriotism needs rationality, fanaticism is not equal to loving one's country, back in the day, the empress dowager fooled the Boxers, that action and behavior was absolutely harmful to the country.



雪狼野人: 正确。面对外人预谋已久而公然的挑战几乎没有底线,面对内部却 ▪ 悍无比。炕头汉子,令人鄙视。<sup>lxxxv</sup>

Translation: Correct. Facing foreign, open aggression, the central government is silent and does not resist, while facing their own people, they are ruthless. This man is only sitting on his own bed, despicable.



弹涂鱼晓鹤: 说的有道理, 中国有一部分管理者就不会聆听下属的意见和声音, 一味的让人听从, 这样还有什么意思?! 难道就不能和平的有规矩的解决问题吗?<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

Translation: What you say makes sense, some of the ruling people never listen to the opinions of their subordinates, making people blindly obey, what is the point of this?! Can't we peacefully resolve our problems in an organized manner?

This evolution of discussion points to the discontent and lack of consensus on Weibo.

There are various responses to the initial post, but other users simply expressed their agreement in a brief, non-descriptive way. In one of the previous posts, the author writes, "Patriotism needs rationality, fanaticism is not equal to loving one's country." Through this posting, the author comments on the changing face of nationalism and the best way, in his or her opinion, to love one's country.

Conflicts within China that affect large populations amplify the stark division between Weibo users and non-Weibo users. While examining Weibo posts, it is important to remember that a Weibo user most likely comes from an affluent background, one that can support consistent Internet usage and allows time to familiarize oneself with terminology, site set-up, etc.... There exists a "digital divide between developed and undeveloped regions... The digital and economic divide in China shapes the different uses of the Internet and these differences in use are much broader than those found in the West."<sup>lxxxvii</sup> The variation in the reactions and the subsequent collective identity that forms within each group perpetuates this gap.

One must turn to Weibo users' backgrounds and socioeconomic status to understand the dominance of their opinions online. Weibo users most likely hold more influence over the government or larger businesses' actions because of their status in

society offline, but turn to Weibo as a means of expression without constraints. It can be assumed that if a Chinese citizen can afford a smartphone or computer and constantly posts on Weibo, they are not in a factory or a field performing hard labor. According to the CIA World Fact Book using the US standards of poverty, 13.4% of China's population currently lives under the poverty line.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> An even larger portion of the population cannot afford daily access to the Internet nor can they afford to spend time to master the skills required to operate Weibo. The opinions online represent only a portion of the general population's, furthermore the opinions presented online do not inherently correlate to microbloggers' actions or opinions offline. Thus, regardless of Weibo users' social status, their influence does not necessarily extend past the bounds of Weibo due to of the social restrictions and social-class divide.

The following Weibo was written on September 19, 2012. The source is unknown because so many Weibo users have since reposted this microblog. Although this post was not found through the channel of Murong Xuecun, it perfectly illustrates some of the sentiments felt in relation to the division of class in Chinese society:

Post: 看完今天的各路消息，不得不承认这个社会确实是分阶级的，屌丝上街开party，中产阶级微博谴责，富人沉默不语加快移民节奏，而真正的顶端躲在幕后利用这帮乌合之众当炮灰。

Translation: After I read today's news, I could not help but to recognize today's society is truly divided into classes, the go-into-the-streets, chaotic class, the middle class that condemns actions on Weibo without acting, the silent upper class that is emigrating at an increasingly fast pace, and lastly the actual top class that hides backstage using this mob to serve as cannon-fodder.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

In this post, the author mentions the mass media as a source for insightful reflection on society. The author divides society into classes in the stereotypical sense with definitions built upon generalized actions and opinions. Most recently, this post was

reposted by another user, Ann 花儿, on March 13, 2013 from a Windows Phone. This reposting months after it was initially written shows the enduring qualities of such an idea.

We observe relatively cohesive, lasting opinions on Weibo because it attracts those who share a common cultural history and frame of reference. This background consists of a familiar knowledge of historical events, current events, and a similar vocabulary. Of course, knowledge of how to use the Internet serves as the foundation for users' frame of reference, and automatically divides one sector of society from another. Damm cites Guobin Yang and Giese's argument of virtual discussions to reinforce this claim. He defines these discussions as:

'Insider discussions,' assuming that the users had a high degree of familiarity with the Chinese language, e.g., the use of homonyms and Chinese tradition and culture, as well as with the more recent past, that is, expressions derived from the Cultural Revolution.<sup>xc</sup>

This term "insider discussion" reflects the confines of Weibo dialogues. Not only does the technological gap provide an obstacle to understanding posts, but cultural intricacies do as well. For example, the use of euphemisms has become increasingly more popular on Weibo. These euphemisms morph to accommodate the current topic or to avoid censorship rules. Someone unfamiliar with a particular term's deeper meaning would not be able to appropriately take part in a dialogue. For example, while translating Weibo for the purposes of this paper, I encountered a term "屌丝上街开 party (*diaosishangjiekaiparty*)" with which I was unfamiliar. I emailed my friend, a native Chinese speaker who is also a student at Macalester. She too had no idea, despite the fact that she occasionally uses Weibo. She emailed a friend who uses Weibo much more frequently. He quickly explained, this term "suggests the chaos when people protest on

the street. ‘屌丝’ here means people of relatively low socioeconomic status. ‘上街’ means get on the street. ‘开 Party’ originally means having fun but in this context, these guys are the people creating this chaos.”<sup>xci</sup> This term is one example of a more complex definition hiding behind a simple phrase.

This online community is not homogeneous. Internal online tension does exist on Weibo between users. For example, the following post by 笨笨的小半空 on September 16, 2012 in response to Murong Xuecun’s post on September 16, 2012, shows such criticism of other Weibo users:

Post: 呵,如果听到别人从电视中得一二资讯就在此判断别人只从电视而不从其他途径获取资讯,着实武断吧!好象天下人皆被表面现象所愚弄蒙蔽而唯独你等清醒深刻,确乎鹤立鸡群、与众不同呀! 你该怀着怎样骄傲又寂寞的心情洗洗睡的呢?

Translation: Ha, if you decide that someone only gains information from the TV but not other channels, just based on the fact you heard someone received info from the TV, then it's a substantial arbitrary decision! It seems that all the people in the world are duped by superficial phenomenon and only you have awoken from this deep coma, really to stand above the others, out of the ordinary! And how you should be filled with arrogance in a lonely state of mind to wash and sleep?<sup>xcii</sup>

In this post, the author responds to another user’s criticism of the mainstream media, and those who do not seek out other channels for information. This author believes that the previous Weibo post was arrogantly written and that he or she ignored the fact that many people believed the mainstream media at least once. By believing the mainstream media is biased, the previous user was actually buying into another stereotype, and thus hypocritically judging someone else’s habits. The author brings up the need to question motives and beliefs, irrelevant of their authoritative source. This belief to question information and not make assumptions aligns with those of alternative nationalism.

Tension and deviance play into Weibo's dynamics. Through the participation in insider discussions, users subscribe to a new collective identity that engages with alternative nationalist views. A portion of Weibo users who subscribe to this collective identity have begun using virtual protest to express their opinions of the government, their compatriots, and other Weibo users. These inklings of protest online may not be more effective than physical protests because of the divided nature of Chinese society. Yet one day these protests may act as a spark for a movement, as seen in the US during the Occupy Wall Street Movement and the Arab Spring in Egypt.

Weibo offers a new level of anonymous, passive interactivity for Chinese citizens. A Weibo user can engage in a conversation merely by writing an observation or comment and hitting "enter". However, it is generally only other Weibo users who read this dialogue (though in rare occasions microblog posts are featured in the media). Although this audience may exclude those who participated in the anti-Japanese protests, users addressed the protesters' behavior in Weibo posts. Many Weibo users see those protesting in the streets as uncivil. The reason for the protesters' lack of online representation lies in the severe socioeconomic discrepancy between Weibo users and those protesting in the streets.

### ***Online and Offline Discontent through Weibo***

Taking to the streets to protest an event or change requires courage, particularly in a country such as China. The state tightly controls freedom of speech and maintains strict laws that prohibit gathering in public spaces. Thus, it is only logical that online protests have increased in popularity recently. Anonymous figures online may express opinions generally without feeling the ramifications of communicating controversial ideas.

Murong Xuecun published a post on September 12, 2012 to remind protesters that there are other incidents about which they should be enraged:

Post: 军报老调重弹,说钓鱼岛事件伤害了中国人民的感情,这话没错,可仔细想想,还有比钓鱼岛更伤感情的事。▪ 拆难道不伤害中国人民的感情,野蛮执法中国人民的感情,地沟油、豆腐桥、遍地贪腐难道不伤感情,唐慧、陈平福、任建,等事件难道不伤感情? 今天,让伤透了感情的中国人民一起怒吼: 还我钓鱼岛。

Translation: The army's report sings an old tune, saying the Diaoyu Islands event hurt the Chinese people's feelings. This claim is not mistaken, but we need to think carefully, there are things more harmful to our feelings than the Diaoyu Islands. Aren't the demolitions harmful to the Chinese people's feelings? Don't underground oil, tofu bridges, and prevalent corruption hurt people's feelings? The incidents of Tang Hui<sup>xciii</sup>, Chen Pingfu<sup>xciv</sup>, and Ren Jianyu<sup>xcv</sup> don't hurt one's feelings? Today, let the thoroughly hurt Chinese people howl: Give back our Diaoyu Islands!<sup>xcvi</sup>

This post questions the legitimacy or source of the Chinese people's feelings of frustration. It mentions events such as the "tofu bridge", a term coined on Weibo in reference to the many bridges that collapsed in China. This reference specifically points to the 19<sup>th</sup> bridge that collapsed in the last five years. The Diaoyu Islands Dispute, and the Chinese public's subsequent reactions, provides a conduit into a reservoir of other incidents in recent history that have enraged Chinese citizens. Murong Xuecun offers a reminder of these events.

Another post also illustrates a similar thought pattern. In response to Murong Xuecun's post on September 12, 2012, 林 Weaving posted the following Weibo on September 12, 2012:

Post: 中国平民没必要直接对日本喊话,喊了也未必能听到,基本属于自己气自己。我们更应该关注本国政府,要喊话也是对本国政府喊话,而此事的要点就是,首先要教政府学会怎么听话。👍 这个可以有! <sup>xcvii</sup>

Translation: Chinese people do not need to yell at the Japanese directly, screaming may not reach their ears, yelling at others is in effect fooling oneself. We should focus on our

own country's government more closely, if we want to speak out, do it to our own government. Furthermore this matter's main points are just so, first of all we want to teach our government how to listen. This is good!

This post reflects positive thinking in regards to the future of Chinese politics. Although the author does not target the protesters' reactions to the Diaoyu Islands Dispute, the author does provide alternatives to their reactions. Similar to Murong Xuecun's post, here the author also cites the Chinese government as a primary player in the dispute and redirects the energy surrounding the dispute to focus on rational steps to improve internal sentiments.

The following post by P 卜蛋 written on September 12, 2012 in response to Murong Xuecun's post on September 12, 2012 expresses feelings of outrage in online China and calls for action:

**Post:** 时至今日我不得不站出来向国人道歉，我为自己曾消费过日货深感悔恨。日寇竟敢冠冕堂皇地捐款去购买实属我中华人民共和国的领土，此乃支持日本法西斯之行为。为表本人悔恨之决心，特发起捐款支持对日战争。十几亿海内外华人们，请随便凑个百八十亿让世界知道钓鱼岛是中国的，也帮助畸形的日本反省反省。

**Translation:** At this late hour, I cannot help but apologize to my countrymen; I have myself consumed Japanese goods in the past and regret it deeply. Japanese invaders dare to be pompous by using contributions to go shopping to buy what truly belongs to the People's Republic of China's territory; this can only sustain Japanese fascism. To demonstrate the determination of my deep regret, I will start a fund to sponsor a war against Japan. Between the one and two billion people all over the world, I invite you to casually gather around one hundred billion to let the world know the Diaoyu Islands are China's, which will also help the deformed Japanese do some reflecting.<sup>xcviii</sup>

This particular post seems to be an outlier on Weibo when compared to other postings. Yet through active participation in a slanted discussion that emphasizes a logical or more diplomatic approach, the user subscribes to a particular identity of this collective Weibo group. The proposition to take to the streets expands the definition of an average, intellectual Weibo user's approach to the Diaoyu Islands Dispute. The author

examines his or her own discontent through the lens of consumerism and nationality. Through Weibo, the author of this post attempts to reconcile his or her own dissatisfaction. The question remains: did this particular individual follow through and take to the streets? Was this particular Weibo post effective in recruiting protesters? Regardless of this post's influence in offline China, the author analyzed his or her own actions and attempted to engage in offline China through the medium of Weibo due to his dissatisfaction.

These posts are obvious indicators of how the face of protest is changing. Online protest has become the norm for those who want to express their frustration with the state or its citizens within a certain social setting. The occurrence of online protest prevails due to the higher level of anonymity and a freer forum of expression. This phenomenon is not confined to China but also can be seen during the Occupy Movement in the United States, where signs of protest appeared with more frequency online. Similarly, during the Arab Spring, protests gained momentum through online support.

Guobin Yang shows China's netizens have more spaces for expression than before the advent of the Internet in his article "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere."<sup>xix</sup> He examines the impact users' involvement in Weibo has on the ever-increasing social discrepancy between Weibo users and non-Weibo users. Online protest's efficacy cannot be directly compared to that of offline China because many of the posts are censored. Also, online protest may not directly link to political change in a visible way, though it may have influenced the outcome. Any comparison would show that offline China's protests are more visible and, perhaps, more effective.

Yet a comparison between the efficacy of physical protests and virtual protesters cannot absolutely prove the power of one versus the other. In many ways, virtual protests spur protests in the streets. They act as a primary mode to communicate discontent. One medium begins to reflect the feelings of discontent seen in another realm. For example, during the beginning stages of the Occupy Movement on September 17, 2011 AdBusters called for protests on Wall Street through a tweet. News of the protest spread quickly and soon enough thousands were gathered in protest of big banks. The protesters called for reform outside of the current system. A portion of the discussions that occurred during Occupy happened online but the physical spaces also provided a necessary arena for dialogue.<sup>c</sup> In fact, some claim the entirety of the movement revolved around the idea of occupying space as individuals. Similar to the Arab Spring, many perceive social media as the fuel for the Occupy Movement. These movements embodied the ideologies already present that could have existed without using social media. Social media did, however, influence the methods used.

Nevertheless, many scholars assert that the Internet and its portals increasingly become a space for public discussion and protest. Online protest stands as a critical example of Weibo's freeing capacity and its promotion of free speech. Guobin Yang provides an instance of past online protest on the Internet: "...in 1996, an online protest movement was launched against Japanese ultra-nationalists' construction of a lighthouse on the Diaoyutai (Senkaku) Islands."<sup>ci</sup> He claims that this case of online protest exemplifies the Internet's role as a "space of public expression and protest, and a nexus of information and transnational mobilization."<sup>cii</sup> This online protest mobilized against

the Japanese in 1996. It contrasts the form of online protest seen in the most recent occurrences of protest in 2012.

Weibo users now post microblogs commenting and, oftentimes, criticizing the radical, nationalistic protesters in the streets. The posts in 1996 were, for the most part, an assertion of China's sovereignty and anti-Japanese sentiments in their calls for change; however, the microblogs written in September 2012 focused on thinking critically about one's actions and analyzing the historical facts supporting either side. Quite possibly, this change derives from the discussions online and the expansion of knowledge. The expression of discontent is changing in the online and offline world. Individuals look to various spheres to share their views with others. The channels for protest has flip-flopped, those professing more patriotic values now take to the streets and those advocating for more alternative nationalism have chosen Weibo as a venue for their discontent.

Guobin Yang continually voices the opinion that the virtual world holds monumental influence over protest. He writes, "Online Chinese cultural sphere is also changing the dynamics of popular protest in China."<sup>ciii</sup> The cultural sphere to which he refers includes those outside of the Mainland and extends past political issues. The occurrence of the most recent Diaoyu Islands Dispute protests also suggests a novel way to use online sites: analyzing the protesters' radical action while advocating for a rational solution. Murong Xuecun points out the naivety of some Chinese when they boycotted Japanese products. On September 29, 2012, he wrote about the irrationality of the protesters' actions in the name of protest and nationality:

Post: 日本作家的著作在某些城市被 ▪ 迫下架，只能证明决策者的愚蠢。假如一本书定价 30 元，日本作家所得通常不超过 3 元（如超过保护期，那就一分不得），

剩下的 27 元由中国的翻译、书店、出版社、印刷厂等共同分割。为了不让日本人赚走 3 元，中国宁可禁止本国 30 元的生意，很难想象这是正常人 ▪ 的脑子做出的决定。

Translation: In some cities, Japanese author's works were forcibly taken off the shelf, which only proves the foolishness of the policy maker. If one book's fixed price is 30 Yuan, Japanese writer's royalty generally doesn't surpass 3 Yuan, (if it passes the protection period, they wouldn't even get a cent). The remaining 27 Yuan are commonly split by the cost of the Chinese translation, the bookstore, the publisher, the print shop and other common splits. In order to keep Japanese from 3 Yuan of profit, China would rather stop 30 Yuan of its own country's business. It is difficult to imagine this is what normal peoples' brains decide.<sup>civ</sup>

Murong Xuecun is a microblogger who subscribes to alternative nationalism.

Through the investigation of the people's actions and the government's motivations, Murong Xuecun highlights the intersection between the public sphere and the government's controls. His posts bring issues of questionable rationality to the surface. He does this not through direct criticism of protesters' actions but rather by providing a description of possible causes of the protesters' passionate reactions other than the Diaoyu Islands Dispute.

Murong Xuecun is involved in critical analysis online. He both criticizes and justifies the protesters' reactions. In his opinion, some behavior, such as the removal of Japanese books from shelves, is illogical because it actually negative affects Chinese citizens. However, Murong Xuecun points to other causes of the Chinese people's dissatisfaction to justify their rage. Murong Xuecun's commentary on Chinese society illuminates the spectrum of the word "nationalism", as it can encompass both emotions of pride and disillusionment with one's country. Protesting those protesting in the streets stands as a new form of nationalism.

### *Anti-Patriotism and Weibo*

In the context of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute, individuals who have expressed opposition to protesters' actions have formed a collective identity centered on nationalism and concern for their nation's image. Their participation in the online discussion of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute shows both their concern for the national image and their deeper concerns for the Chinese government and Chinese media. Erica Strecker Downs and Phillip Saunders claim:

Chinese nationalism emerged from the shock of extensive contact with the West in the nineteenth century, which challenged both the traditional Confucian cultural worldview and China's territorial integrity and national unity.... The development of Chinese nationalism in this context has given sovereignty and territorial integrity intense symbolic value.<sup>cv</sup>

Yinan He's standpoint that a strong sense of devotion to one's country replaced the devotion previously seen to Communism aligns with this argument. It also justifies some Chinese citizens' intense sense of patriotism, as communism has faded as the leading ideology in China.

Because of the increased use of the Internet in China, Guobin Yang believes that Chinese users "show a strong desire to become better informed and more critically engaged through the Internet."<sup>cvii</sup> I argue that Chinese netizens want to become better informed; however, they also have a strong desire to express themselves and look for solidarity amongst other Chinese citizens. For example this post written by 听海观涛 2013 on September 18 in response to a post by Murong Xuecun shows a microblogger in search of commonality regarding nationalistic sentiments in the Weibo community:

Post: 希望 ▪ 个人都能看清, 今天, 在爱国主义的旗号下曾有过多少丑陋和罪恶的嘴脸。如果事态继续发展, 我们将无法预言明天。或许未来某一天, 人们不再记得文明始于何时, 那就请记住文明终止的时间。

Translation: I hope that each person can see clearly. Today, under the name of patriotism, there have been many ugly and evil faces. If this state of affairs continues to develop, we will be without a way to predict tomorrow. Perhaps someday, people will not remember civilization's beginning, so please remember when it ends.<sup>cvi</sup>

The author of this post does not pose questions about its fellow citizens, nor does he or she ask for information about a certain event or time period. The Weibo user merely makes an observation about society and the evolution of events to voice his or her opinion. This post was written with the possible motive of recognition, or simply to engage with civil society in this virtual sphere. The Diaoyu Islands Dispute certainly exemplifies Chinese Weibo users' engagement and critical thinking online. He or she mentions patriotism and street protesters' use of this term to justify violent protests. The author also expresses his or her desire to bring clarity to individuals amidst such a chaotic atmosphere.

Here is another response to Murong Xuecun's post on September 16, 2012 by 高红波上海 on September 16, 2012:

Post: 一直没想通这时干嘛去科普，在如此敏感之日。以前看国家层面的斗争，常有人教导我们，就像两个不出世的高手博弈，没分出胜负之前所有落子普通人等看不出玄机，直到决定命运的那一步到来。可每次博弈结果瞎了我的眼。一贯的内硬外软，再不信狗屁的韬光养晦，基本上这一次也不例外。

Translation: I have never conceived of this moment and the popularization of science, on this susceptible day. Before watching national competitions, sometimes we had people educating us, which resembles two experienced chess players playing a game before the victory has been determined, the commoners won't be able to see the intricacies of the moves until the moment arrives when fate is decided. Yet the results of every chess game you play blinds my eyes. All along the inside was hard while the outside was soft, again not to believe this bullshit behind hiding one's capacities and biding one's time, basically this time is also not an exception.<sup>cvi</sup>

This post exudes confusion and serves as an example of how Weibo users do not always put themselves on a virtual pedestal. Rather, some users look for solidarity in their

bewilderment. Searching for an explanation from other Weibo users also places the user's peers on the same level of understanding and trust. The microblogger published this post to show the importance of critically analyzing facts. A more critical perspective of the current political situation in China emerges in many posts on Weibo. Here is another example, a post written by 紫韵幽莹 on September 17, 2012 in response to Murong Xuecun's post on September 16, 2012:

Post: 然后你就会发现，一年当中的每一天都是重复着这样的声音，没有任何的不河蟹。对了，我记得清王朝也曾曾经辉煌一时，他们是怎么教育自己民众的？下级官员怎么忽悠皇帝的？现在还没有盛极一时就已经看到了大楼倒塌前的倾危了吗？只是换了个忽悠的方向结果就不一样了么。

Translation: Then you'll discover, each day that year was full of repeating this voice, there was not any trace of unrest. Yes, I remember clearly the Qing dynasty was also once a glorious period, how did they educate the masses? How did lower level officials defy the emperor? Now we haven't reached the era of glory and we can already see the dangers before the building tumbles. Simply change the deception's orientation and the consequence is different.<sup>cix</sup>

This post discusses the looming consequences in China's future. Additionally, the author includes historical references to make a point. The author specifically looks at the intersection between the sovereign and the subjects of a state to draw an analogy to the modern political conditions.

Domestic opinion carries a lot of weight in China, as it does in many countries with massive populations. The position of the Chinese people could dictate the CCP's actions. As the CCP maintains power, they appease the demands of radical nationalists so as not to seem weak in the face of foreign powers. Due to Japan and China's intertwined history of tension, Japan exists as a convenient target for both the CCP and nationalists' anger, the residue of imperialism and war crimes. The use of Japan as a target is also observed on Weibo. The vast majority of posts from the so-called intellectual circle do

not promote irrational anger; however, Murong Xuecun and many of his followers do address these sentiments. They encourage Chinese citizens to express their anger in a rational way and to reanalyze the cause of their anger.

Many Chinese citizens still harbor resentment towards Japan for past war crimes committed. Therefore, they maintain that it is Japan's responsibility to reconcile their wrongdoings and "always expect Japan to make concessions."<sup>cx</sup> On the other hand, due to the presence of social media, the government cannot afford to ignore strong opinions among its citizens. It has yet to be seen if the government will choose to address the intellectual Weibo-bloggers opinions. The Chinese government's recent censorship of the decade-old "Return Sino-Japanese Relations to Rationality Petition—Our Plea" points to its shaping of the Chinese identity and nationalist sentiments without directly addressing bloggers' opinions.

Furthermore, the Chinese government shapes the mainstream media by strictly controlling what is featured or released. Here is an example of Murong Xuecun's analysis of Chinese society, specifically criticizing the media's role in the Diaoyu Islands Dispute, posted on September 14, 2012:

**Post:** 中日在钓鱼岛的问题上各执一词,你说你有理,我说我有理,大多数人也没能力探幽发微,希望央视(CCTV)等主流媒体能 ▪ 做全面的梳理和分析,日本人都有哪些说词 是否全无道理,除了 ▪ 罗宣言波茨坦公告,还有哪些证据对中国有利,是否也有不利的证据 “自古以来”和“神圣不可侵犯”其实没有太多说服力。

**Translation:** China and Japan in the Diaoyu Islands Dispute, each have their own versions. You say you are right, I say I am right, the majority of people don't have the capacity to explore it in depth. I hope that the mainstream media would be able to see and analyze it from every part, to make clear what kinds of arguments the Japanese have and whether they are logical. Besides the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, the question is: are there more pieces of evidence to prove that these Islands belong to China or pieces of evidence unfavorable to China? The sayings "since the beginning of

time the Diaoyu Islands have belonged to China” or “these are holy and inviolable” are not convincing.<sup>cxix</sup>

Murong Xuecun writes of the reality that the majority of Chinese citizens lack the resources needed to understand this multifaceted conflict in depth. He emphasizes the perspective that it is the media’s responsibility to fully clarify the conflict. It is, in his opinion, also the media’s responsibility to educate the Chinese people on what grounds the Japanese lay their claims and to insightfully analyze these claims. During the 2012 protests, the media in China continually cited historical reasons why China should control the Diaoyu Islands, which exacerbated tension. For the most part, the mainstream media neglected news of the protests. News travelled principally on Weibo and other social media sites.<sup>cxii</sup> Because the media ignored the protests in most newspapers, those without Weibo remained ignorant of the behavior of their fellow citizens in other cities.

Criticism of the mainstream media certainly occurred in the case of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute. Netizens found in intellectual circles deliberately targeted and criticized the media’s contribution to the general public’s knowledge of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute. This feeling is exemplified in the following post written by Murong Xuecun on September 15:

Post: 假如我是个只从电视上获取资讯的人, 2012年9月15日是个很不错的日子, 在这一天, 国家领导参加了全国科普日活动, 海洋局公布了钓鱼岛座标, 广州抓获了一名地铁色狼, 白鹿原上映了, 李, 春说疯狂就是自由, 帝国主义依然不长进, 到处都是反美散。然后, 我说声“感谢国家”, 怀着自豪的心情洗洗睡了。

Translation: If I were a person who gained information from the television only, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012 is a very good day. Today government officials attended a global science conference. The department of the seas announced the coordinates of Diaoyu Island. In Guangzhou, a lecher was arrested. The film “White Deer” was shown. Li Yu Chun said crazy is freedom. Imperialism still has not improved much. There are anti-American protests everywhere. Then, I said “Thank you my nation.” I took a shower and went to sleep with pride.<sup>cxiii</sup>

Murong Xuecun mocks the media by writing a humorous news release that mimics the media's style. He also comments on the public's idea of engagement and patriotism. He references events such as movie releases and international science conferences as examples of "honorable occasions" for China. Weibo users who write comments such as these assume a position of superiority, supported by their supposedly better understanding of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute and their diplomatic approach to addressing the Chinese state and foreign powers involved. However, it also shows a level of engagement and critical thinking absent from other arenas of protest. Nevertheless, posting a comment online in response to events only stands as passive engagement with the public sphere, one that Weibo encourages.

## **Conclusion**

Tales of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute protests spread rapidly online in September 2012, spawning fresh reflection on the term nationalism in the era of social media in China. These discussions occurred on Weibo only between members of the upper-middle class. The dissemination of information and creation of open discussion forums on Weibo fostered a new virtual sphere in which users engage with each other to communicate ideas they see as relevant to themselves, their families, and China. In the instance of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute, some members of the upper-middle class in the online community scoffed at the protesters' display of raw emotions; others rationalized this behavior in light of recent events and the government's shortcomings. With consideration to alternative nationalism, netizens simultaneously facilitated an online discussion that critically challenged the Weibo community to analyze and develop their opinions of the Chinese government and the mainstream media. The social class gap and unequal wealth

distribution in China determines Weibo's participants, which widens the discrepancy between the information circulated in both circles and, thus, widens the discrepancy between these two groups' interactions within their nation.

Yet what Weibo has created, a space in which people can engage in a discussion across China's vast expanse, increases the likelihood of the people's unification under one type of nationalism. Keeping the sheer number of Weibo participants in mind, the profound importance of the Internet and social media in contemporary society will only increase for generations to come. If Weibo were to include all citizens, the Chinese people may have more say in finding a solution to some of China's problems. Can the discussion on Weibo evolve to include other voices in the near future? In all probability, this situation will not come to pass. China's resources are not limitless and cannot provide computers to every citizen. Also, it is not in the Chinese government's best interest to facilitate easy communication between its citizens.

The users who subscribe to an alternative nationalism express their opinions in an open manner. On Weibo, discussions tend to focus on improving or scrutinizing China's current position, rather than fueling a dispute with neighboring countries over uninhabited islands. A shared dialogue is necessary to facilitate change and mutual understanding across regions and social class borders. Other technologies, such as SMS or Wei Xin, may surface to address this demanding situation and expedite communication. For the time, Weibo cannot act as the mediator between these two factions of Chinese society. In the future, it may unify the Chinese people under a common sense of pride and nationalism. However, the possibility remains that Weibo will only continue to separate the upper-middle class from the lower class in China. As

the Internet develops and further isolates lower class members from current information through the use of other social media and the Internet as a whole, it is clear that Weibo comprises only a portion of the problem.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Alternative nationalism diverges from state-sponsored patriotism in China, and involves critically thinking through one's opinions of, and participation in, an event involving one's country and domestic issues. Alternative nationalism consists of interrogating one's own nationalistic impulses before acting irrationally, without a deeper analysis of the motives and causes of the frustration. This term specifically stands as an opposite to radical patriotism.

<sup>ii</sup> Throughout this paper, I will continually use the term "upper-middle class" to refer to netizens who tend to belong to a class that has enough resources to spend time learning to master the Internet. These netizens generally have a computer or a device from which they may access Weibo. This consistent source of connection allows the user to fully engage with the Weibo community, as opposed to randomly going online or spending time in an Internet Café when they have time. The broad term of "Upper-Middle Class" primarily focuses on those who engage in intellectual circles on Weibo, to further distinguish between the users prevalent within the virtual sphere.

<sup>iii</sup> Guobin Yang. *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 21.

<sup>iv</sup> The first site "classmates.com" was dubbed a "social media site" in 1995 in the United States (Rebecca Leung, "In Search of the Past," *CBS News*, February 11, 2009. [http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500164\\_162-552363.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500164_162-552363.html)).

<sup>v</sup> In 1994, the American National Science Foundation Network aided top Chinese universities to establish a connection between their inter-campus networks and the World Wide Web. The creation of the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in 1997 christened the official recognition of Internet's place in China. The CNNIC, run by the Ministry of Information Industry and operated by China Academy of Sciences, collects data on the Internet and its use, manages Chinese domain name registration, creates Internet policy proposals and monitors other information such as IP Addresses and Autonomous System Numbers. They are also largely responsible for monitoring Weibo statistics and usage. (Shaohua Guo, "The Eyes of the Internet Emerging Trends in Contemporary Chinese culture" (PhD diss., Austin, Tex: University of Texas, 2012). <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/ETD-UT-2012-08-6147/GUO-DISSERTATION.pdf>.)

<sup>vi</sup> Guo, "The Eyes of the Internet Emerging Trends in Contemporary Chinese Culture."

<sup>vii</sup> The Internet has also provided a way for companies to circulate their products and capitalize on the Internet's traffic. Guo Shaohua writes, "the IT industry in particular, and commercial media in general, has catalyzed the opening up of discursive space that is simultaneously entertainment oriented and politically concerned" (Ibid 57). In Guo Shaohua's dissertation, she explores "the ways that the state, commercial media, and the cultural public sphere have 'co-evolved'" to make the Internet in China what it is today (Ibid 60). Her claim emphasizes the duality of Chinese Internet. In particular, spaces such as Weibo allow companies to target their audience's desires and sell their products or ideas.

<sup>viii</sup> "Premier Wen Jiabao chats with netizens," *English People*, February 27, 2010. <http://english.people.com.cn/90002/99541/index.html>.

<sup>ix</sup> Gudrun Wacker, "Resistance is Futile: Control and Censorship of the Internet in China," in *From Woodblocks to the Internet Chinese Publishing and Print Culture in Transition, circa 1800 to 2008*, ed. Cynthia Joanne Brokaw et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 367 found in Guo, "The eyes of the Internet emerging trends in contemporary Chinese culture."

<sup>x</sup> Michelle and Uking, "Special: Micro blog's macro impact," *China Daily*, March 2, 2011. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-03/02/content\\_12099500.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-03/02/content_12099500.htm).

<sup>xi</sup> "Sina Weibo," last modified March 2013, [http://corp.sina.com.cn/eng/sina\\_mng\\_eng.htm](http://corp.sina.com.cn/eng/sina_mng_eng.htm).

<sup>xii</sup> Duncan Hewitt, "Weibo brings change to China," *BBC World Service*, July 31, 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18887804>.

<sup>xiii</sup> Willis Wee, "Sina Weibo Passes 500 Million Users, But Needs to Monetize More on Mobile," *Tech in Asia*, February 20, 2013. <http://www.techinasia.com/sina-weibo-500-million-users-but-not-monetizing-mobile/>.

<sup>xiv</sup> "Sina Weibo," last modified February 2013, <http://us.weibo.com/>.

<sup>xv</sup> Guobin Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," *Media, Culture & Society*. 25 (2003): 470.

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- <sup>xvi</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 129.
- <sup>xviii</sup> David Kurt Herold, and Peter Marolt, *Online Society in China: Creating, Celebrating, and Instrumentalising the Online Carnival*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011): 11.
- <sup>xix</sup> Mark, "Weibo Users Demographics," *China Skinny*, October 25, 2012, 1.  
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- <sup>xx</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Cindy Chiu, et al., "China's Social Media Boom," *McKinsey&Company*, 2012.  
[http://csi.mckinsey.com/Knowledge\\_by\\_region/Asia/China/Social\\_media\\_in\\_China](http://csi.mckinsey.com/Knowledge_by_region/Asia/China/Social_media_in_China).
- <sup>xxii</sup> Jack Perkowski, "China's Best Kept Secrets: Mianyang And Other Tier 3 Cities," *Forbes*, May 11, 2012, 1.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Cindy Chiu, et al., "China's Social Media Boom," *McKinsey&Company*, 2012.  
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- <sup>xxiv</sup> Mark, "Weibo Users Demographics," *China Skinny*, October 25, 2012, 1.  
<http://chinaskinny.com/blog/weibo-demographics-infograph>.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Chiu, "China's Social Media Boom," 2012.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> A report from O'Reilly about Twitter shows that participants choose public sharing rather than close off their posts from certain users (Sarah Milstein et al., "Twitter and the Micro-Messaging Revolution: Communication, Connections, and Immediacy—140 Characters at a Time," *O'Reilly Radar Report* (2008): 24.  
<http://weigend.com/files/teaching/ischool/2008/readings/OReillyTwitterReport200811.pdf>).
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," 486.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6-7.
- <sup>xxix</sup> To "hash tag" a topic connects a post to the larger topic. Users may search for a topic with a hash tag to locate more discussions on the same topic.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Eytan Bakshy et al., "Everyone's an Influencer: Quantifying Influence on Twitter," *University of Michigan* (2008): 2.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> From their research the authors of "Everyone's an Influencer: Quantifying Influence on Twitter" concluded: "Content that is rated more interesting tends to generate larger cascades on average, as does content that elicits more positive feelings...certain types of URLs, like those associated with shareable media, tend to spread more than URLs associated with news sites, while some types of content (e.g. "lifestyle") spread more than others" (Bakshy, "Everyone's an Influencer: Quantifying Influence on Twitter," 7). The cultural differences between American social media users (Twitter's primary audience) and Chinese social media users (on Weibo) may prevent this research from applying in entirety, however one might postulate that certain results apply universally. Thus, these trends could also reflect Weibo users' influence and how particularly shareable media, such as videos or pictures, would be posted more frequently than news sites. In particular, the stigmatization of mass media news sites among the educated middle class in China leads me to believe that Weibo users share other types of media before they post news sites' URLs.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Milstein, "Twitter and the Micro-Messaging Revolution: Communication, Connections, and Immediacy—140 Characters at a Time," 24.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 for his non-violent struggle for human rights in China. However, because he is currently serving a prison sentence of 11 years and is considered a criminal by the Chinese government, the Chinese government does not officially recognize his award. Rather, it criticized the Nobel Committee for giving Liu Xiaobo this award. Andrew Jacobs and Jonathan Ansfield, "Nobel Peace Prize Given to Jailed Chinese Dissident," *The New York Times*, October 8, 2010.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/09/world/09nobel.html?pagewanted=all>.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Herold, *Online Society in China: Creating, Celebrating, and Instrumentalising the Online Carnival*, 12.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Guobin Yang, "The Co-Evolution of the Internet and Civil Society in China," *University of California Press* 43 (2003): 415.

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<sup>xxxvi</sup> Ibid 406.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Ibid 406.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Ibid 413.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Ibid 414.

<sup>xl</sup> A perfect example of online protest in the age of social media is the relative success of the Arab Spring and the role social media such as Facebook played in furthering the activities and circulating information.

<sup>xli</sup> Online China is separate from offline China or the reflection of offline China in online China. A person's viewpoint in online China does not necessarily correlate to his or her opinion in offline China. However, it is safe to assume that because of the anonymity and freeness of online China, most of the feelings are the same. Online China also brings up another point of contention, the question of how much online China influences offline China. This question is difficult to answer because of the fragmentation of Chinese society and the lack of knowledge about users' interaction with the medium. We must simply take online China as a space in which people may express opinions that may run parallel to those from offline China. Weibo is a virtual interpretation of the Diaoyu Islands Dispute. (Herold, *Online Society in China: Creating, Celebrating, and Instrumentalising the Online Carnival*, 8.)

<sup>xlii</sup> Kenneth Rapoza, "China's Weibos vs US's Twitter: And the Winner Is?" *Forbes*, May 17, 2011.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2011/05/17/chinas-weibos-vs-uss-twitter-and-the-winner-is/>.

<sup>xliiii</sup> Zixue Tai, *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and Civil Society*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 255.

<sup>xliiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xlv</sup> Ibid 259.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Murong Xuecun, *Zhongguo, shao le yi wei yao = China: in the absence of a remedy* (Beijing Shi: Zhongguo he ping chu ban she, 2010).

<sup>xlvii</sup> Murong Xuecun, "Weibo Profile," Last modified April 10, 2013. <http://www.weibo.com/hawking>

<sup>xlviii</sup> Jane Perlez, "China Accuses Japan of Stealing After Purchase of Group of Disputed Islands," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2012, 1. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/12/world/asia/china-accuses-japan-of-stealing-disputed-islands.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/12/world/asia/china-accuses-japan-of-stealing-disputed-islands.html?_r=0).

<sup>xlix</sup> They are approximately twenty-eight miles north-northwest of Ishigaki in the Ryukyu Islands. This small, uninhabited island group is just over eight square miles and comprises five generally low-lying coral islands and scattered islets. The largest island is called Uotsuri-shima (two point five miles/four kilometers long, one mile/one point six kilometer wide). (Daniel Dzurek, "The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Dispute," *Durham University* (1996) <http://www-ibru.dur.ac.uk/resources/docs/senkaku.html>.)

<sup>1</sup> According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas, an Exclusive Economic Zone of forty thousand square kilometers surrounds the islands. (Ibid.)

<sup>ii</sup> Jean-Marc F. Blanchard, "The U.S. Role in the Sino-Japanese Dispute over the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands, 1945-1971," *The China Quarterly*, 161 (2000): 95.

<sup>iii</sup> BBC, "Q and A: China-Japan Islands Row," *BBC World News*, January 22, 2013.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11341139>.

<sup>liii</sup> Erica Strecker Downs and Phillip C. Saunders, "Corrected version of 'Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Islands'," *International Security* 23 (1999): 118.

<sup>liiv</sup> Ibid 122.

<sup>liv</sup> Ibid 117.

<sup>lvi</sup> Ibid 115.

<sup>lvii</sup> Ibid 128.

<sup>lviii</sup> Ibid 130.

<sup>lix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lx</sup> Ibid 135.

<sup>lxi</sup> Ibid 136.

<sup>lxii</sup> See Endnote 74.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Yanan He, "History, Chinese Nationalism and the Emerging Sino-Japanese Conflict," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 16 (2007): 14.

<sup>lxiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lxv</sup> Ibid 2, 16.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Downs, "Corrected version of 'Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Islands'," 139.

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<sup>lxvii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lxviii</sup> He, "History, Chinese Nationalism and the Emerging Sino-Japanese Conflict," 18.

<sup>lxix</sup> Ibid 22.

<sup>lxx</sup> See endnote 74.

<sup>lxxi</sup> Tai, *The Internet in China: Cyberspace and Civil Society*, 285.

<sup>lxxii</sup> Amy Qin, "China: Suit for Anti-Japan Attack," *The New York Times*, October 12, 2012.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/13/world/asia/china-suit-for-anti-japan-attack.html>.

<sup>lxxiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> Li Yinhe, October 25, 2012 (1:54 p.m.), "Return Sino-Japanese Relations to Rationality Petition—Our Plea," *Weibo* 2012, [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_7cd4f46901014kt3.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_7cd4f46901014kt3.html).

让中日关系回归理性——我们的呼吁 (2012-10-05 13:54:13)

Return Sino-Japanese Relations to Rationality Petition--Our Plea

最近,因钓鱼岛引起中日之间的关系危机,尤其是在中国社会造成的震荡,令人深感忧虑。我们正好读到了日本市民发起的联署声明《终止领土问题的恶性循环》,明显感受到来自日本人士的诚恳善意。这份声明不回避早年日本殖民历史和钓鱼岛之争源起,又立足于多年来两国之间已经发展出来的友好合作关系,尤其是着眼于和平相处的未来,这是将危机处理成一个契机的良好做法。为此,我们提出如下呼吁。

Recently, because the Diaoyu Islands led to a crisis in Sino-Japanese relations, particularly bringing about shock in Chinese society, one feels deeply worried. We just happened to read a Japanese sponsored petition "Stop the vicious cycle of territory disputes", which obviously stems from Japanese people's good intentions. This copy of the statement doesn't avoid the source of conflict, the history of the Japanese's colonization of the islands, it stands with many years of these two countries having already developed friendly and cooperative relations, particularly to visualize a peaceful, harmonious future, this is a critical moment of good intention to handle the crisis for prosperity.

1、钓鱼岛的领土争议,是一个由历史遗留下来的问题,但前人亦已提供给后人务实的思路。1972年,周恩来先生即表示出“搁置争议”的意向,1978年邓小平先生明确继承了这一方针,为的是不让钓鱼岛问题成为妨碍两国之间正常交流的障碍。在今天看来,这个决策仍然是明智的。因为在现状之下,任何单方面的解决方案,都只会导致武力冲突乃至于东亚和平局面的崩溃。一旦钓鱼岛的问题再次被提出来,在没有更好的对话、磋商可能的情况下,都先要回到这个立场上来。

1. The dispute over the Diaoyu Islands Territory has been handed down through history, however our forefathers also supplied its later generations ways of practical thinking. In the year 1972, Mr. Zhou Enlai showed his intent to "lay aside disputes", in 1978 Mr. Deng Xiaoping clearly inherited this policy, to not let the Diaoyu Islands Conflict become a hindrance on the normal exchange between the two countries. It seems that today, this policy still seems sagacious. Because under the present conditions, any one-sided resolution will result in armed clashes, even resulting in the peaceful status of East Asia falling apart. If the Diaoyu Islands Dispute is brought up again, if we do not have a good dialogue, and have not exchanged views, everything will go back to this current position.

2、2012年9月27日,日本驻联合国代表儿玉和夫先生在大会发言中,以“马关条约”作为钓鱼岛归属的依据,我们认为这是一个罔顾事实、不负责任的表现,不能接受这样一个重现不平等条约幽灵的起点。不能否认,日本始终存在领土扩张及军国主义思潮,不时传出极右翼言论,对于侵华历史的认知也经常反复,不利于发展友好的睦邻关系。

September 27, 2012, Japan's UN delegate Mr. Eryu and Mr. Fu made a statement in the general session, taking "The Treaty of Shimonoseki" to be the basis of the Diaoyu Islands belonging to Japan, we believe this is an ignored fact, it does not show responsibility, we cannot accept a starting point where the ghosts of unequal ghosts are present. No need to deny, from the beginning to the end, Japan's goals of territorial expansion and militarism still exist in Japan, frequently expressing ultra rightwing thoughts, fickle in denial about their history of aggression towards China, this is not a friendly, beneficial developing relationship.

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3、中国大陆近三十余年经济发展速度很快，人民生活水平有着明显提高，这与坚持和平发展道路有着密切关系。需要珍视目前已经取得的成就，因而也珍视与周围邻国拥有稳定和谐的友好关系。因此，就目前紧张的局势而言，我们希望争取一切可能的途径对话协商，继续保持与日本及其他周边国家和平稳定的关系。不论是国家还是人民，只有在和平中才有繁荣昌盛。

These past thirty years, Mainland China's economy has developed very quickly, people's living standards have clearly risen, and this and the road of the continual development of peace have a close relationship. We need to treasure the accomplishment we have already achieved at the present, consequently we also must treasure the close, friendly and stable relationship we have established with surrounding countries. Therefore, with regard to the nerve-wracking situation at the present, we hope to strive for any possible paths of dialogue and negotiations, continuing to protect our stable and peaceful relationship with Japan and periphery countries. No matter if it is the state or the people, only with peace can we thrive and prosper.

4. 战后日本在政治、经济、文化各方面的成果，也为世人瞩目。我们看到了日本社会和人民在今天的改变，看到了许多日本人士在战争道歉和重建和平方面的可贵努力，以及日本在中国和平发展道路上的有力援助。因此，这就需要人们在正视历史、记忆历史的同时，也需要根据当今日本现实，做出新的认知和判断。

After the war Japan's politics, economy, and culture each had positive results, and everyone was astounded. We saw Japanese society and its people transformation to what they are today, we saw many Japanese people apologize for the war and make great efforts to rebuild peace, as well as Japan's strong support to help China on the road to the development of peace. Thus, it requires people to not only face and recall history, but also gain a new understand and perspective based on today's Japan, to weed through the old and bring out the new to judge effectively.

5、 们警惕和反对任何利益集团或政治派别，为了自己的目的和利益，挑起领土争端，操弄和绑架民意，煽动狭隘民族主义情绪。在解决领土争议和取得和解问题方面，政府本身拥有更大的责任。一旦发生危机，政府也有责任引导民众理性认识问题和采取行动。

We warn against and oppose any interest group or perhaps political groups, because of their own personal interests, flaming the territorial dispute, to grasp and kidnap the popular will, to incite emotions of narrow nationalism. On the problem of resolving the territorial dispute to negotiate peace and to reconcile, the government itself has a larger responsibility. In one day a crisis occurred, the government also has responsibility to guide the people's rational thinking and to take action.

6、 2012年9月中旬，在中国一些城市发生的因钓鱼岛争端激化而引发的打砸烧行为，我们非常痛心，并加以特别谴责。这些极少数人的做法，不能代表两岸四地的大多数人在钓鱼岛问题上的普遍看法。我们十分不希望这些行为引起国际社会的误解，从而引发经济方面的倒退，和其他方面更多的倒退。

Mid-September 2012, in a few cities in China the conflict over the Diaoyu Islands was taken to the extreme and evoked 打砸烧 (anti-Japanese protesters who demonstrated in September) behavior, we were really heartbroken, we actually regard it with particular condemnation. This small minority's behavior does not represent the views of the majority of pan-China around the conflict, which is the majority's way of looking at the Diaoyu Islands Dispute. We really hope this behavior does not bring rise to an international misunderstanding, thus to fall back on the economy's side, and fall back on the many other sides.

7、 最近,中日文化交流受到限制,有关日本书籍的出版于发行也在部分城市一度受到殃及,这是极其不明智的,也是令人遗憾的。中日文化交流源远流长,有着十分具有说服力的丰富成果。领土或政治方面的争议,不应无限制地扩展到其他领域。在睦邻关系当中,人民之间的关系起着主要作用,真正深远的意义在这里。就目前的情况来说,应尽快恢复双方民间的经济、文化、生活等各方面正常的合作交往,尽量弥补因为最新争议造成的损失,尽快撤销所有缺乏长远眼光的临时措施。

Recently, the cultural exchange between China and Japan has been restricted, the Japanese books recently published in the city are a disaster, this is extremely unwise, it is what wise men pity. Sino-Japanese

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cultural exchange is well established; it has possessed very convincing and abundant achievement. The territory or governmental policy side of the conflict should not unrestrictedly expand into other aspects. In the middle of a good-neighbor relationship, the people's relationships have an important function; true profound meaning is found here. Right now we should restore the cooperation between the people on both sides in the aspects of the economy, culture, life etc...each side's normal, cooperative contact, in order to make up for the loss brought by recent conflicts.

8、我们每个人在自己的故土上生活、劳作,养育后代,参与社会事务及国家事务,拥有对于国家的主权,并拥有对于国家主权的一份发言权。基于这个原因,我们认为在政府处理主权事务时,需要倾听民众的意见,而不是把民众甩在身后。

Each person in our native land has the right to his own life, manual work, raising children, participating in society and country manners, and possesses in relation to the country his or her own sovereignty, particularly possessing the right to speak one's mind. Because of this rationality, we believe that in at the time of our government's handling of sovereignty rights, we need to listen attentively to the masses opinion, rather than disregarding them.

9、在两岸四地和日本的教科书里,应写入中日两国全面而真实的近现代历史。中国的教科书也应增加不同民族相处与融合的教育,以利下一代思考判断、并培养开放的心态去了解与自己不同的国家和人民;发展中日民众之间的互相尊重,让年轻人在伙伴关系和友谊观中正常生长。

In Pan-China's and Japan's textbooks, they should write a comprehensive and true Sino-Japanese history of recent history. China's textbooks should also include and teach ethnic minority's history, to let future generation's ponder and give judgment, particularly to foster and open the way for understanding between their own different country and people; to develop Sino-Japanese mutual respect, to allow young people's relationships and friendships to normally grow.

10、我们也认为,涉及领土、国家主权等国际事务的事情,不独两国政府责任。应该更多发展民间交流渠道,增进互相了解,为子子孙孙创造和平的未来。

We also believe, to touch upon the territory, a country's sovereign rights and international matters, not only are two countries' government's duty. We should develop channels of cultural exchange among the people, to enhance mutual understanding; because of future generations, we should create a peaceful future.

欢迎更多的朋友加入。

We welcome more friends to join.

<sup>lxxv</sup> BBC. Map. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11341139>.

<sup>lxxvi</sup> Miriyam Aouragh. *Palestine Online Transnationalism, the Internet and the Construction of Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris Academic Studies, 2011), 116. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10480623>.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> Murong Xuecun, September 12, 2012 (7:22 a.m.), *Weibo Entry*  
[http://www.weibo.com/hawking?key\\_word=%E6%9C%89%E4%BA%BA%E8%AF%B4%E6%88%91%E4%B8%8D%E6%94%AF%E6%8C%81%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%AF%B9%E9%92%93%E9%B1%BC%E5%B2%9B%E6%8B%A5%E6%9C%89%E4%B8%BB%E6%9D%83&is\\_search=1](http://www.weibo.com/hawking?key_word=%E6%9C%89%E4%BA%BA%E8%AF%B4%E6%88%91%E4%B8%8D%E6%94%AF%E6%8C%81%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%AF%B9%E9%92%93%E9%B1%BC%E5%B2%9B%E6%8B%A5%E6%9C%89%E4%B8%BB%E6%9D%83&is_search=1).

<sup>lxxviii</sup> 正版齐天大圣, September 12, 2012 (8:23 p.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, Ibid link.

<sup>lxxix</sup> 無以為念, September 12, 2012 (8:23 p.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, Ibid link.

<sup>lxxx</sup> 与风有关, September 12, 2012 (8:23 p.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, Ibid link.

<sup>lxxxi</sup> 落寞后的执著, September 12, 2012 (8:25 p.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, Ibid link.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> 夏明宇 2012, September 12, 2012 (8:26 p.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, Ibid link.

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> 陌之寒, September 12, 2012 (8:26 p.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, Ibid link.

<sup>lxxxiv</sup> 快乐诊所\_舒汉锋, September 12, 2012 (8:28 p.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, Ibid link.

<sup>lxxxv</sup> 雪狼野人, September 12, 2012 (9:00 p.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, Ibid link.

<sup>lxxxvi</sup> 弹涂鱼晓鹤, September 12, 2012 (11:47 p.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, Ibid link.

<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Jens Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society," *Critical Asian Studies* 39 (2007): 289.

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<sup>lxxxviii</sup> "China," last modified March 29, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>.

<sup>lxxxix</sup> Ann 花儿, March 13, 2013 (3:46 a.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, <http://s.weibo.com/weibo/%25E7%259C%258B%25E5%25AE%258C%25E4%25BB%258A%25E5%25A4%25A9%25E7%259A%2584%25E5%2590%2584%25E8%25B7%25AF%25E6%25B6%2588%25E6%2581%25AF%25EF%25BC%258C%25E4%25B8%258D%25E5%25BE%2597%25E4%25B8%258D%25E6%2589%25BF%25E8%25AE%25A4%25E8%25BF%2599%25E4%25B8%25AA%25E7%25A4%25BE%25E4%25BC%259A%25E7%25A1%25AE?topnav=1&wvr=5&b=1#1365697559514>.

<sup>xc</sup> Damm, "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society," 286.

<sup>xc</sup> Yang Zhang, Email with Cerisa Obern, March 30, 2013.

<sup>xcii</sup> 笨笨的小半空, September 16, 2012 (2:40 p.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, [http://www.weibo.com/1182415487/yC31goTFr#\\_rnd1365698235456](http://www.weibo.com/1182415487/yC31goTFr#_rnd1365698235456).

<sup>xciii</sup> Tang Hui was the mother of a child who was raped and locked in a brothel in Hunan Province, China. Fan Xhongxin, "What do Child Rapists deserve?" *Caixin Online*, August 21, 2012. <http://english.caixin.com/2012-08-21/100426578.html>.

<sup>xciv</sup> Cheng Pingfu was a teacher who published "a series of online essays criticizing the country's ruling Communist Party, the 55-year-old laid-off teacher was accused of 'inciting subversion of state power.'" Austin Ramzy, "Teacher, Violinist, Enemy of the State? Web Posts Spur Free-Speech Debate in China," *Time World*, September 11, 2012. <http://world.time.com/2012/09/11/teacher-violinist-enemy-of-the-state-web-posts-spur-free-speech-debate-in-china/>.

<sup>xcv</sup> Ren Jianyu is a 24-year old Chinese man sent to a labor camp after reposting a supposedly subversive Weibo 100 times. He is now an outspoken critic of re-education through labor camps. Louisa Lim, "China Pledges Reforms to Labor Camps, But Offers Few Details," *NPR*, January 7, 2013. [www.npr.org/2013/01/07/168808588/china-pledges-reforms-to-labor-camps-but-offers-few-details](http://www.npr.org/2013/01/07/168808588/china-pledges-reforms-to-labor-camps-but-offers-few-details).

<sup>xcvi</sup> Murong Xuecun, September 12, 2012 (5:53 a.m.), *Weibo Entry*, <http://www.weibo.com/1182415487/yBywXtBun>.

<sup>xcvii</sup> 林 Weaving, September 12, 2012 (7:27 a.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, [http://weibo.com/lm734928258?key\\_word=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%B9%B3%E6%B0%91%E6%B2%A1&is\\_search=1](http://weibo.com/lm734928258?key_word=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%B9%B3%E6%B0%91%E6%B2%A1&is_search=1).

<sup>xcviii</sup> P 卜蛋, September 12, 2012, (8:31 p.m.) comment on Murong Xuecun Post, [http://weibo.com/lm734928258?key\\_word=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%B9%B3%E6%B0%91%E6%B2%A1&is\\_search=1](http://weibo.com/lm734928258?key_word=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%B9%B3%E6%B0%91%E6%B2%A1&is_search=1).

<sup>xcix</sup> Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," 483.

<sup>c</sup> "Adbusters #Occupy," last modified April 11, 2013, <http://www.adbusters.org/campaigns/occupywallstreet>.

<sup>ci</sup> Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," 481.

<sup>cii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>ciii</sup> *Ibid* 483.

<sup>civ</sup> Murong Xuecun, September 29, 2012 (8:50 p.m.), *Weibo Entry*, [http://www.weibo.com/hawking?key\\_word=%E6%97%A5%E6%9C%AC%E4%BD%9C%E5%AE%B6%E7%9A%84%E8%91%97%E4%BD%9C%E5%9C%A8%E6%9F%90%E4%BA%9B%E5%9F%8E%E5%B8%82%E8%A2%AB%E5%BC%BA%E8%BF%AB%E4%B8%8B%E6%9E%B6&is\\_search=1](http://www.weibo.com/hawking?key_word=%E6%97%A5%E6%9C%AC%E4%BD%9C%E5%AE%B6%E7%9A%84%E8%91%97%E4%BD%9C%E5%9C%A8%E6%9F%90%E4%BA%9B%E5%9F%8E%E5%B8%82%E8%A2%AB%E5%BC%BA%E8%BF%AB%E4%B8%8B%E6%9E%B6&is_search=1).

<sup>cv</sup> Downs, "Corrected version of 'Legitimacy and the Limits of Nationalism: China and the Diaoyu Islands'," 118.

<sup>cvi</sup> Yang, "The Internet and the Rise of a Transnational Chinese Cultural Sphere," 478.

<sup>cvi</sup> 听海观涛 2013, September 18, 2012 (9:48 a.m.), comment on Murong Xuecun Post, [http://weibo.com/u/2479082091?key\\_word=%E5%B8%8C%E6%9C%9B%E6%AF%8F%E4%B8%AA%E4%BA%BA%E9%83%BD%E8%83%BD%E7%9C%8B%E6%B8%85&is\\_search=1](http://weibo.com/u/2479082091?key_word=%E5%B8%8C%E6%9C%9B%E6%AF%8F%E4%B8%AA%E4%BA%BA%E9%83%BD%E8%83%BD%E7%9C%8B%E6%B8%85&is_search=1).

<sup>cvi</sup> 高红波上海, September 16, 2012, comment on Murong Xuecun Post, [http://weibo.com/u/2479082091?key\\_word=%E5%B8%8C%E6%9C%9B%E6%AF%8F%E4%B8%AA%E4%BA%BA%E9%83%BD%E8%83%BD%E7%9C%8B%E6%B8%85&is\\_search=1](http://weibo.com/u/2479082091?key_word=%E5%B8%8C%E6%9C%9B%E6%AF%8F%E4%B8%AA%E4%BA%BA%E9%83%BD%E8%83%BD%E7%9C%8B%E6%B8%85&is_search=1).

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- <sup>cx</sup> He, Yinan, "History, Chinese Nationalism and the Emerging Sino-Japanese Conflict." *Journal of Contemporary China*, 16 (2007): 10.
- <sup>cxi</sup> Murong Xuecun, September 14, 2012 (12:01 p.m.) *Weibo Entry*, <http://www.weibo.com/hawking>.
- <sup>cxii</sup> Sandra Huang, "How China's Mainstream Media Ignored the Anti-Japanese Riots," *The Atlantic*, September 26, 2012. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/09/how-chinas-mainstream-media-ignored-the-anti-japanese-riots/262879/>.
- <sup>cxiii</sup> Murong Xuecun, September 14, 2012 (12:10 p.m.) *Weibo Entry*, <http://www.weibo.com/hawking>.