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Devil in the Making: Sino-Japanese Wartime Cultural Products in China and Its Influence on Chinese Nationalism

In September 2012, anti-Japan protests took place and turned into riots in China because of the unsettled issue of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. While similar territorial disputes in the South China Sea were also undergoing at that time, no demonstrations on the South China Sea issue developed into riots and neither anti-Philippine nor anti-Vietnam sentiments were aroused to a comparable level. Thus, it might be fair to say that the anti-Japanese riots were not only caused by the Diaoyu Islands, but also owing to the Sino-Japanese historical issues and the cultural trauma left by the Sino-Japanese War during 1937–1945.

This paper aims to provide a possible interpretation of the role of Sino-Japanese wartime cultural products in shaping Chinese nationalism through a cultural sociological analysis. The concept of “wartime cultural products” in this paper does not refer to the cultural products produced during wartime; instead, it refers to the cultural products with war as the topic. In order to give a hint of the role of Sino-Japanese wartime cultural products in shaping Chinese nationalism, the author asks the following two specific questions and will answer them in the main body of this paper: 1) what is the deep cultural structure of the anti-Japanese culture products? 2) how does the deep cultural structure shape current Chinese nationalism and anti-Japanese action? “Deep cultural structure” here means the objective but non-public codes and logic, which is different from the surface structure that can be obtained easily.

Chinese Nationalism in Retrospect and Cultural Sociology as a New Path

Sino-Japanese conflict is not a new issue. As Caroline Rose (2005, p. 2) has noticed, “emerging in the 1980s, Sino-Japanese problems reappeared on an almost annual basis in the form of Chinese protests over textbook content, the nature (or lack of) Japanese apologies to the Chinese, ‘gaffes’ by Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Diet members relating to events of the war, Japanese prime-ministerial visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, and so on.” James Reilly (2011, p. 463) declares that China’s patriotic education campaign mainly began from the mid-1980s. Since education in China is to a big extent controlled by Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Reilly’s research sheds light on the strategy of CCP’s propaganda on Japan after the mid-1980s. Meanwhile, Jungmin Seo (2008, p. 1) notices that during the anti-Japan riot in 2005, though Chinese authorities maintained “a determined but calm and reserved tone,” the cultural market in China quickly jumped on the fever of nationalism. Therefore, Jungmin Seo (2008, p. 1) believes, rather than determined merely by politics, “nationalism as a cultural commodity is shaped between the double-pressure of market forces and the Chinese state ideology.” While Jungmin Seo stresses the double-pressure of the market and the state, Shunji Cui (2012, p. 199) believes the former factor took the increasing lead. He even alleges “Beijing’s control mechanisms and its ability to direct nationalist discourse in ways convenient to itself are challenged by the rise of popular nationalistic sentiment.”

Although the above researchers have noticed the impact of market force on popular nationalistic sentiment in China, their research did not provide any detailed analysis of the market force, where popular wartime cultural products took the most space. Due to the deficiencies of the former researches, this paper is going to appeal to a different methodology to analyze the nationalism in China. “Sociology [...] is a science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its cause and consequences” (Weber 1978, p.4). In order to move a step closer to the causal explanation of nationalist sentiment and action in China, I decided to appeal to “cultural sociology.”

Cultural sociology aims at being a kind of “social psychoanalysis” and “bring the social unconscious up for view” (Alexander 2003, p.4). The main logic of cultural sociology is abduction. Different from deduction, abduction is not truth conveying; different from induction, abduction is

not informative. The process of abduction is to provide one educated guess and then try to validate it. Cultural sociological explanation can never be true or false since abduction can never be verified, but a good explanation should be plausible.

Structural hermeneutics is the methodological approach of this research. As one of the most common tool kits in cultural sociology, structural hermeneutics emphasizes the autonomy of culture in social structure (Alexander 2003, p. 26). The autonomy of culture is reflected in cultural sociologists' intention of expanding the dimension of social structure to include culture (Alexander 2005, p. 20). From the perspective of cultural sociology, a social action can only be understood when an analyst enters this action's internal-meaning-environment (Alexander 2005, p. 21). Structural hermeneutics, which is the methodological commitment of many cultural sociologists, is a sophisticated combination of structuralism and hermeneutics. Structuralism is the scientific analysis of semiotic system and meaning; hermeneutics is the humanistic art of understanding and interpretation (Alexander 2003, p. 26). Structural hermeneutics enables both systematic structural construction and detailed textual interpretation. The most common methods used in structural hermeneutics are discourse analysis, narrative analysis, performance analysis and iconic analysis. In this research, discourse analysis and narrative analysis are the major methods.

The origin of discourse analysis can be traced to Emile Durkheim. In the *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim (2001 [1912]) constructs the master binaries of "sacred" and "profane." Cultural sociology inherits this pair of binary oppositions to guide the understanding of public discourse. While Durkheimian sacred and profane account for the "collective" and "individual" oppositions in social life, this master binary in the strong program is endowed with two more meaning dimensions, which are "us" vs. "other," and "good" vs. "evil" (Alexander 1993).

Narrative analysis originated from Aristotle and was developed mainly by Northrop Frye and Philip Smith. Every story is an imitation of life and action, even if it is purely fiction. Aristotle calls the "imitation of reality" as "mimesis" (Sachs 2006). Northrop Frye (1957) develops Aristotle's idea on narrative and drama into several fictional modes. In these modes, he distinguishes "low mimesis" and "high mimesis." Low mimesis is a realistic narrative model. In low mimesis, the protagonists of the narratives are driven by mundane, individual interests and desires. High mimesis is an idealistic model. In high mimesis, the protagonists of the

narrative are motivated by sacred and collectively shared values, while the antagonists are driven by “radical evil.” Based on Frye’s idea, Philip Smith (2005) shapes his “apocalypse” theory. Apocalypse is the extremely high mimesis genre in which characters are totally polarized.

In the following part, the author is going to stick to the theoretical commitment of cultural sociology, which is the autonomy of culture, and the methodological commitment of it, which is structural hermeneutics, to analyze nationalism in China. Since one of the magnifications of nationalism in China is the negative sentiment toward the Japanese, the selected sample is centered on anti-Japanese cultural products – the most unforgettable classical Sino-Japanese wartime movies and the most popular current Sino-Japanese wartime TV series. In the movie section, the top five “most unforgettable anti-Japanese wartime films” (Xinlang Diaocha 2013) – *Railway Guerrilla* (1956), *Landmine Warfare* (1962), *Little Soldier Zhang* (1963), *Tunnel Warfare* (1965) and the *Bloody Battle of Taierzhuang* (1986) – were selected. As it is impossible to obtain authorized rankings of the anti-Japanese wartime series according to their popularities, the author chose the following TV series based on commentary reports and related forums: *Drawing Sword* (2005), *My Chief and My Regiment* (2009), *The Line* (2009), *Snow Leopard* (2010), and *Designation Forever* (2011) (original names of the movies and TV series can be found in Appendix 1). First-hand data of the five whole movies and selected episodes from the five TV series were collected by the author. Second-hand data, such as the synopsis of the TV series, was adopted to assist the understanding. The combination of the classic movies and the current TV series guaranteed that both vintage and fresh sources are included. After the data is collected, the author uses the discourse analysis tools and narrative analysis method to interpret them.

As Alexander (2003, p. 23) stated, there are a good number of cultural sociologists who work on clarifying “concrete mechanisms through which culture does its work.” Among them, Ann Swidler’s “tool kit” stands out. Swidler (1986, p. 274) began her theory from criticisms upon “culture as value” perspective from Max Weber and Talcott Parsons. Weber believed that individuals’ actions are driven by their idea and belief. Parsons inherited Weber’s model, and he holds the idea that “values are essence around which societies are constituted” (Swidler 1986, p. 274). Swidler (1986, p. 275) disputes above understanding by examining the case of “culture in poverty.” She asks why people in poverty, who want the middle-class life, cannot easily get it. The answer can only be that it is not the culture as an end value that shapes the action.

In order to keep the causal significance of culture and at the same time reject its effect as an end value, Swidler came up with a “tool kit” theory. Swidler (1986, p. 277) believes that a culture is not a “unified system that pushes action in a consistent direction,” instead, it is a ““tool kit” or repertoire from which actors select different kinds of things in different circumstances. In another word, culture works as a medium, a vehicle, a box full of codes, symbols and narratives, instead of an end value, to shape the strategy of action. In this way, we are able to understand why the ethos of Protestantism outlasts its religious ideas – although the end is not persuasive anymore, the repertoire is still here. Also, it is possible to understand why it is difficult for the street-corner man to live a wealthy and dominant life though they are longing for it – they barely obtain the repertoire that can lead them to a decent life. The repertoire or tool-kit theory from Swidler will guide the interpretation of the role wartime cultural products play in shaping the anti-Japanese protests in the later part of this paper.

Data From Popular Cultural Products

In the anti-Japanese films and TV series, various binaries appear to describe Chinese and Japanese. Table one shows examples of the binaries.

Table 1. Binaries in Films and TV Series

Chinese	Japanese
Great	Devil
Clever	Stupid
Affectionate	Cruel
Wise	Mad
Self-disciplined	Greedy
Brave	Timid
Winner	Loser
Tiger, Leopard	Wolf, Gog, Jackals, Chicken, Rabbit, Locust

The above binaries can be divided into three groups. The first group is the antonym of “Japanese devil” and “Chinese hero.” In the selected movies and TV series, “Japanese devil” (*riben guizi*), “little devil” (*xiao guizi*) or simply “devil” (*guizi*) is commonly used to address Japanese soldiers. For example, in a 45 minutes episode from *Drawing Sword*, the

term “devil” appears more than twenty-five times. The adjacent of “Japanese” and “devil” strengthens hatred from Chinese towards the whole Japanese nation, rather than only the soldiers. The recurrence of this use in the popular cultural products make people gradually get used to it, and it spurs the hatred and misunderstandings secretly. On the contrary, the Chinese, especially the soldiers, are described as great heroes, which increased youngsters’ admiration for the soldiers.

The second group is the distinct animal metaphors. As showed in the table, Japanese are described as wolves, dogs, jackals, chicken, rabbits or locusts in the movies and TV dramas. Those animals are either representatives of cruelty in Chinese culture (wolf, jackal and dog), or timidity (chicken and rabbit) and greed (locust). The icon of Chinese is typically the tiger and leopard. In Chinese tradition, the tiger and leopard are regarded as brave, strong and swift as the tiger is considered the king of all animals and the leopard is homogeneous. In rare cases, the animal metaphors of Japanese and Chinese could be switched, for example, the wolf can be used to show the braveness of Chinese soldier and the tiger can be borrowed to highlight the ruthless of Japanese.

The above metaphors correspond faultlessly with the third group of binaries – a series of opposite adjectives. In the classic wartime movies, the Japanese are always unintelligent, timid, cruel and greedy, and they always lose the battle. The Chinese, especially the CCP soldiers, on the contrary, are wise, brave, affectionate and self-disciplined, and they are the winner of the battle. In current TV series, the characters of the protagonist and antagonist are more complicated and the boundary is a little bit more blurred than in the classic movies, but it is still possible to notice the distinction.

Besides of above three pairs of binaries, the narratives on the Chinese and Japanese diverges too. The following tables reveal typical narratives on Chinese and Japanese from the sample movies and TV dramas.

Table 2. Typical Narratives on Chinese

CCP members let the villagers first leave the dangerous place (<i>Tunnel Warfare</i>)
Soldiers give the weapon captured in the battle to the team leader (<i>Landmine Warfare</i>)
The chief of one army suspends a personal grudge with the other chief and they cooperate in the battle for their country (<i>the Bloody Battle of Taierzhuang</i>)

A group of soldiers leave money to the restaurant owner even though because of an emergency they do not have time to eat the food they just ordered (*Railway Guerilla*)

The chief of one army sacrifices the life of his wife in order to win the battle (*Drawing Sword* – 14)

The soldier makes one vow that he will only go back home after he killed all the invaders in his motherland (*Snow Leopard* – 38)

A CCP soldier put himself in a dangerous situation in order to save an old village woman (*Little Soldier Zhang*)

The soldier resists marrying one beautiful girl because he has his duty in the battle (*Designation Forever* – 15)

Table 3. Typical Narratives on Japanese

The soldiers rob everything they can find in the village (*Tunnel Warfare*)

The soldier killed defenseless people in a whole village (*the Bloody Battle in Taierzhuang*)

The army uses a virus in order to lead to as many deaths as possible of their opponent army (*Designation Forever* – 15)

The soldier killed an unarmed old lady in front of his childhood grandson (*Little Soldier Zhang*)

The soldier kidnapped an unarmed young woman, which leads to the death of this woman (*Drawing Sword* – 14)

A captain tortures his opponent because of a jealous and personal issue (*the Line* – 42)

The soldier kidnapped the old father of their opponent, which leads to the suicide of the old man (*Snow Leopard* – 38)

It is lucid that the above narratives are qualified as high mimesis when Frye's mimesis theories are applied on them, and some of them even fit into Smith's apocalypse model. Three pairs of binary oppositions characterized the polarized morality of Chinese (soldiers) and Japanese (soldiers), which are good vs. evil, collective vs. individual and us vs. the other. Firstly, the Chinese soldiers are always the good guys who sacrifice themselves to protect their countrymen. The Japanese are the evil monsters who kill opponent soldiers and unarmed civilians with cheap shots such as traps and viruses. Secondly, the recurrence statement such as "kill the invaders in our motherland" perfectly shows the logic of us (motherland) vs. the other (invaders). Thirdly, the Chinese are willing to sacrifice their individual interests, and sometimes even their closest relatives, for the collective goal. The Japanese, on the contrary, rob the whole village for individual desire and torture opponents for personal reasons.

The distinctive binary discourse and narratives on the Chinese and Japanese can be regarded as an identity building strategy as the starting point of identity building is always differentiation and classification, which indicates that some people are included and others are excluded in the community. In the case of Chinese identity building, while in the early movies only the Communist Party soldiers and Chinese civilians fit into the category of brave, strong, unselfish and wise Chinese, recently, the trend is that all Chinese, even the Kuomintang (KMT) soldiers, are included. The groups of people who are excluded from the positive projection are foreigners, especially Japanese, the nation who brought most suffering to the Chinese according to Chinese narratives (Zheng Wang 2012, p. 56). As showed in the former part, the negative adjectives and nouns, which are also the binary code of the positive words describing Chinese, are imposed on Japanese. All in all, the deep cultural structure in anti-Japanese wartime cultural products is a game of differentiating “we” and “other,” or “Chinese” and “Japanese.” With the Chinese identity constructing process in mind, we can better understand the Chinese anti-Japanese sentiment and action.

Understanding Anti-Japanese Protests from the Cultural Repertoire

In September 2012, Citizens from 19 Chinese cities, including metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, joined the anti-Japanese protest wave in China. The common approach observed in China during such events is that individuals gather on the street and express their anger through slogans in their hands. Following are ten typical slogans that appeared in this protest (original sentences can be found in Appendix 2):

1) I would like to kill all the devils even if the price is we have to regress twenty years (in living standard).

2) Chairman Mao, the CCP army, KMT army, help! The little Japanese come to bully us again.

3) I would rather kill all the Japanese even if the price is the whole Chinese land is also covered with tombs (of our country man); I am willing to protect the Diaoyu Islands even the result is there is no life in Mainland China.

4) The Diaoyu Islands are parts of China. Japanese and brutes get out of it!

5) We will kill evil dog – Koizumi Jun'ichirō, mad dog – Noda Yoshihiko, devils, jackals and wolves for revenge.

6) (Japanese have) the greedy heart of dogs and wolves.

7) We have more than 1 billion soldiers, so how can we wait for our sons and grandsons to wipe out the humiliation of our generations? I would love to go to Tokyo with an army of 10 thousand soldiers who are like tigers and wolves.

8) Brother Hu, please start the war!

9) Give me a gun and give me a cannon; I will protect the Diaoyu Islands.

10) Once the war is started, I am willing to join a car battle, horse battle, land battle, water battle, city battle, alley battle, guerrilla warfare, landmine warfare, tunnel warfare...

It is not difficult to notice the echoes of the deep structure of the anti-Japanese cultural products from the above slogans. In Slogan 1, the term “devil” is used to address the Japanese. In Slogan 2, the wartime heroes – Chairman Mao, CCP soldiers, KMT soldiers – are appealed to for help. These two slogans bring us back to the binary of Japanese devil and Chinese hero. In Slogan 4, the Japanese are put side by side with brutes. Similarly, in Slogan 5 the former Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō and then Japanese Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko are paralleling with devils, jackals and wolves, and they are described as evil dog and mad dog. In Slogan 6, although the statement is plainer, the metaphor of dog and wolf appeared again. Interestingly, Slogan 7 also includes the metaphor of wolf, but this time it appears with tiger instead of dog, and it is used to address the Chinese, so the symbolic meaning of this animal changed from greedy and cruel to brave and swift. Those slogans corresponded to the animal metaphor discussed in the movies and TV series.

In Slogan 9, a citizen is asking for a weapon and declaring his willingness to go to war for the Diaoyu Islands. Slogan 10 expresses a similar wish, which together with Slogan 9 mirror the braveness of these protestors. In Slogan 8, the citizen asks Hu Jintao, the leader of the CCP at that time, to start the war. Instead of using the full name of Hu, the protestor addresses him as Brother Hu. This detail reveals the binary of “us” vs. “them.” No matter in which position Hu is, as a Chinese, he is our brother. While in Slogan 1, the price for war is only the living standard, in slogan 3 the protestor announces that he would rather sacrifice his life and the lives of his countrymen, as long as the Japanese can be eradicated. Except for strong hatred, this statement also represents the use of the

binary of collective vs. individual – in order to achieve the collective honor, individual life can be paid.

Swidler (2001) finds out that when her interviewees are asked about their thoughts of love, they always put cultural images, symbols, expressions and ideas together to talk about one problem, and sometimes, their current answers can even contradict their earlier answers. Swidler (2001) concludes that most people do not have a single or unified belief, instead, they just use their culture as a tool kit to shape their talking. Similarly, the author would argue that the comparability between the deep structures of movies and TV series and the protesters' slogans is also due to the cultural products' role as a "repertoire" (Swidler 2001). Since the classic movies are the main source of Sino-Japanese war collective memory for most Chinese, especially those who have never experienced the Sino-Japanese war personally, and also because the recent wartime series keep on heating Chinese anger toward Japan, when a "similar" case happens – the Japanese can be seen as taking Chinese land, according to Chinese discourse, Chinese protestors naturally turn to their tool kit. This tool kit is full of binary codes – the Japanese devil vs. Chinese hero, tiger vs. dog, brave vs. timid, collective good vs. individual interests, us vs. the other. The protesters appeal to the culture "tool kit" to a big extent automatically, and the "tool kit" shapes their slogans also unconsciously. From the perspective of current Chinese identity construction, the protestors are just playing a matching game. Since the Chinese people, especially the popular cultural product receiver, are convinced that they are brave and wise, just like the war heroes in the movie and TV series, when their identity is violated, in this case is that the Japanese try to take the Chinese land and impose humiliation again, they are willing to use violence or violent words to defend their territory and identity.

Conclusion

This research gave a possible interpretation of the role of Sino-Japanese wartime cultural products in shaping Chinese nationalism. Through analyzing classic Chinese-produced Sino-Japanese wartime movies and TV series, the author found that the discoursed images of Japanese and Chinese fit into the binary oppositions. To be specific, the Japanese have radical negative images and Chinese, especially the CCP soldiers, have extreme positive images; the high mimesis narratives further polarized the distinct images of Chinese and Japanese. Meanwhile, the paper presents a modern

Chinese identity building process through distinguishing Chinese from Japanese. Based on the empirical data and Ann Swidler's "tool kit" theory, the author argues that the binary structure in anti-Japanese cultural products acts as a "tool kit" to shape the rhetoric of anti-Japanese protests in China.

As a cultural sociological research, this paper is not able to verify any direct link between movies, Chinese identities and the anti-Japanese protests of 2012. What this paper meant to achieve is to give a social psychoanalysis of the anti-Japanese sentiment delivered by cultural products, and how the deep structure of these cultural products acts as a "tool kit" of the popular protest. The author believes that this research has brought the unconscious basis of 2012 anti-Japanese protest up for view. As for the scientific verification of the direct link between cultural product, identity, and protest, it has to be left to other research.

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Appendix 1: Names of the Movies and TV Series in Chinese (same order as in the article)

铁道游击队 (1956)
地雷战 (1962)
小兵张嘎 (1963)
地道战 (1965)
血战台儿庄 (1986)
亮剑 (2005)
我的团长我的团 (2009)
生死线 (2009)
雪豹 (2010)
永不磨灭的旗帜 (2011)

Appendix 2: The Protest Slogans in Chinese (same order as in the article)

- 1) 哪怕倒退二十年，干掉鬼子
- 2) 毛主席，八路军，国军，小日本又来欺负咱们了
- 3) 哪怕华夏遍地坟，也要杀光日本人；宁愿华夏不长草，也要保卫钓鱼岛
- 4) 狗狼野心
- 5) 钓鱼岛是中国领土，日本人及畜生远离
- 6) 恶狗小泉，疯狗野田。鬼子豺狼，统统杀光。清算历史，血债血偿。
- 7) 万里长城十亿兵，国耻岂待儿孙平。愿提十万虎狼旅，越马扬刀入东京。
- 8) 恳请涛哥开战吧
- 9) 给我枪给我炮，我来保卫钓鱼岛
- 10) 一旦开战，老夫车战、马战、陆战、水战、笼城战、巷战、麻雀战、地雷战、地道战