

MASSACRE AS METHOD: THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL DAY FOR NANJING
MASSACRE VICTIMS AND CHINA'S DRIVE FOR REGIONAL POWER

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Asian Studies

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Washington, D.C.
May 5, 2015

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ABSTRACT

In December 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping presided over China's first state commemoration of the 1937 Nanjing Massacre. The decision to hold this event, made months prior in February at the National People's Congress annual meeting, seems counterintuitive in light of China's recent progress in deescalating tensions with Japan. However, this move was part of a strategy to reclaim national prestige and regional status through the assertion of historical claims. After tracing the establishment of the Nanjing Massacre Commemoration Day and exploring the particular significance of the Nanjing Massacre in Sino-Japanese relations, I propose four other benchmarks that demonstrate a larger bank of policies to achieve this goal. Though this decision may seem indicative of a strong current of domestic nationalism or China's desire for contrition from Japan, I argue that neither alternative convincingly accounts for the timing or content of this push for regional status. China's insistence on periodically reviving the Nanjing Massacre does not bode well for the future of Sino-Japanese relations.

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INTRODUCTION

In November 2014, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and Chinese President Xi Jinping met for the first time in two years at the APEC Economic Leader summit in Beijing. Despite the less-than-encouraging image of Xi and Abe's awkward handshake, this was a monumental step forward for the Sino-Japanese relationship. However, only one month later, Xi presided over China's first state commemoration of the 1937 Nanjing massacre.¹ His comments, particularly regarding the death toll of 300,000 people, reignited tensions with Japan as it relayed its dissatisfaction with the figure to China after the speech.² Importantly, why did China hold its first state commemoration of the 1937 Nanjing Massacre in December 2014 despite 76 years of not doing so, the recent thaw in China and Japan's relations as marked by the Qingdao meeting in September and the Japan-China Summit Meeting in November, and emergent bilateral trade growth for the first time in years?

Public invocation of the Nanjing massacre in China is neither novel nor surprising; however, the recent warming in Sino-Japanese relations is both. In September 2013, Xi and Abe met on the sidelines of the G20 Leader's Summit for the first time, with both leaders calling for improvement in bilateral relations.³ Days before the APEC summit, China and Japan laid the groundwork for further cooperation as Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi and Japanese National Security chief Shotaro Yachi came to a four-point consensus on improving bilateral

¹ "Nanjing massacre: China's Xi Jinping leads first state commemoration," 13 December 2014, *BBC.com*, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30460818>>.

² "Japan complains after China says 300,000 died in Nanjing Massacre," 14 January 2015, *Japan Times.co.jp*, <<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/01/14/national/history/japan-complains-after-china-says-300000-died-in-nanking-massacre/#.VSIEF1zXH60>>.

³ Jiji, "Abe, Obama agree to cooperate on Syria," *The Japan Times*, 6 September 2013, <<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/09/06/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-obama-agree-to-cooperate-on-syria/#.VUZPJFzXH61>>.

ties, which Yang Bojiang of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) called “a precious step towards a better bilateral relationship.”⁴ Moreover, political gains have been accompanied by economic progress – according to a Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) survey, total trade between Japan and China in the first half of 2014 increased by 4.4%⁵, compared to the previous two consecutive years of total trade decline (dropping 6.5% in 2013).⁶ Richard Katz described Sino-Japanese economic improvements in *Foreign Affairs*, citing multiple visits between Chinese businesses and Japanese firms as well as an economic mission sent by the Japan Business Federation in November 2013, which was received by Vice Premier Wang Yang.⁷

The National People’s Congress’ choice to permanently memorialize the Nanjing massacre in the form of a national day comes 77 years after the event occurred. Putting aside the numerical sensibility of making such a change on the 75th anniversary, 2014 was a year marked by gradual but recognizable advancement of Sino-Japanese cooperation. Entrenching (and, as I will later argue, internationalizing) remembrance of the Nanjing massacre by creating a national day seems to clash with that progress and hinder future cooperation. Also, what about the Nanjing massacre merits renewed attention in furtherance of the Chinese government’s political goals? Other Sino-Japanese disputes such as remilitarization, visits to the Yasukuni shrine, and

⁴ Wang Yamei, “China, Japan reach four-point agreement,” 7 November 2014, *Xinhua*, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-11/07/c_133772952.htm>.

⁵ “JETRO Survey: Analysis of Japan-China Trade in the first half of 2014 (based on imports of both countries), *JETRO.go.jp*, 22 August 2014, <<http://www.jetro.go.jp/en/news/2014/20140822008-news>>.

⁶ “JETRO survey: Analysis of Japan-China Trade in 2013 and outlook for 2014,” *JETRO.go.jp*, 28 February 2014, <<http://www.jetro.go.jp/en/news/2014/20140228009-news>>.

⁷ Richard Katz, “Why Chinese-Japanese Economic Relations are Improving,” 30 December 2013, *Foreign Affairs*, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/140615/richard-katz/why-chinese-japanese-economic-relations-are-improving>>.

(most glaringly) outstanding territorial disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands are more current, more urgent and arguably more controversial.

The Nanjing massacre possesses unique characteristics that are particularly useful for the Chinese government today. As I will demonstrate, the “Rape of Nanking” possesses a clear association with victimhood at the hands of Japanese aggressors, a feeling to which people around the world can relate. By recalling such trauma, the Chinese government thereby places Japan’s ascendance in a historical context unfavorable to Japan. The Nanjing Massacre commemoration day is only one part of a bank of policies advanced by the Chinese government in order to accomplish a higher goal. I argue that China has a clear strategy (though not public) to reclaim national prestige and its rightful regional status through the assertion of historical claims with clear benchmarks including the commemoration national day. This reactivates once-dormant historical memories and encourages both Chinese and foreign citizens to remember Japanese aggression. China thus placed the Nanjing massacre in a category with other massacres in order to create a shared experience across China and the rest of the world. By doing so, China strengthens its case for regional leadership and concomitantly challenges the so-called Japanese “charm offensive” and more aggressive stance of Shinzō Abe’s government.

In order to substantiate this claim, I will divide my argument into multiple sections. First, I will demonstrate that China actively aspired to a leading role in the region before February 2014, and that this desire overrode China’s interest in maintaining friendly relations with Japan. Next, I will consider the Nanjing Massacre, focusing on the unique aspects of this issue that make it an appealing tool for the Chinese government to disparage Japanese regional leadership. I will situate this event in the context of a larger Chinese strategy by bringing in other key events surrounding it that also capitalize on historical memory of Japanese wartime actions, creating

doubt and fear about any future Japanese rise to power. I will also respond to potential critics who would attribute this decision to other motivations such as domestic nationalism or desire for a true apology. Finally, I will offer predictions about future benchmarks of this strategy and the implications of China's renewed attention to the Nanjing Massacre for future Sino-Japanese relations.

CHINA'S DRIVE TO LEAD

After Xi Jinping entered office in early 2013, his administration quickly began to engage in more proactive diplomatic efforts that signaled a desire for a stronger Chinese leadership role in Asia. Within this new diplomatic push, in 2013 Xi introduced two initiatives that heralded China's reinvigorated regional leadership: the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Furthermore, in October China held its first-ever Central Work Forum on Diplomacy to the Periphery, which Xi linked in a speech to achievement of the "two centennials" and "realiz[ation of] the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."⁸ Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar observes that Xi visited fourteen countries by December 2013 while Li Keqiang visited nine.⁹ Moreover, Foreign Minister Wang Yi's speech at the World Peace Forum in June 2013 publicized China's new foreign policy concept entitled "Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics," standing in stark contrast with Deng Xiaoping's famous "keeping a low profile" policy guideline.¹⁰ Glaser concludes that Wang's statements "indicate global

⁸ Bonnie Glaser and Deep Pal, "China's Periphery Diplomacy Initiative," *China US Focus*, 7 November 2013, <<http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/chinas-periphery-diplomacy-initiative-implications-for-china-neighbors-and-the-united-states/>>.

⁹ Justyna Szczudlik-Tatar, "China's New Silk Road Diplomacy," *The Polish Institute of International Affairs*, No. 34 (82), December 2013.

¹⁰ Bonnie S. Glaser and Allison Szalwinski, "Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics," *China Brief*, Vol. 13 (Issue 16), 9 August 2013.

governance and greater leadership in the international community will be a key part of the policy of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.”¹¹

Japan’s positive relations not only with countries in Southeast Asia but throughout the Asia Pacific region directly challenged China’s regional aspirations. After Shinzō Abe returned to power in late 2012, he and his colleagues visited numerous countries in Southeast Asia as well as Australia as a part of a new “charm offensive.” This not only helps Japan to consolidate its economic interests in the region but also garners support for Japan’s regional leadership, as expressed in an opinion piece written by Abe in December 2012. In that piece Abe propagated the strategy of an “Asian security diamond,” in which “Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. state of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific,” stopping China from turning the South China Sea into a “Lake Beijing”.”¹²

China’s interest in gaining regional leadership combined with recent flare-ups telegraphed an overriding goal of the NPC in February 2014 at their annual meeting when they chose to create the Nanjing Massacre commemoration national day. While the aforementioned gains made politically and economically between China and Japan in late 2013 and 2014 could have driven the two countries to minimize emphasis on outstanding issues and capitalize on cooperation, there are a few reasons why that did not occur. Richard Katz proposes that China in late 2013 was pursuing a theory of “delinking trade from politics,” explaining how Sino-Japanese economic and business relations could improve while political differences widened. He writes, “At the heart of China’s reversal of last year’s tactics toward Japan is the economic

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Yuka Hayashi, “Abe’s Diamond Defense Diplomacy,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 January 2013, <<http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2013/01/17/abes-diamond-defense-diplomacy/>>.

reality that China needs Japan just as much as Japan needs China.”¹³ While Katz presented this delinking as a positive sign, the continued separation of economics and politics also means that stronger economic relations may be enough to forestall major conflict but not minor conflict – a non-nuclear version of the stability-instability paradox. Therefore, China’s designation of the Nanjing Massacre commemoration national day can be construed as an example of low-level provocation not preempted by heightened conflict or growing ties. Furthermore, China did not play down the commemoration day in light of growing political cooperation with Japan – as I will discuss shortly, the government’s preparatory actions prior to 13 December indicate a clear desire to make this commemoration known domestically and internationally.

WHY THE NANJING MASSACRE?

The Nanjing Massacre was an appropriate and appealing tool for the Chinese government to use to advance its international status over Japan’s. Not only would entrenching the Nanjing Massacre in a national commemoration day renew traumatic memories of Japan’s past aggression (thus undermining Japan’s charm offensive), but it also served the additional purpose of portraying China as the rightful regional leader. By underscoring the cautionary tale of what happens when Japan gains power, China brought the Nanjing Massacre into the modern day context. To understand why the Nanjing Massacre is a useful tool, one only needs to recount the event itself. During the Sino-Japanese war in December 1937, Japanese troops captured the then capital of China, Nanjing. In their occupation, the Japanese engaged in countless horrific acts,

¹³ Richard Katz, “Why Chinese-Japanese Economic Relations Are Improving,” *Foreign Affairs*, 30 December 2013, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2013-12-30/why-chinese-japanese-economic-relations-are-improving>>.

including “wanton killings, rapes, and lootings on a large scale.”¹⁴ Frank Tillman Durdin, an American writer for the *New York Times* who chose to stay in Nanjing after it fell to the Japanese troops, reported mass executions of women, civilians and war prisoners, commenting, “By despoiling the city and population the Japanese have driven deeper into the Chinese a repressed hatred that will smolder through years.”¹⁵ Not only is the event itself jarring, but contradictions over the amount of casualties each country claims as well as the growing number of historical revisionists in Japan exacerbate its gravity.

The ceremony surrounding the holiday, Xi Jinping’s speech, and other publicity actions before December contributed to the impact of the commemoration and set the tone for future commemorations (and thus for future Sino-Japanese relations). China had ample time to minimize the scale of the 2014 commemoration activities in light of progress in Sino-Japanese relations, but chose not to, actively courting nationalist fervor and international attention. Gilles offers an explanation of the ever-changing nature of national identities that demonstrates how China’s actions reopened old wounds and reinvigorated anti-Japanese sentiment. He writes, “National identities are, like everything historical, constructed and reconstructed; and it is our responsibility to decode them in order to discover the relationships they create and sustain.”¹⁶ In the case of historical issues with Japan, WWII plays an oversize role in shaping modern-day Sino-Japanese relations. Prior to the commemoration, the *Economist* reported that the party “continue[d] to whip up nationalist sentiment with anti-Japanese television shows, the

¹⁴ Xiaohong Xu and Lyn Spillman, “Political Centres, Progressive Narratives and Cultural Trauma,” in *Northeast Asia’s Difficult Past*, ed. Mikyoung Kim and Barry Schwartz, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, pg. 101.

¹⁵ Suping Lu, “The Nanjing Atrocities Reported in the U.S. Newspapers, 1937-38,” *The Readex Report*, Vol. 7 (Issue 2), <<http://www.readex.com/readex-report/nanjing-atrocities-reported-u-s-newspapers-1937-38>>.

¹⁶ John R. Gilles, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pg. 4.

publication of war memoirs, and...the issuing of school textbooks with anti-Japanese themes,” including one titled “Memory of Blood and Fire.”¹⁷ In addition, a host of reports in English and Chinese were released prior to 13 December that recounted the events in gruesome detail, demonstrating a push for attention from not only Chinese audiences but from the rest of the world.¹⁸ This was by design - an NPC delegate told reporters that he wanted the commemoration to be an international event attended by state leaders.¹⁹ A commentary in *Xinhua* also advocated for international attention, saying, “Commemorating the Nanjing massacre may revive the world’s memory of the Asian holocaust.”²⁰ When 13 December arrived, the commemoration activities were elaborate – it was broadcast live across the country, with Xi Jinping attending as well as Zhang Dejiang, chairman of the Standing Committee of the NPC.²¹ Xi’s speech dominated the media that day, in which he described the destruction carried out by the Japanese and the “foul wind and bloody rain” of the Japanese occupation.²² International commemoration also took place in Osaka, Southern California, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Macau.²³

¹⁷ “Lest they forget,” *The Economist*, 12 December 2014, <<http://www.economist.com/news/china/21636115-new-memorial-days-china-are-sign-frostiness-japan-lest-they-forget>>.

¹⁸ Shannon Tiezzi, “China’s Nanjing Massacre Publicity Push,” *The Diplomat*, 13 December 2014, <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/12/chinas-nanjing-massacre-publicity-push/>>.

¹⁹ Darren Wee, “Nanking massacre memorial day should be international event, says NPC delegate,” *SCMP*, 26 February 2014, <<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1435561/nanjing-massacre-memorial-day-should-be-international-event-says-npc>>.

²⁰ “China Voice: Nanjing Massacre should be remembered by the world,” *Xinhua*, 12 December 2014, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-12/12/c_133850242.htm>.

²¹ Qiao Rui, “Commemorating history and cherishing peace,” 15 December 2014, *CCTV*, <<http://english.cntv.cn/2014/12/15/ARTI1418635999738610.shtml>>.

²² Adam Cathcart, “Xi Jinping’s Nanking Massacre Commemoration and China’s Anti-Japanese Calendar,” *China Policy Institute Blog*, 15 December 2014, <<https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/chinapolicyinstitute/2014/12/15/xi-jinpings-nanking-massacre-commemoration-and-chinas-anti-japanese-calendar/>>.

²³ Qiao Rui.

CHINA'S LARGER PLAN

Creating a Nanjing Massacre national commemoration day is only one piece of a larger strategy to undermine Japan's regional leadership position. I argue that there are four other benchmarks that demonstrate a larger policy to entrench opposition to Japanese leadership through historical commemoration – the designation and subsequent celebration of Victor's Day and Martyr's Day, China's nomination of the Nanjing Massacre to be registered at the UNESCO Memories of the World program, and Xi's actions in Berlin. The Standing Committee of the NPC not only ratified the creation of a Nanjing Massacre memorial day at their meeting in February but also "Victory Day" on September 3rd, which "mark[s] victory in the war against Japanese aggression."²⁴ On that date, Xi delivered a speech observing that the CCP was "leading the Chinese nation on its quest for great revival."²⁵ In marking these two holidays, the committee noted that they intended to "remember the harm caused to the Chinese people, convey China's stance against aggression, safeguard human dignity and preserve world peace."²⁶ China also celebrated another new holiday in late September called Martyrs' Day, which was created to honor fallen soldiers who died fighting foreign enemies. This day also featured a nationally televised ceremony that Xi Jinping and other national leaders attended, offering flowers and a moment of silence.²⁷ Outside of China's borders, China brought the Nanjing Massacre to the UN by applying for UNESCO to include the Nanjing Massacre and "comfort women" into the Memory of the World program, which is dedicated to compiling historical material related to

²⁴ "China ratifies national days to commemorate war victory, massacre victims," 27 February 2014, *CNTV.cn*, <<http://english.cntv.cn/program/asiatoday/20140227/105741.shtml>>.

²⁵ "Lest they forget."

²⁶ "China ratifies national days."

²⁷ "Making Memorials: China Creates a New Holiday for Martyrs," *WSJ*, 30 September 2014, <<http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/09/30/making-memorials-china-creates-a-new-holiday-for-martyrs/>>.

world heritage.²⁸ Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told the press that this move was intended to “prevent the miserable and dark days from coming back again,” and urged Japan to “correct mistakes so as to embrace the future of peace with its Asian neighbors.”²⁹ The final benchmark of this larger strategy was further international advocacy. In March, Xi visited Berlin and brought up Japan twice in a speech at the Korber Foundation, saying “The war of aggression committed by Japan militarism alone inflicted over 35 million Chinese military and civilian casualties...these atrocities are still fresh in our memory.”³⁰ A *China Daily* op-ed published during the visit observed, “the government of China has been trying to impress the world with the sharp contrast between post-World War II Japan and Germany in facing their parallel burdens of history...the sufferings of the Chinese people were on a scale comparable with those of the Russian, Jewish and Polish peoples. It is therefore fitting and moving that President Xi wanted to make this comparison publicly.”³¹ Xi originally requested that Chancellor Angela Merkel accompany him to the Holocaust memorials in Berlin; although Merkel declined, Xi’s effort indicates the Chinese government’s drive for international association and support for anti-Japanese WWII recollection.

Collectively, these actions show that the Chinese government intended to utilize references to Japan’s aggression in WWII to undermine their international support, particularly for a Japanese leadership role in Asia-Pacific. By recounting what happened when Japan gained

²⁸ Zoe Li, “UNESCO lists Nanjing Massacre and ‘comfort women,’ China says,” *CNN*, 17 June 2014, <<http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/13/world/asia/china-japan-nanjing-massacre-unesco/>>.

²⁹ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on June 12, 2014,” *FMPRC*, 12 June 2014, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1165222.shtml>.

³⁰ Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping*, New York: Routledge, 2015, p. 240.

³¹ Martin Sieff, “Merkel disappoints on Holocaust visits,” *China Daily*, 28 March 2014, <<http://en.people.cn/102774/8581257.html>>.

regional status before and invoking shared trauma, China aimed to cast doubt over Japan's intentions in the present day. Within Southeast Asia, memories of Japanese actions are not far beneath the surface. For example, in Singapore, the 70th anniversary of the Sook Ching ("Purge") was commemorated in 2012 with speeches and public events, which occurred in February 1942 after Singapore fell to the Japanese and approximately 50,000 Chinese-Singaporeans lost their lives.³² South Korea's tensions with Japan over wartime treatment of Korean women are still active, especially given Abe's statement in 2007 that "there was no evidence to prove there was coercion" of the so-called "comfort women."³³ Finally, the Chinese government's allusions to the Holocaust both before and after the commemoration day were geared to gain Western sympathy and support. Gilles adds, "Events and places with international meaning such as Hiroshima, Chernobyl, Auschwitz, and Nanjing capture the world's attention even when the nations responsible may wish to forget them."³⁴ In particular, Holocaust denial in countries like Iran (which launched a cartoon contest in February 2015 on that theme) has garnered international condemnation – by recalling the Nanjing Massacre's association with the Holocaust and renewing emphasis on deniers in Japan, China thus fosters international sympathy and indignation for Japan's actions. Ian Buruma observes that the Chinese government can also unite Chinese dissidents abroad in supporting the PRC by means of the Nanjing Massacre: he writes, "the one thing that does tie them together is a kind of emotional nationalism that has grown

³² "The Sook Ching massacre and War memories of Singapore," *The Independent Singapore*, 26 December 2013, <<http://theindependent.sg/blog/2013/12/26/the-sook-ching-massacre-and-war-memories-of-singapore/>>.

³³ Colin Joyce, "Japanese PM denies wartime "comfort women" were forced," *Telegraph*, 3 March 2007, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1544471/Japanese-PM-denies-wartime-comfort-women-were-forced.html>>.

³⁴ Gilles 14.

much stronger in recent years, and one of the great symbols of this new Chinese nationalism is the Nanking massacre.”³⁵

CONTESTING GRASSROOTS NATIONALISM

By placing China’s actions in the field of international politics, I am consciously choosing not to attribute China’s action to domestic nationalist pressure, an alternative that might convince those studying this event. Mass protests in China’s history can spiral out of control easily – no Chinese official will likely forget the lessons from the loss of control experienced in 1989. Anti-Japanese nationalism is a known phenomenon in China that has led to multiple large-scale protests involving thousands of people, oftentimes engaging in exceptionally violent behavior. Zheng Wang argues that nationalism in China is inextricably linked to the sense of collective humiliation shared by all citizens; he writes, “the CCP feared that it could be excluded from a community the people might create themselves, and, as a result, incited nationalistic fervor.”³⁶ However, in the past this anti-Japanese nationalism specifically with regards to the Nanjing Massacre has spiraled out of control – Mark Eykholt cites the issue of differing popular and official sentiments regarding the Massacre, writing “the Chinese government has had trouble managing these differences, and Chinese students have proven willing to use anti-Japanese protests as a base for their own antigovernment protests.”³⁷

Though this is a compelling explanation, China has proved itself quite capable of controlling patriotic nationalism within its borders, especially with regards to Japan. In her book

³⁵ Ian Buruma, “The Nanking Massacre as a Historical Symbol,” in *Nanking 1937*, ed. Feifei Li, Robert Sabella and David Liu, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2002, pp. 1-9.

³⁶ Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012, pg. 227.

³⁷ Mark Eykholt, “Aggression, Victimization, and Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre,” in *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000, pg. 57.

Powerful Patriots, Jessica Chen Weiss details multiple instances of protest (two in particular with regards to Japan in 2005 and 2012) that the Chinese government either chose to quash or let play out. By allowing the 2005 anti-Japan protests to play out and invoking Japan's actions in WWII, China placed Japan's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council in jeopardy; Chen Weiss notes "China gave ASEAN nations – who in November 2004 had signed a trade accord with China – grounds for resisting Japan's entreaties for support at the UN deliberations."³⁸ The Chinese government's power to restrain protests (when and if they wanted to) was exhibited between 2006 and 2010, ranging from media appeals and meetings to police crackdowns and a ban on protests. Chen Weiss writes, "When China's diplomatic objectives have counseled flexibility and reassurance, as they did when China believed that Japan would release the trawler captain during the first phase of the 2010 crisis, the government has been able and willing to prevent large-scale nationalist protests."³⁹ These examples give credence to the argument that an incensed public is not forcing the Chinese government's hand. In addition, there is not compelling evidence to show that the Chinese public was particularly nationalist or anti-Japan in 2014; in fact, in the 10th annual Japan-China Public Opinion Poll conducted by The Genron NPO and China Daily, Chinese respondents with an "unfavorable" impression of Japan decreased from 92.8% to 86.8% since last year, with those having a "favorable" impression increasing from 5.2% to 11.3%.⁴⁰ In this way, the government *ignored* public sentiment by poking old wounds and was not acting under the influence of a militant nationalist public but instead determined its own policy stance.

³⁸ Jessica Chen Weiss, *Powerful Patriots*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, pg. 157.

³⁹ Chen Weiss 217.

⁴⁰ "The 10th Japan-China Public Opinion Poll: Analysis Report on the Comparative Data," 9 September 2014, *The Genron NPO*, <http://www.genron-npo.net/en/pp/docs/10th_Japan-China_poll.pdf>.

SINCERE APOLOGY?

The other alternative for why China declared a Nanjing Massacre commemoration national day holds that China is truly aiming for one thing – an apology. The predominant opinion in China is that Japan’s apologies to date are not enough – in a 2013 Pew Research Center survey, 78% of Chinese respondents said that “Japan has not apologized sufficiently for its military actions during the 1930s and 40s.”⁴¹ Given that many in the Chinese government have compared Japan’s actions to those of Germany, Thomas Christensen notes that in China it is normal to “compare Japan’s failure to accept responsibility for WWII to the more liberal postwar record of Germany, which has franker discussions of the war in its textbooks, has apologized for its wartime aggression, and has even offered financial payments to Israel.”⁴² Therefore, one could argue that designating a Nanjing Massacre commemoration national day and subsequent associated events are a push for Japan to publicly own up to its actions and right historical wrongs. When Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama offered a frank apology in August 1995 (on the 50th anniversary of Japan’s surrender in WWII), a spokesman from the Chinese Foreign Ministry stated “we believe that the Japanese Government’s attitude of expressing remorse over Japan’s past colonial rule and invasion, and its apology to the peoples of Asian countries, is positive.”⁴³ The Chinese government has called for apologies from Shinzō Abe and members of his government in recent years, especially after visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. When

⁴¹ Wai Ting, Michito Tsuruoka, and Si Hong Kim, *Asian Countries’ Strategies towards the European Union in an Inter-regionalist Context*, Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2015, pg. 231.

⁴² Thomas J. Christensen, “China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma,” in G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *International Relations theory and the Asia-Pacific*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, pg. 28.

⁴³ Sheryl WuDunn, “Japanese Apology for War is Welcomed and Criticized,” *The New York Times*, 16 August 1995, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/16/world/japanese-apology-for-war-is-welcomed-and-criticized.html>>.

three Japanese cabinet members visited Yasukuni in October 2013, Hua Chunying told the press, “The issue of the Yasukuni Shrine is an issue about whether Japan can correctly view its history of aggression and colonial rule with profound remorse.”⁴⁴ Jennifer Lind, who has written extensively about the role of apologies in international relations, recommends “following the prudent and promising model set by [Chancellor Konrad] Adenauer” in which “West Germany acknowledged German atrocities yet emphasized the country’s postwar achievements.”⁴⁵ She believes that this measured form of apology may be acceptable to Beijing, writing “Assuming Japan is willing to admit Japanese atrocities against the Chinese people...China might be willing to abandon its relatively recent politicization of memory.”⁴⁶

However, there are multiple problems with this alternative. First, China is not demanding a measured apology – it wants full contrition, West Germany style, where Germany’s leaders “apologized to Germany’s victims frequently, sincerely, and in unflinching detail.”⁴⁷ When Abe spoke recently at a summit in Jakarta, expressing “deep remorse” but not using the phrases “heartfelt apology” or “colonial rule and aggression” (as Murayama did in 1995), *Xinhua* reported that “the absence of a sincere apology...was highly conspicuous and deeply regrettable, and marked a betrayal of the spirit of the occasion.”⁴⁸ More importantly, there is no indication that China will forgive and forget upon receipt of a full Japanese apology. Austin and Harris propose that, with respect to war history, “China, for various reasons, prefers to remember and

⁴⁴ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on October 18, 2013,” *Chinese Consulate in Milan*, 18 October 2013, <<http://milano.chineseconsulate.org/eng/fyrth/t1090910.htm>>.

⁴⁵ Jennifer Lind, “The Perils of Apology,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2009, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/2009-05-01/perils-apology>>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Deng Yushan, “Commentary: Abe’s onus to free China-Japan from historical straitjacket,” *Xinhua*, 22 April 2015, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/22/c_134175196.htm>.

draw an apology and/or other concessions from Japan.”⁴⁹ One of those reasons is that Japan and Abe’s gaffes in the realm of history garner international backlash, including from its ally partner the U.S. When Abe posed in front of a military training jet marked with “731” (the unit number of a Japanese Imperial army group that conducted horrific experiments on Chinese citizens), the Congressional Research Service published a report “warning that the controversy over historical issues could damage U.S. interests” that caused Abe to apologize for his actions.⁵⁰ Thomas U. Berger similarly argues that China has not been willing to accept Japanese apologies for years in large part because of the way anti-Japanese sentiment has been ingrained in Chinese identity and nationalism. He writes, “Chinese and Korean nationalism is in many ways defined itself against Japan.”⁵¹ Japanese aggression also plays an oversized role in education in China; as Zheng Wang writes, “a state-run patriotic education is conducted from kindergarten through college...all these sources of memory have made forgetting impossible.”⁵² Liu Xiaobo contends that China does not want to forgive Japan even if it could, as that would undermine legitimacy; he writes, “Reviving war memories keeps the nation united against Japan, and behind the party.”⁵³ To fully forgive Japan would be to reject one of the most fundamental parts of Chinese identity and would likely undermine the CCP, making it an untenable option.

⁴⁹ Yew Meng Lai, *Nationalism and Power Politics in Japan’s Relations with China*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2014, pg. 104.

⁵⁰ Kirk Spitzer, “Sorry, But Japan Still Can’t Get the War Right,” *Time*, 20 May 2013, <<http://nation.time.com/2013/05/20/sorry-but-japan-still-cant-get-the-war-right/>>.

⁵¹ Kirk Spitzer, “Why Japan Is Still Not Sorry Enough,” *Time*, 11 December 2012, <<http://nation.time.com/2012/12/11/why-japan-is-still-not-sorry-enough/>>.

⁵² Zheng Wang, “History Education: The Source of Conflict Between China and Japan,” *The Diplomat*, 23 April 2014, <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/history-education-the-source-of-conflict-between-china-and-japan/>>.

⁵³ Matthew Forney, “Why China Loves to Hate Japan,” *Time*, 10 December 2005, <<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1139759,00.html>>.

CONCLUSION

China's actions in 2014 to emphasize, entrench and internationalize national memory and commemoration of Japanese aggression in WWII are not positive signs for the future of Sino-Japanese relations. China preempted the possibility of "moving past" the Nanjing Massacre by not only declaring an annually-occurring day of commemoration but also by adding other national days dedicated to remembering China's defeat of Japanese aggression and by inviting the world to share in that condemnation through international recognition of China's victimization. History tells us that China will likely ramp up its emphasis again if Japan engages in any unwelcome behavior. However, Japan does not need to directly invoke the Nanjing Massacre to provoke further commemoration. As Mark Eykholt observes, "the Chinese government uses the Massacre for political ends...giv[ing] the government a potent weapon with which to try to intimidate Japan."⁵⁴ This is not to say that the Nanjing Massacre is only used instrumentally without regard to the actual trauma of the event – Chinese responses to Yasukuni visits by Japanese leaders will almost always include a reference to 1937. Japan, meanwhile, is not helping its own cause. For example, the Yushukan, a museum on Yasukuni's grounds, suggests that the Nanjing Massacre was no big deal – Richard Bitzinger of the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies comments, "Nanjing is treated as something very minor, like just a few instances, sort of a spring-break party for the soldiers that got a little out of hand."⁵⁵ If either country desires lasting cooperative bilateral ties (that are not exclusively economic in nature), both need to look to the future instead of the past. For Japan, this means framing the Abe administration's upcoming remarks this summer on the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII in a

⁵⁴ Eykholt 57.

⁵⁵ Robert Marquand, "Koizumi's visits boost controversial version of history," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 21 October 2005, <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1021/p01s04-woap.html>>.

way that does not further anger China – recycling or embellishing the Murayama Statement would likely accomplish that goal. In turn, China must allow fledgling cooperative efforts with Japan like the recent leaders’ meeting in Jakarta to flourish instead of stamping them out by pouring salt into old wounds. China can still pursue its goal of attaining a stronger regional leadership role by demonstrating its interest in regional stability instead of cultivating tension and fear. The trauma of the Nanjing Massacre should not be forgotten – but reconciliation lays the groundwork for ensuring nothing like it ever happens again.

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