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*Myths and Mobilization Matter:
Increasing Agency of Chinese Activist Groups
in the Diaoyu / Senkaku Islands Conflict*

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Myths and Mobilization Matter: Increasing Agency of Chinese Activist Groups in the Diaoyu / Senkaku Islands Conflict

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I. Introduction

Sino-Japanese conflict on a group of islands in the East China Sea, called Diaoyu in Chinese and Senkaku in Japanese, has led to considerable international attention in recent years. For decades, politicians and observers had downplayed the significance of this group of uninhabited rocks. However, the situation has changed dramatically, and the Diaoyu / Senkaku Islands (DSI)¹ conflict has turned into a significant threat that could possibly deteriorate Sino-Japanese relations as a whole. Consequently, media rhetoric trying to capture the nature of the conflict has been increasingly fierce. On the domestic level, Chinese media has even speculated on Chinese and Japanese military capabilities in case of armed conflict. The *South China Morning Post* titled on April 2, 2014: “*Chances of War between China and Japan increasing*”, citing ex-People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officer Luo Yuan that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is more than capable of defending itself against Japan (South China Morning Post 2014). The Diplomat even headlined on January 25, 2014: “*New Cold War: China vs. Japan*” (The Diplomat 2014). On the international level, western media has also regularly been reporting on the DSI conflict and its dangers for Sino-Japanese and East Asian relations.

This thesis is interested in discovering reasons for the remarkable *change over time* in the DSI conflict. There has been a considerable variation in how the Chinese government has handled the DSI dispute both domestically and internationally. The stark contrast is best captured by looking at Premier Zhou Enlai’s 1972 remarks (“There is no need to mention the Diaoyu Islands. It does not count as a problem of any sort”, cited in Tian 1997: 109) and today’s string of newspaper articles in the party’s mouthpiece *Renmin Ribao* during conflict flare-ups, usually heavily condemning Japan and lasting for days.

Overall, the conflict has become manifest about eight times (1970, 1978, 1990, 1996, 2004/05, 2010, 2012, 2013)², spanning over four decades. The Chinese government’s sovereignty claims and arguments why they believe the DSI to be Chinese territory have not changed much since the 1980s. However, “timing, method, and intensity of the claim by the

¹ For the convenience of the reader, this thesis will use the abbreviation DSI (Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands). The author does not intend to take a stance on the sovereignty issue by playing the Chinese name first.

² By my own account, the number is debatable. It has to be noted that boats and activists from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan have regularly entered the territory since about 2006, but most of these incidents remained rather small. Boats did not always reach the islands, and at other times were not allowed to sail to the DSI (see empirical chapter).

three sides [PRC, Japan, Taiwan³] (...) are dictated (...) by domestic factors not fully within the control of the governments” (Chung 2007: 53). This thesis aims to shed light on these *domestic* factors, and more specifically, Chinese subnational activist groups and their role in the conflict. Political activist groups in China are attributed an increasing influence on the conflict in the thesis, simultaneously claiming such an influence can only be understood when taking the significant transformation of the Chinese political system into account.

Before explaining the approach, a brief look at existing research on the DSI conflict is necessary. Some scholars have focused on the role of the governments (as the main agents in foreign policy) in the dispute. Realism emphasizes that the regional order has been changed by China’s rise. As countries mainly strive for power in realism, the strategic maritime importance of the DSI and the natural resources in the area are of importance. However, Liberalists argue that strong trade ties between China and Japan have prevented the conflict from escalating (Koo 2009). Literature using International Relation’s grand theories provides important insights – the conflict has indeed only come up again after natural resources were discovered (resembling Realism), and the Chinese government has always been very careful once anti-Japanese protests turned too violent considering that the country is still dependent on Japanese investment (resembling Liberalism). However, the domestic level is neglected in these studies, and ever-thickening trade ties are in contrast with the much-increased tension in the latest rounds of conflict. More recent literature also refers to *China’s New Assertiveness* (Johnston 2013) in territorial disputes, arguing that the Chinese government has recently been more self-confident and less willing to compromise in its foreign policy. This trend has especially been attributed to territorial and sovereignty disputes such as the DSI conflict and other disputed islands in the South China Sea.

For my purpose, literature that treats foreign policy as a *two-level game* (Putnam 1988) – incorporating domestic factors – is more appropriate, especially taking the role of public opinion into account. Scholars have noted that the Chinese government has sometimes acted repressive, sometimes tolerant to anti-Japanese public sentiment in China. Weiss (2014) argues authoritarian regimes use the public as a strategic bargaining tool in bilateral crisis. Kang (2013) and Fewsmith/Rosen (2001) emphasize that certain conditions affect the influence of public opinion in the People’s Republic: A high level of elite cohesion, relaxed bilateral relations and

³ Although the focus of this thesis is on the PRC and Japan in the DSI conflict, the role of Republic of China (ROC) in the conflict is going to be depicted in chapter II and IV as well.

a low level of public mobilization limits the influence of public opinion on foreign policy, while a low level of elite cohesion, tense bilateral relations and a high level of public mobilization increase the influence of public opinion (ibid).

Indeed, the overall state of Sino-Japanese relations has influenced how the government has reacted to the DSI dispute (see empirical chapter). Yet, when taking a closer look at China's domestic level, political activists in 2014 can operate and influence in ways that were not possible 25 years ago, no matter what the government does. I argue two parallel and originally not intertwined domestic developments in China since the 1990s are crucial to grasp the changing nature of the conflict. One is the role of (Japan-related) *historical myths* (or history-related narratives; Gustaffson 2011: 28) in the emerging and partly state-induced Chinese nationalism, the other is a growing yet still *embryonic civil society* (Shi 2004) in China – a space the nationalist activist groups (especially online) can operate in, facilitate activities in and use to mobilize for protest activities (Tai 2006). Both developments have become intertwined precisely because activists use historical myths in their whole agenda (starting from their actions to their argumentation and even in their organizational structure and presentation); plus China's history-sensitive public has been driven by those myths to take part in “offline” protest, organized by activists and other netizens. Both these developments are discussed in the following sections.

As for historical myths, history politics and its interrelation with nationalism in China, this field has been well-documented (see chapter 3.3). History has been identified as a key variable posting a far more outreaching impact on East Asian politics than it would in the West (Johnston 2012). In post-Tian'anmen China, the government has imposed a new form of history propaganda (facilitated through education systems and the mass media) that involves a strong nationalist element. In contrast to earlier times, the government has not only started to emphasize foreign imperialist aggression of the past, but at the same time positioned the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the patriotic safe-guardian to preserve the Chinese motherland and nation. Anti-foreign myths are not exclusively expressed towards Japan, but as their bilateral relations are among China's most tense, the resulting popular sensitivity and anger towards Japanese war crimes is a lot bigger in comparison to other “aggressors”.⁴ Thus, nationalism inevitably is linked to the DSI dispute, as the islands are perceived to have been “stolen” from China. Gong (2001: 42) criticizes that China's “overreliance on history to

⁴ For reasons why the government decided to alter its history politics, see chapter 3.3. For its content, also see chapter 3.3.

provide national legitimization could challenge the ability of any Chinese government to satisfy its own people or to engage easily internationally”. No matter whether the “history card” is overused or not, it is common sense that historical grievances have now firmly reached the broad Chinese public, the latter now being very sensitive to judge Japan’s present actions on the base of its past.

While most scholars attribute nationalism a role in the conflict, they do not agree on strength of causal linkage. Some argue that despite strong rhetoric to calm public anger, the Chinese government has always successfully put a lid on protests to protect economic relations with Japan (Koo 2009). It is also claimed that protests have so far not really altered China’s foreign policy (Reilly 2014). Others doubt that public opinion and *audience costs* can significantly influence foreign policy making in an authoritarian system (Rose 2000). While it is true that the government has been able to curtail protests, this argument ignores that the CCP has found this to be increasingly difficult. Also, DSI-related protests used to be exclusive to Taiwan and Hong Kong, but now have routinely been staged in mainland China as well – a fact a causal explanation is needed for. As for the second argument, Chinese popular will can by no means be channeled as effectively and routinely in domestic institutions like in democracies, yet there is no denial that China’s society has been opening up dramatically, and *bottom-up* “emotional venting” and *political advocacy* do take place (He 2007: 3). While the degree of influence is debatable, it is very much worth investigating. Also, there is empirical evidence that *bottom-up* pressure has influenced the government, as the empirical chapter will show.

This brings us to the second development: China’s changing domestic environment and its emerging embryonic civil society. This development is of vital importance to raise attention and develop mobilization capacities for nationalist activist groups. The inclusion of new social actors – among them civil society – into Chinese foreign policy has been noted before (Heberer/Senz 2010). Still, Chinese civil society is by no means fully developed, especially when measured with Western standards (Shi 2004). There is no doubt that new social spaces have developed, however, and these spaces offer new possibilities for Chinese individuals and organizations to pursue their own interests beyond the government’s agenda (Tai 2006). Opportunities are especially available to nationalist activist groups: They make extensive use of the internet, thereby facilitating online activism, internet protest and also real “offline” social movements. These groups could not have had any impact in a China where the government held a monopoly on media information and where foreign policy was exclusively in the hands of Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and a few party elders – but this has changed dramatically. Most

crucially, activists are acting with similar historical myths to those that the state has injected into its own people. As *nationalist* groups, DSI activists enjoy possibilities to mobilize for their agenda that other civic actors probably do not have. The embryonic civil society gives DSI activists the room to operate, while historical myths offers them an arsenal that the public cares about.

This thesis tries to contribute to existing literature and illuminate important questions in a couple of ways:

First, while the DSI conflict has been analyzed in the context of Sino-Japanese relations before, there are very few authors who incorporate the role of activist groups in the conflict. Mostly, the role of governmental action and/or public opinion (like in Reilly 2014) is emphasized. Going beyond this dualistic conceptualization, new light can be shed on state-society relations with a very important dynamic that has (largely) been neglected so far. To do so, the thesis obviously has to show whether activists amplified past rounds of DSI conflict.

Second, scholars have mainly focused on a single or a limited amount of DSI conflict peaks so far. In contrast, this thesis analyzes a number of conflict rounds since the 1990s in order to show the impact of the briefly sketched aforementioned important changes on China's domestic level. China's political transformation is argued to be the key in explaining the conflict's changing nature over time.

Third, even an embryonic civil society like China seems to have more of an impact more in some cases than others. Chinese society can be stirred up when it is sensitive and responsive to a certain issue such as the DSI. The activist groups are a very good example of the evolving yet somewhat partial interplay between society (the public), social groups (like the activists) and the government in China.

Last, while activists can by no means directly influence the government, it is worthwhile to show there are indicators that Beijing increasingly has *tied hands* in the conflict – making any sort of compromise increasingly unlikely – as some authors suggest (He 2007: 16-21). It will be shown that the activists, if not directly, through stimulating the public can have an impetus this big.

Some other questions are beyond the scope of this project. Japan also has a number of activist groups that have been stimulating the dispute in the past. Also, recent political developments in Japan⁵ seem to suggest that these groups have an increasing influence on

⁵ Also see Chapter 2.1

Japanese politics. However, language barriers do not allow the author to have a deeper look into Japanese society. A comparison would also be compelling because state-society interaction mechanisms in democratic Japan might work differently. On the Chinese side, incorporating democratic Hong Kong or Taiwan would be interesting, especially as political activism concerning the DSI has its roots in these two political entities. Hong Kong and Taiwan are covered in the thesis, but the focus is still on the effects activism over there had on the PRC.

The remainder of the thesis follows alongside the aforementioned elements:

Chapter II introduces to the conflict item. Reasons for the DSI conflict between China, Japan and Taiwan (and its historical development) are identified. The relevant positions on the status of the islands are given. The conflict is also embedded into overall Sino-Japanese relations and its multiple tensions.

Chapter III takes a closer look at the triangle between government, activists and the public. The chapter begins with an introduction to Chinese Foreign Policy and its main principles. The biggest scope introduces the theoretical approach briefly mentioned above. It conceptualizes the function of historical myths, linking it to China, the government's *Patriotic Education Campaign*, and Chinese nationalism. Key historical myths that have been spread are described. Furthermore, the role of civil society in an authoritarian regime in the literature is discussed. A special emphasis is laid on cyberspace and how it empowers public opinion and facilitates activism.

Chapter IV tests various (albeit not all) conflict peaks (1990, 1996, 2004, 2012). Before doing so, the two key mainland activist groups, the *China Federation for Defending the Diaoyu Islands* (CFDD; *Zhongguo Minjian Baodiao Lianhehui* 中国民间保钓联合会) and the *Patriots Alliance Network* (PAN; *Aiguo zhe Tongmeng Wang* 爱国者同盟网) are introduced, including their online presence. The section also gives some general findings on the activists' attitudes towards the DSI and Japan, their motives and their relations towards Chinese authorities. Key questions for the empirical chapters include: What were the most important events in each relevant conflict peak? Who provoked the conflict, how did it surge, when was it de-escalated? Were activists involved at any stage in the conflict peak? Were they capable to conduct actions, or even mobilize, and if yes, how did they do so? Did they do so offline or online? Where (PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong) did activism take place? What arguments did activists use when trying to mobilize? Did historical myths play a role? How can the relationship between government and activists be described in the relevant peak? Did public protests happen? Is it possible to determine whether activists have directly or indirectly contributed to public protest? Did the

government react tolerant or repressive? Did activist actions even impact the government?

Methodically, the approach of content analysis is chosen, and the author will look at various newspapers, Chinese online forums, websites, microblogs (like Weibo) as well as draw from existing research. Two peaks before the internet age (1990, 1996) and two peaks within the internet age (2004, 2012) are chosen to be able to estimate the impact of the internet on the role of activism.

Finally, a conclusion in Chapter V wraps up the main empirical findings and again reflects them on the background of the theoretical approach, the activists' interaction with the government and the public. The aim is to show that activism has been a significant and understated reason for the remarkable *change over time* in the DSI dispute.

II. The Conflict on the Diaoyu / Senkaku Islands in Overall Sino-Japanese Relations

2.1 An Overview of Sino-Japanese Relations: Hot Economics, Cold Politics

Before turning to the DSI conflict itself, it has to be embedded into the overall development of Sino-Japanese relations. Observers have used a couple of phrases to grasp China's and Japan's relationship, amongst them "hot economics, cold politics" (Koo 2009) and "politics versus economics" (Whiting 1992). These contrasting quotes point to the booming economic bilateral relations, but also to the sometimes complicated political relations. The latter have "been cyclical, with periods of relative cordiality interspersed with episodes of contention" (Dreyer 2001: 373). In 2008, for example, two mutual visits by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chinese President Hu Jintao were declared as "ice-breaking" and called a new period of "warm spring" (Renmin Ribao 2008) – however some noted that the ice mountains in the background had still not melted (Hagström 2008), and indeed old tensions would soon surface again. Changing patterns of cooperation and conflict will be very visible in this chapter, and – as the empirical part will show – the more troublesome phases in Sino-Japanese relations are still very much relevant to the Chinese public today whenever the DSI conflict erupts again. The following sections are sorted thematically.

2.1.1 Sources of Cooperation

Diplomatic Ties and Jointly Balancing the Soviet Threat

Despite the chapter headline “cold politics” that characterizes contemporary Sino-Japanese relations, the pure fact that China and Japan established diplomatic relations in 1973 was a huge factor in enabling the “hot economics” that will be depicted in the following section. After World War II, Communist China and Japan organized themselves in different security networks, thus complicating any sort of quick rapprochement similar to Germany and France in post-war Europe. While the PRC became a close ally of the Soviet Union, Japan went under the American security umbrella – both alliances were settled in the *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance* (1950) and *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan* (1952) respectively. Ideological differences remained and Taiwan’s status posed a major conflict. Military capabilities of the other side were continuously observed and partly feared. Still, the 1960s and 70s are the historical phase with probably the least relevance to contemporary Sino-Japanese tensions and the DSI dispute, as contact was limited.

The Sino-Soviet split in 1960 and Sino-American rapprochement paved the path for what has been called the *normalization* of Sino-Japanese relations in the 1970s. The *Joint Communiqué* (1972) ended the “abnormal state of affairs” (§1; cited in MOFA 2014⁶) between the two countries, Japan recognized the PRC (and not Taiwan) as the “sole legal government of China” (§2; *ibid*), whilst China abandoned any claim for war reparations from World War II (§5; *ibid*). Diplomatic relations were established in 1973, but negotiations on the *Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People’s Republic of China* proved to be more difficult, as the PRC demanded an anti-hegemony clause directed against the Soviet Union. After initial Japanese reluctance to include such a passage, the treaty was finally concluded in 1978, and relations continued to flourish in the 1980s. Even Tian’anmen student demonstrations and the many casualties did not deteriorate the improved Sino-Japanese ties: While the Japanese government heavily condemned the PRC like its western counterparts, Japan restored normal relations (and development aid) with China much quicker. Only when the Soviet Union collapsed in the 1990s, counterbalancing was not necessary anymore, and old tensions surfaced again (see section “sources of trouble”). Still, stronger political ties between 1970 and 1990 were a huge amplifier for the remarkable growth of Sino-Japanese trade, as the next section will show.

⁶ MOFA refers to the Japanese *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* in this chapter, but is also used as an abbreviation for the equivalent Chinese ministry in the thesis.

Booming Economic Relations and Growing Interdependence

The most prominent example of cooperation in Sino-Japanese relations has to be the remarkable growth in bilateral trade since the beginning of China's opening up in 1978. After World War II, Japan quickly was interested in reviving trade relations with China, but times of "needs versus policy" (Feraru 1949) in a separated world with different blocks only made rapprochement possible decades later. However, unofficial, limited trade ties did exist before diplomatic ties were established, but they only jumped off after that.

The most crucial reason for intensified economic relations has to be China's reform and opening up (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放) policy. China's market reforms included the creation of special economic zones (SEZ) with very liberal trade policies that set high incentives for foreign companies to invest into China through Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). Low wages and low tax rates enabled foreign companies to produce goods at a globally competitive price. Japan has been at the forefront of this "run" on the Chinese market. Thus, Japanese FDIs increased sharply, amounting \$69.48 billion in a total of 42,401 ventures until 2009 (Renmin Ribao 2010)⁷, and the overall trade volume increased from \$1 billion (1972) to \$266.79 billion (2008; *ibid*). Also, Japanese development aid has significantly spurred China's modernization (especially its infrastructure), thereby also contributing to China's remarkable economic growth (Inada 2002). China's and Japan's economic interdependence has been called a major reason why political tensions have not escalated into violent conflicts (Koo 2009). Recently, however, annual bilateral trade volume has dropped by 6.5% to \$311.995 billion in 2013 (JETRO 2014)⁸ and by 3.3% to US\$333.664 billion in 2012 (JETRO 2013). Media headlines have partly related decreasing trade numbers to the DSI dispute, and China's Ministry of Commerce spokesman was quoted that "the drop in trade volume between China and Japan was mainly caused by economic factors, but also bilateral relations have casted shadows on trade relations" (World Bulletin 2014).

The quote just given illustrates that economic and political relations – despite the "hot" and "cold" labels – are not regarded as quite so distinct entities by political elites, and they can definitely be influenced vice versa. When Chinese President Hu and Japanese Premier Abe met in 2006, headline articles in *Renmin Ribao* expected that flourishing economic relations could be the basis for further political cooperation. However, economics have also proven be a reason

⁷ Renmin Ribao (人民日报) is the Chinese name for China Daily. To remain consistent throughout the thesis, the Chinese name is used for citations, even when articles in English are quoted.

⁸ The abbreviation JETRO refers to the *Japan External Trade Organization*.

for political complaint in Sino-Japanese relations: When the Chinese trade deficit with Japan was at its height at around \$6 billion in the 1980s, the CCP feared “selling out” to Japan and addressed the issue on many occasions in meetings with Japanese politicians, including popular public complaints about Japan (Dreyer 2001: 374). Also, student demonstrations in 1985 in a number of Chinese cities blamed a Japanese ‘economic invasion’ into China, an obvious reference to the military invasion some decades before (He 2007: 11). Complaints vanished when bilateral trade became more balanced and in China’s favor a couple years later. Back in the 1980s, “the Chinese government was very careful to prevent the indignation of ordinary Chinese against Japan to spin out of control” (Zhang 1998: 105). Later in this thesis it will be shown that the CCP today does not quite have this monolithic authority anymore, yet (like in the 1980s) it is still very common in present-day anti-Japanese riots to blame Japanese companies and their presence in China, ranging from boycotting Japanese goods to violent attacks on Japanese businessman and facilities in China.

2.1.2 Sources of Trouble

Period of Japanese Imperialism

In the 19th century, Qing China was impressed with Japan’s Meiji Reform and its quick rise on eye-level with the West. The positive Chinese assumptions in China were quickly overturned when Japan started its military conquests soon after. The First Sino-Japanese War (1894/95) resulted in a humiliating defeat for China, and it had to accept the *Treaty of Shimonoseki* (*maguan tiaoyue* 马关条约). They are called unequal treaties in China because its terms were largely dictated by Japan, including far-reaching territorial and trade concessions to Japan (see section 2.2). Japan’s imperialist expansion continued and hit its height in the 1930s, as it sought to create the “*Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*” to which China’s vast raw material reserves and other economic resources (like food and labor) were central. Following the Mukden Incident in 1931, Japan erected the puppet state Mandschukuo in Manchuria. The incident on the Marco Polo Bridge marked the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) that is commonly called The War of Resistance Against Japan (*Kang Ri Zhanzheng* 抗日战争) in Chinese. Japanese expectations for a quick win were soon extinguished, even more so after the US declared war on Japan in 1941. Japan was ultimately defeated in 1945.

The Japanese army committed many war crimes during its occupation of Chinese (and other East/South East Asian) territory. The official post-war body to judge on the war crimes

was the 1947 *International Military Tribunal for the Far East*, charging the defendants with crimes against peace (Class A), conventional war crimes (Class B) and crimes against humanity (Class C). War crimes are defined as “violations of the laws or customs of war“ (Tokyo Charter 1946: §5b)⁹ against combatants and non-combatants, which also includes attacks on citizens. 28 top-level Japanese military and political leaders were charged with Class A war crimes, more than 5,700 Japanese were charged with Class B and C crimes.

Amongst others, mass killings, the issue of comfort women, the so-called unit 731 and the treatment of prisoners of war are the most relevant war crimes still brought up in today’s discourse. Regarding mass killings, Rudolph Joseph Rummel has stated that three to ten million, mostly likely about six million people fell victim to Japanese democide in WW II (Rummel 1997). *Democide* refers to "the murder of any person or people by their government, including genocide, politicide and mass murder" (Rummel 1994). The term goes beyond genocide because democide includes “any murder by government” (Rummel 1998), while *genocide* “should ordinarily be understood as the government murder of people because of their indelible group membership” (ibid), e.g. in the Holocaust. Although several mass killings happened in China between 1937 and 1945, the 1937 *Nanjing Massacre* is the most symbolic one that is repeatedly brought up in contemporary discourse. Japan took almost no prisoners during its advancement into China, and many surrendering soldiers were killed. Emperor Hirohito had also released a directive on August 6, 1937 that removed the constraints of international law on the treatment of Chinese prisoners (Fujiwara 1995).

Approximately 200,000-300,000 people were killed during the six week span that the massacre took place. The German book *Die Dritte Welt im Zweiten Weltkrieg* summarizes the Japanese cruelties:

"Die marodierenden japanischen Soldaten (schnitten) Frauen die Brüste ab, nagelten Kinder an die Wände oder rösteten sie über offenem Feuer. Sie zwangen Väter, ihre eigenen Töchter zu vergewaltigen und kastrierten chinesische Männer. Sie häuteten Gefangene bei lebendigem Leib und hingen Chinesen an ihren Zungen auf" (cited in Welt Online 2012).¹⁰

It was the deliberate act of killing and its cruelty against already defeated foes that today still aggravates people. Historian Jonathan Spence, as others, also thinks "there is no obvious explanation for this grim event, nor can one be found. The Japanese soldiers, who had expected easy victory, instead had been fighting hard for months and had taken infinitely higher casualties than anticipated. They were bored, angry, frustrated, tired“ (Spence 1999: 424).

⁹ The *Tokyo Charter* is also called *International Military Tribunal for the Far East Charter*.

¹⁰ German quote not translated

There have also been a number of other war crimes such as the issue of comfort women or the Unit 731. Comfort women were recruited against their will to serve as sexual slaves to the Japanese soldiers in many East Asian countries. While it is difficult to estimate exact numbers, figures from a couple 10,000 up to 400,000 women exist (Asian Women's Fund 2007). Unit 731, also founded by Emperor Hirohito himself, carried out experiments on civilians and prisoners of war, amongst them ten thousands directly and possibly a couple hundred thousand indirectly killed (Harris 2002). Experiments on human beings included amputations and testing of biological weapons. While this is not the place to discuss Japanese war crimes in detail, the following section will depict why these war crimes are of such significant relevance to contemporary Sino-Japanese relations.

Problematic Japanese Post-War Treatment of History

Historical debt that Japan owes to East and Southeast Asian countries is one of the most commonly mentioned themes in official statements by other governments in the region. Deng Xiaoping once stated accordingly: "If we want to settle the historical account, Japan owes China the largest debt" (cited in Deng 1993: 293). Obviously, these kind of statements are most common in times of bilateral crisis, especially when Japanese "behavior" is considered inappropriate with regards to its history.

Indeed, post-war Japanese discourse on history remains a puzzling and controversial topic. Immediately following the war, left forces within Japanese society criticized militarism and the aims of the Asia Pacific War. Later, more conservative groups became increasingly influential in Japanese politics and challenged such views (Dower 1999). A movement to release B- and C-class war criminals emerged soon after US-Japanese rapprochement in the *San Francisco Peace Treaty* (1952). Soon after, the movement won over the support of the people, stressing the hardship of the families of war criminals. Step by step, a consensual view was established in Japan that just a small part of the top military leadership was responsible for the country's expansionist past. The government also stated that most Japanese (amongst those the conducted "lesser" war criminals) "are not criminals, rather, they gather great sympathy as victims of the war" (cited in Kentaro 2011). Dierkes notes that by the 1970s, "discussions about responsibility for the Asia Pacific War specifically and about Japanese history more generally have all but disappeared" (Dierkes 2010: 5). As for the PRC, history issues with Japan were also mostly shelved aside in the 1970s and early 1980s, as the priority was on reestablishing normal relations. The Chinese government's position changed from the 1990s onwards (also

see chapter 3.2.2), and a number of history-related issues (other than the DSI dispute) started to impact Sino-Japanese relations.¹¹ Issues include the aforementioned comfort women, visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine and content of Japanese school textbooks.

The Yasukuni Shrine draws criticism because it does not just enshrine fallen soldiers, but also mourns the souls of war criminals sanctioned at the Tokyo Trials. Top politicians have repeatedly paid visits to the shrine, causing trouble for Japan's foreign relations. Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone's visit in 1985 led to the first-ever anti-Japanese demonstrations in the PRC. Nakasone promised not to visit again, but other Prime Ministers have done so starting from 1996. Yasukuni visits proved especially troublesome under Prime Ministers Koizumi (2001-2006) and recently Abe (2006-7, since 2012).¹² Each time, foreign reactions were harsh as a consequence.

School textbooks have similarly arisen foreign anger, as invaded nations feel some of the acknowledged books are intended to "whitewash Japan's militaristic past" (The Washington Post 2005). A 2001 schoolbook had already omitted key details of Japanese wartime atrocities, and another book a couple years later "critics say further distorts the past and portrays imperial Japan as a liberator" (ibid). The word "invasion", for instance, had been removed in the latter book. In the end, just a tiny minority of schools chose these controversial textbooks, yet the lone fact that they were accepted by the *Ministry of Education* proved troublesome enough for Japan's bilateral relations. A Japanese student who later moved to Australia also has some interesting insights in how she perceived history lessons to be like:

"There was one page on what is known as the Mukden incident, when Japanese soldiers blew up a railway in Manchuria in China in 1931. There was one page on other events leading up to the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 - including one line, in a footnote, about the massacre that took place when Japanese forces invaded Nanjing - the Nanjing Massacre, or Rape of Nanjing. There was another sentence on the Koreans and the Chinese who were brought to Japan as miners during the war, and one line, again in a footnote, on "comfort women" - a prostitution corps created by the Imperial Army of Japan. There was also just one sentence on the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki" (BBC 2013).

Also, after the student went to Australia, she felt "excitement when I noticed that instead of ploughing chronologically through a given period, classes would focus on a handful of crucial events in world history" (ibid). Also, compared to Japan, she points to the fact that in China – instead of one sentence – topics such as the Nanjing Massacre are studied in detail (ibid; also see chapter 3.2.2). The student also states that she can understand Chinese anger over certain Japanese intellectuals who deny war crimes altogether, even if she feels that China might

¹¹ Japan's other foreign relations, e.g. with South Korea, experienced a similar development with many common issues to Sino-Japanese relations.

¹² While Abe did not visit the shrine in his first term, he did on several occasions during his second term.

sometimes also be “overly anti-Japanese” (ibid).

Most of these history-related issues are connected with the accusation that political and academic elites in particular would deny war responsibility, while the government was still owing East Asian countries a formal apology. Emperor Hirohito visited China in 1992, and while the PRC was hoping for a formal apology, “his statement of regret was less abject than the Chinese government had hoped, although much more than the Japanese right wing was comfortable with” (Dreyer 2001: 376). Still, other leading intellectuals proposed a completely distinct view on history, best exemplified by the 2007 movie “*The Truth about Nanjing*”. Intended to encounter a Western documentary on the Nanjing Massacre, this movie hopes to correct all existing ‘propaganda’ that film makers believe to have identified, also proclaiming that Japanese soldiers who were sanctioned as war criminals were martyrs in reality. The film also declares most of Chinese historiography on the Nanjing Massacre as myths¹³, and consequently denies Japanese war guilt, too. The movie was backed by about 40 publicly well-known Japanese (The Japan Times 2007), including diet members and university professors. Amongst them, former Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara (who is also a prominent figure in the 2012 DSI dispute, see chapter 4.8) and history professor Nobukatsu Fujioka stand out. Fujioka had founded the *Liberal View of History Study Group* in the 1990s, a group that aimed at “correcting history” by spreading a “positive view” of Japanese history, removing references to its “dark history”. Fujioka is known for calling many Japanese war crimes a myth (BBC 2013).

The Japanese public since the 1990s also has reacted rather reluctant to foreign demands to show more acknowledgement of war crimes:

“Some Japanese, to be sure, felt extreme regret. A larger number of others felt that they had been victimized by the same militarists who had acted so cruelly toward China, and that they, too, had suffered in the war. The experience had been bad for everyone; it was time to move on. The generation born after the end of the war, by now the majority of the population, felt no responsibility for acts committed by their ancestors. Many people sincerely could not imagine Japanese troops behaving so badly, and steadfastly refused to believe that they had. A small but vocal group of older patriots insisted that many of the more heinous events, even those well-documented by eyewitnesses who filmed them, had never happened. Despite the gradations of sentiment described above, however, a consensus formed that the PRC was using the war issue as a tool to extract concessions on other, unrelated, matters” (Dreyer 2001: 376).

Many observers also point to the fact that acknowledging war crimes would mean a loss of face for Japan as a whole nation – a fate any individual would try everything he could to avoid in East Asian culture. Nevertheless, it is a combination of hesitant history awareness and a number of political provocations (e.g. when visiting the Yasukuni Shrine) that continue to make history

¹³ On the concept of historical myths, see chapter 3.2.

one of the most important variables even in 21st century East Asian politics (Johnston 2012). Although Japan has been a peaceful country for decades, many of its more controversial present actions still get associated with renewed Japanese imperialism by its neighbors – no matter whether such an accusation simply serves political purposes or is truly grounded in an honest perception of strain and uneasiness.

Comparisons between history treatment in Germany and Japan are frequent: Germany has a strong focus on *Geschichtsaufarbeitung*, with a focus on making sure school children learn about the cruelties of the Nazi regime so that this might never happen again. This is quite different from Japan. Also, in early 2014, when Sino-Japanese relations were tense once again, Chinese newspapers postulated Japan to follow the footsteps of Western Germany, explicitly citing Chancellor Willy Brandt's 1970 *Warschauer Kniefall* which was then considered a thorough apology for Germany's past war crimes to Poland (Renmin Ribao 2014).

Some of the actions by Japanese politicians, especially LDP members, have to be viewed in more general political trend to the right in Japan, though. As Nakano argues:

“Abe may or may not push Japan further to the right during his remaining months in office, but it is important to understand that the rightward shift did not start with him, and will most likely not end with him either” (Nakano 2014).

In this sense, visiting the Yasukuni Shrine may not just be a sign of a revisionist understanding of history¹⁴, it may also be directed at fostering certain conservative segments within Japanese society and political parties. The conservative LDP recently also saw the formation of the new right-wing *Sunrise Party* (The Japan Times 2014. The Sunrise Party later became the *Japan Restoration Party* which recently (in autumn 2014) together with the *Unity Party* founded the *Japan Innovation Party*. Therefore, the long-term dominating Liberal Democratic Party probably more than ever feels like it needs to foster cohesion amongst its conservative voters.

Geopolitical Rivalry and a Range of Related Disputes

Not all political struggles between Japan and China are related to history: Despite being partly intertwined like in the DSI case, one can often (and certainly in this case) identify multiple causes for conflict. Another frequently brought up argument in the DSI dispute is geopolitical rivalry on leadership in East Asia between China and Japan, as well as the two countries' strive for best access to natural resources. These arguments will now be briefly discussed.

¹⁴ Still, many politicians who went to the shrine have opposed condemnation of Japan's wartime past.

Ever since Bernstein and Munro released *The Coming Conflict with China* (Bernstein / Munro 1997), the image of a “China threat” to the world as a result of its ascending power has been a constant fixture of debate.¹⁵ The China threat image has both a military dimension (primarily raised by the US) as well as an economic dimension (raised by the US, the European Union and others; Lai 2012) – pointing at topics such as China’s growing annual spending on its military, and multiple trade conflicts in both bilateral relations as well as in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Lately, Chinese foreign policy has also been portrayed as more aggressive and less willing to compromise (“*China’s New Assertiveness*”, also see chapter 3.1), especially in its territorial conflicts. As for East Asia, China’s rise on eye-level with Japan has repeatedly been expected to cause a struggle for leadership in the region, with the DSI case seen as a prominent example of this development (Baker 2012). Beijing, on the other hand, is worried about the US renewed focus on the Asia-Pacific region which includes reshuffling military capacities there. The PRC also fears “a resurgent Japan could assist the United States (US) on constraining China in an echo of the Cold War containment strategy” (ibid). China itself at least rhetorically continues to claim that its political rise should be peaceful. Media reports have also linked China and Japan’s leadership struggle to their individual attempts to foster good bilateral relations with the *Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (ASEAN), China’s recent media offensive against Japan (The Diplomat 2014b), and even in their Africa politics (The Diplomat 2014c), although both governments have denied a connection to the DSI dispute in the latter case.

China and Japan heavily compete for access to natural resources on the world market, thereby resembling how much they have risen on eye-level with each other. Given that big economies also are among the world’s biggest energy consumers, Chinese-Japanese competition is hardly surprising (Schiffer 2014). In the Japanese case, energy consumption outweighs production by five to one; and China alone has contributed about 40 percent to the rise in worldwide oil demand since 2000 (ibid). Oil, coal and natural gas – so-called fossil energy sources – are of most interest. Both China and Japan are net importers and consume far more resources than they can produce themselves. Natural resources are also entwined into the DSI case itself. The islands are expected to post one of the world’s largest untapped oil reserves that lie deep within the seabed surrounding the area (United Nations 1970). Also, the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS) assigns property rights up to two hundred

¹⁵ In Japan, articles in similar tone appeared even sooner, with Guo (2011: 81) citing a 1990 article entitled “论中国这个潜在的威胁” (*A Discussion on China’s Potential Threat*).

nautical miles around an island's seabed if it considered a fully-fledged island (United Nations 1982). Thus, territorial sovereignty over the islands equals controlling exploitation of the natural resources in the area. Given that sovereignty is contested, any attempts for joint exploitation have failed and cooperation has remained largely absent.¹⁶ Schiffer summarizes in a rather pessimistic tone that is typical of most contemporary post-2010 articles concerning Sino-Japanese relations: “The failure to create legitimate and equitable structures to mediate disputes, ameliorate divergences, and take into account legitimate interests could well lead to a destabilizing security dilemma for the region“ (Schiffer 2014).

2.2 A Brief History of the Diaoyu / Senkaku Islands Conflict and its Political Status

The DSI area consists of five inhabited islands and three barren rocks. Geographically, the islands are 120 nautical miles northeast of Taiwan, 200 miles east of the Chinese mainland, and 200 nautical miles southwest of the Japanese island Okinawa (cp. image 1).

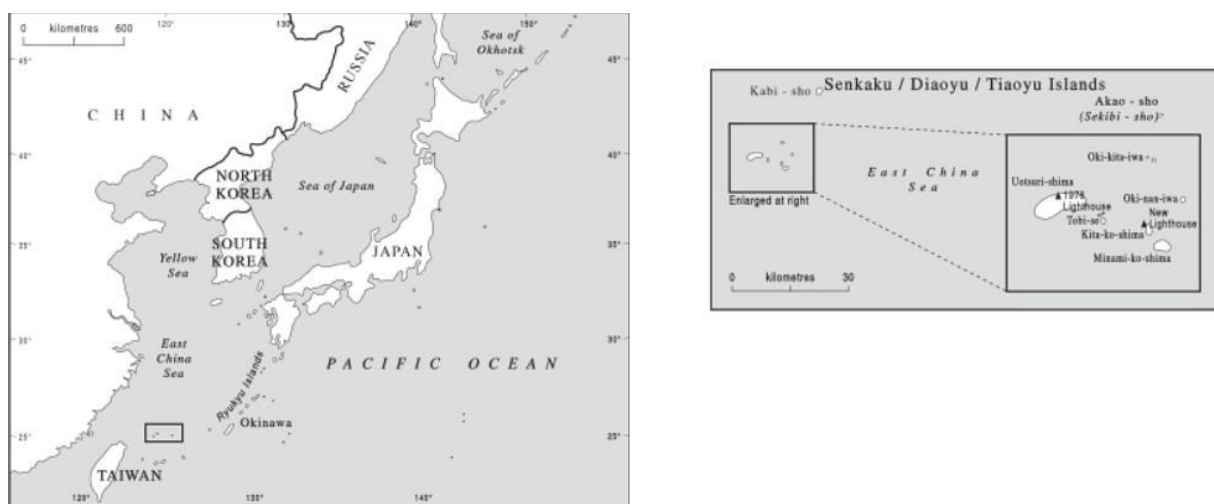


Image 1: Map of the Diaoyu / Senkaku Islands, and Location in East Asia (from Lee 2002: 3)

While this section introduces the DSI's political status with its many changes throughout recent history, the following section will then address contemporary Chinese (mainland and Taiwan) and Japanese positions why they believe the islands belong to their respective territory, thereby pointing to geographical, historical and juridical arguments.

The political status of the DSI today is highly contested, but it has been neglected to irrelevance for centuries. As Harry notes, the archipel was often “lumped together with other larger sets of islands, such as the Ryukyu Islands or Taiwan more generally“ (Harry 2013: 657).

¹⁶ There have been multiple attempts (1990, 2006, 2010) to launch a round of negotiations for joint exploration between China and Japan. A preliminary agreement in 2008 never manifested into concrete action though.

The islands never posted a colonial status for China, Japan or any other major power either. While China claims to have evidence the DSI were Chinese (see chapter 2.3), no flag or other symbolic marker were left behind before the end of the 19th century. At that time, Japan began its imperial ambitions, and quickly seized control over the DSI. A marker was erected on the islands, and a secret 1895 cabinet decision officially incorporated the territory into the Okinawa Prefecture (cited in Lee 2002: 4). After the First Sino-Japanese War (1894/95), Japan was able to dictate its terms on the Chinese side in the *Treaty of Shimonoseki*. The treaty included opening up trade ports to Japan, setting a Chinese high war indemnity to Japan, and – most importantly – granting Japan the territory and full sovereignty of the Penghu group, Taiwan, the eastern portion of the bay of Liaodong Peninsula (today’s southern Liaoning Province in the PRC) “together with all fortifications, arsenals and public property” (Treaty of Shimonoseki 1895: §3). Interpretation of the treaty’s §3 is virulently disputed and extremely relevant in the present DSI conflict, as the following chapters will show. Japan also had a fish processing plant on the islands until about 1940, but the islands have been deserted ever since (The Japan Times 2010).

Taiwan (that had also fallen under Japanese administration) was returned to China after Japan’s loss in World War II. The 1943 *Cairo Declaration* had laid out that “all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese (...) shall be restored to the Republic of China” (Cairo Declaration 1943), with the *Potsdam Proclamation* (1945) carrying out this decision. As for the DSI though, the US took over administration, although the *San Francisco Peace Treaty* (1952) between the US and Japan had not specifically mentioned the DSI (unlike other territories in the area). The aforementioned treaty included the expression “Nansei Shoto”, and both sides held the view that this term also includes the DSI (Lee 2002: 5, Harry 2013: 659). In 1971, the US Senate ratified the *Okinawa Reversion Treaty* that returned administrative control to Japan the following year. The DSI return itself was negotiated as a part of the US handing over administration rights of the Ryukyu Islands to Japan. As the DSI were neither specifically mentioned in the *Treaty of Shimonoseki*, nor in the *Cairo Declaration* and the *Okinawa Reversion Treaty*, one can easily identify that the DSI for over eighty years were not a significant negotiation issue between all of the participating parties. Thus, it can only be said for post-1970 that the DSI became a true issue between China and Japan (see following chapter).

Both PRC and ROC regard the DSI as part of Toucheng in Yilan County, Taiwan. However, the political status of the DSI itself – who are de facto effectively controlled by Japan ever since the US handover – has not changed since then. Ownership of the islands recently did

undergo significant change: After the islands had remained on private leasing contracts for decades, the Japanese government in 2012 decided to buy the DSI territory for ¥2.05 billion, also due to pressure by pro-nationalist Tokyo governor Ishihara who wanted to buy the DSI himself. The Chinese government vehemently criticized Japan for this move, and the purchase led to one of the most intense conflict peaks in the DSI so far (analyzed in chapter 4.8). Even before nationalization, ever since 1972, the DSI were not allowed to be developed by the responsible Ishigaki City authorities, reflecting a rather cautious attitude by the government.¹⁷

Chinese and Japanese Activists, the main group researched in this thesis, only became important around the 1970s when the US started to prepare the DSI return to Japan. Chinese activist groups evolved over time and changed quite dramatically, and later on their actions also reached Chinese society (for an introduction to the groups, see chapter 4.2; for the analysis of the incidents, see chapter 4).

2.3 Chinese and Japanese Positions on Territorial Sovereignty over the Diaoyu / Senkaku Islands

All three claimants involved (the PRC, the ROC and Japan) heavily disagree on the rightful ownership of the DSI. As one observer notes, the main source for most of the disagreement by each side ironically lies in the islands “general political irrelevance for many centuries” (Harry 2013: 657). This is especially true because all relevant documents lack the specific term “Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands”. Thus, different opinions on the wording in the *Treaty of Shimonoseki*, the *Cairo Declaration*, the *Potsdam Proclamation* and the *San Francisco Peace Treaty* became a valuable source of argumentation for all relevant parties. Additionally, more historical, legal and geographical evidence brought up by the three sides seek to support their relevant positions (Denk 2005: 97f.). This thesis does not aim to judge on the level of truth behind those arguments. It is more important to portray the main lines of argumentation, because they provide significant arsenal for governments and activist groups to mobilize for their purposes.¹⁸ Just like with the Japanese war atrocities (chapter 2.2), these arguments provide a huge chance for governments and activists to exploit historical myths (introduced in chapter 3.2).

¹⁷ A *Japan Times* article (2012) illustrates these strict control mechanisms. The central government keeps prohibiting anyone, including the Ishigaki City mayor, to step a foot on the islands. The article speculates this ban is in place precisely to avoid provoking neighboring countries.

¹⁸ This is not only true for Chinese activist groups, of course. As the focus is on their work specifically though, the rest of the section refers to them.

2.3.1 Chinese (Mainland and Taiwan) Position on the Diaoyu / Senkaku Islands

Contemporary Communist China and Taiwan's position on the DSI are influenced by a number of factors, and both sides also use "evidence" from Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Republican China (1911-1949) and Japanese sources. Communist China and Taiwan, despite some similarities in their arguments, still independently claim for sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands, and there are some differences to be noted. Both sides of the Taiwan Strait truly started formulating their claims post-1970, when the DSI were about to be returned to Japan. Some of the inconsistencies in pre-1970 PRC statements on the status of the DSI often become exploited by Japanese argumentation (see following section).

To the PRC, the DSI represent what is called "inherent territory" (固有领土 *guyou lingtu*) – an undeniable and integral part that has always belonged to China and therefore is not a subject of discussion. The term cited above is regularly mentioned by political representatives and also part of almost any academic Chinese source on the topic (e.g. in Zhang 2013, Guo 2011, Dong 2004). A 2012 governmental white paper headline also uses exact term.¹⁹ While most articles do not specify what is precisely meant by "inherent territory", it seems to recur on ancient evidence from the pre-modern imperial times. Apparently the DSI were known to China since 1372, have been called Chinese territory since 1534, and later were controlled by the Qing Court (Lee 2002: 10). Supporting material was usually brought up post-1970, and it contains maps, travel diaries or imperial edicts.²⁰

Geographical reasons are also repeatedly brought up by the PRC and the ROC to support their territorial claims. Most controversial is the *Treaty of Shimonoseki's* notion of the "islands appertaining and belonging to the Islands of Formosa" (Treaty of Shimonoseki 1895: §3). Geographically, the DSI are closer to Formosa/Taiwan (92 nautical miles) than the Okinawa Islands (145 nautical miles). Also, the PRC claims the islands are located on the continental shelf of China and not on the continental shelf of the Okinawa Islands by the 2000 meters deep Okinawa Through (Renmin Ribao 2003, Denk 2005: 100). Japan refuses this kind of interpretation.

On the legal side, the aforementioned paragraph 3 of the *Treaty of Shimonoseki* is the most striking difference to the Chinese pre- and post-1970 position concerning the DSI. No official complaint by either the PRC or Taiwan before 1970 about the paragraph is known,

¹⁹ As stated on the website of the Chinese State Council Information Office <http://www.cfr.org/china/official-chinese-position-diaoyu-dao-senkaku-islands/p29129> (tracked: October 19, 2014).

²⁰ Two examples is an 18th century map, or Empress Dowager Cixi who in 1893 granted the right to collect herbs on the DSI territory (Harry 2013: 658).

while it is a feature of constant criticism ever since. Japan denies any connection between the seizure of the DSI and the *First Sino-Japanese War* (which ended the same year). On the contrary, the PRC and the ROC consider both events as part of *one* single imperialistic movement of Japan, with Japan trying to expand its territory and access to resources at the end of the 19th century. Thus, China relates seizure of the DSI to the *Treaty of Shimonoseki*, a document that is highly symbolic for the unequal treaties China suffered at the hands of many great powers at the time being, usually at Chinese disadvantage.²¹

The Chinese legal argument is completed by referring to the *Potsdam Declaration*, where it is stated that “Japanese sovereignty shall be limited to Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, Shikoku and such minor islands as we determine” (Potsdam Declaration 1945: §8). Both PRC and ROC consider themselves as part of the victors that is referred to by “we”, and both sides (ironically only 25 years later, though) exclude the DSI from the passage “such minor islands”. Just like with the *Treaty of Shimonoseki*, Japan has a different opinion on the matter (see next section). Furthermore, both the PRC and the ROC refer to their respective formal protest note when the US announced to transfer control to Japanese authorities in 1971 (Renmin Ribao 1971). Also, they argue that ceding administrative control is not equal to accepting sovereignty claims – a view that is consistent with the position of the US, too (Manyin 2012). Furthermore, the PRC in 1992 passed a law that allows the right to “adopt all necessary measures to stop the harmful passage of vessels through its territorial waters” (cited in Dreyer 2001: 375f.).²²

Most of these arguments were formulated and clearly expressed in a 2003 *People's Daily* (chin: *Renmin Ribao*) article entitled *China's Diaoyu Islands Sovereignty Is Undeniable*, the mouthpiece of the ruling Communist Party (Renmin Ribao 2003). The article also states:

“No matter what they are named, the Diaoyu Islands, as the Chinese refer to them, or the Senkaku islands, according to Japan, one thing is clear: China has indubitable sovereignty over them. However, turning a blind eye to this indisputable fact, Japan stubbornly persists with its sovereignty claim. According to Japanese media, showing their "determination" to safeguard their claimed sovereignty, seven members of a right-wing group left Tokyo under the cover of darkness last Wednesday and attempted to land on the Diaoyu Islands. They were foiled due to bad weather. This is just one of a string of activities by right-wing groups over the past decades, which have aroused strong protests from China.” (ibid)

As for Taiwan, it similarly argues that the DSI are an integral part of Chinese territory. Despite formal protest against the US return of the islands to Japan in the 1970s, Taiwanese students

²¹ This Chinese perception of Japan has especially been emphasized since historical myths have undergone change. It includes a *victimization* image, terms such as the *hundred years of national shame* (see chapter 3.2).

²² The law is entitled *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone* (中华人民共和国领域及毗连区法; Guo 2011).

were not satisfied with their government, as authorities quickly started joint resource development talks with Japan without clearing the sovereignty status (Chung 2007: 52). Later in the 20th century, the Taiwanese government was much quicker to condemn Japanese action on many of the earlier DSI dispute flare-ups (see chapter IV). For the latest conflict peaks, however, the conflict has been mainly perceived as a PRC-Japanese conflict, resembling the fact that the PRC is the one diplomatically recognized China, while also reflecting the much-increased importance of PRC-Japan relations in East Asia, and China's much-grown importance in the world.

2.3.2 Japanese Position on the Diaoyu / Senkaku Islands

In order to contrast the Chinese and Japanese positions on the DSI sovereignty question, this section is best read in correspondence to the previous one, as it also goes through the relevant treaties, and points out additional arguments that the Japanese side has brought up to support its territorial claims. At the end of the section, the position of the US in the conflict is mentioned as well.

The Japanese *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (MOFA) website offers a detailed *Questions & Answers* section on the most commonly brought up issues in the DSI sovereignty dispute, concluding there that “there exists no issue of territorial sovereignty to be resolved” (MOFA 2014b). The Japanese government insists that they considered the DSI to be *terra nullius* at discovery in 1885, meaning that the Islands were uninhabited territory that had not seen any visible marks of Chinese presence and authority (ibid). The MOFA further states that “under international law (...) the discovery of an island or geographical proximity alone does not evidence the assertion of territorial sovereignty” (ibid). Japan also regards the aforementioned Chinese maps and other sources as insufficient for their territorial claims (ibid). With regards to the *Treaty of Shimonoseki*, Japan argues that the treaty and seizure of the DSI are *not* related to each other, as control over the DSI was executed before the treaty was even concluded (Chung 2007: 53).

Also, while China seems to include the DSI as part of their claim to Taiwanese territory, Japan always denies such a connection. The *Treaty of Shimonoseki* (1895) and the *San Francisco Peace Treaty* (1952) do mention Taiwan, but to Japan, the DSI are not part of the treaties at all: “There is no evidence that shows that the Allied powers, including the Republic of China, recognized that the Senkaku Islands were included among ‘the islands appertaining to Formosa (Taiwan)’” (MOFA 2014b), and no known objections to this view were made at the

conclusion of the peace treaty. Therefore, the MOFA also stresses that “Japan's acquisition of sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands has nothing to do with World War II.” (ibid).²³ Furthermore, a 1953 *Renmin Ribao* 1953 article entitled “*Battle of People in Ryukyu Islands against U.S. Occupation*” officially regarded the DSI as part of the Ryukyu Islands, and not as part of Taiwan (Renmin Ribao 1953). Thus, Japan argues that both the PRC and the ROC had no objection to Japanese sovereignty.

Furthermore, Japan also stresses US American statements on the DSI that would support its claim:

“As is clearly expressed in a statement issued by Secretary of State Dulles at the San Francisco Peace Conference and in the Joint Communique of Japanese Prime Minister Kishi and U.S. President Eisenhower issued on Jun 21, 1957, the U.S. Government did recognize Japan’s “residual sovereignty” over the Nansei Shoto Islands” (MOFA 2014b).

As stated, Nansei Shoto is a term that includes the DSI. Still, the US has taken a more neutral approach on the matter than the quote above would suggest. In 1969, negotiations between the US and Japan settled the transfer of authority by 1972. While various presidents (Kennedy, Nixon) previously confirmed Japan’s “residual sovereignty”, the *Okinawa Reversion Treaty* (1972) proposed to the Senate for ratification did not contain such a notion on the DSI:

“The United States believes that a return of administrative rights over those islands to Japan, from which the rights were received, can in no way prejudice any underlying claims. The United States cannot add to the legal rights Japan possessed before it transferred administration of the islands to us, nor can the United States, by giving back what it received, diminish the rights of other claimants... The United States has made no claim to the Senkaku Islands and considers that any conflicting claims to the islands are a matter for resolution by the parties concerned” (cited in Manyin 2012: 5).

While the US administration today still upholds its rather neutral view, strong criticism against Chinese claims have been formulated on a Japanese state visit by President Obama in 2014:

“Our commitment to Japan’s security is absolute and article five [of the security treaty] covers all territories under Japan’s administration, including the Senkaku islands”, Obama said during a joint press conference with Abe. “We don’t take a position on final sovereignty on the Senkakus but historically they’ve been administered by Japan and should not be subject to change unilaterally” (The Guardian 2014).

US-Japanese security ties have been close after World War II, and reaffirming the inclusion of the DSI in the security ties were interpreted as a strong sign and warning to unilateral Chinese assertive action.

While Taiwan also continued to heavily criticize Japan’s DSI policy from the 1970s to

²³ To China, however, the DSI are of symbolic meaning. In this reading, despite the fact the islands were incorporated into Japanese territory long before World War II, they still represent imperial Japan illegally occupying Chinese territory, like they did much later in Manchuria in the 1930s and 1940s (see chapter 3.2).

1990s, recent negotiations have resulted in a 2014 agreement that settles fishing rights for both sides (Asahi Shimbun 2014).

In a nutshell, it is very hard to determine the rightfulness of sovereignty claims by the relevant parties, and the thesis does not aim to do so. Notably, each side never gets tired to affirm their claims by referring to “international law”. Still, experts in the field do not take such a clear stance: As Harry notes, there is “notable absence of litigation between great powers” (Harry 2013: 656) on territorial conflicts, as most in the past were settled by military means. The DSI irrelevance for centuries further complicates claims, because they are not specifically mentioned in most of the treaties each side uses for their own argumentation. Therefore, handling of the conflict requires sensitive political instincts by all parties, especially since domestic factors (such as activism investigated in this thesis) further complicate the DSI dispute.

III. The Government, the Activists, the Public, and the “History Card”: The Domestic Complexity of China’s Territorial Conflict with Japan

This chapter lays out the theoretical concept for the following empirical analysis. It is argued that the change over time in the DSI conflict is heavily influenced by profound domestic change in China. Nowadays, the public’s level of involvement and participation has increased, demonstrated especially in the form of anti-Japanese protest as a reaction to different rounds of bilateral crisis. As “little evidence to date proves that it is officially orchestrated” (He 2007: 1), an alternative explanation for the protests is sought here. The role of nationalist activists groups and individual online netizens are emphasized in the thesis, as their scope to operate and their mobilization capacities have increased. Besides a much more open society that gives social spaces to activists, they are able to mobilize because of fundamental changes in governmental post-1990 history politics and their effects on the public towards Japan.

Thus, the chapter takes a look at each part of the triangle between the government (chapter 2.1), the activists (as a part of civil society; chapter 2.3) and the general public (chapter 2.4).²⁴ Each of the three sides of the triangle is illuminated theoretically. As for the

²⁴ The most important activist groups are introduced in the empirical part, the role of activism in general is discussed in this chapter as a part of civil society action. In sum, this section theorizes on the relevant actors that are empirically investigated in chapter IV.

governmental history politics, it is argued that through actively shaping historical myths, an often underestimated impact on society is created. After Tian'anmen demonstrations in 1989, the CCP indeed reshaped historical narratives. The conflict is also embedded into general trends of Chinese foreign policy (chapter 2.1, 2.2).

Altered myths later proved to be a fertile ground for the activists' efforts. As for the activists, the limited but ever-expanding role of civil society in Chinese politics today is discussed (chapter 2.3). Sensitive topics (such as "national unity") have the potential to become high-stake at certain times, and can expect to draw strong reactions from the Chinese public, and cyber/online activities are a useful tool for activists to mobilize. Thus, civil society and the role of the internet are covered in this section. As for the general public, the role of public opinion in authoritarian regimes is depicted, and an overview on Chinese opinion polls about Japan over time is presented (chapter 2.4). China's public opinion has been deeply affected by the governmentally reconstructed historical myths, making the public very receptive to strong emotional language and statements that activists like to operate with. Furthermore, theoretical thoughts on patterns of public protest and demonstrations are also introduced.

Taken together, it is argued that changes in historical myths and a bigger scope for activism in China's expanding civil society can explain why the nature of the DSI conflict has changed so much over the last decades. Consequently, the chosen conflict peaks in chapter IV go along with these domestic changes over time. As for the future, the governments seems to have "tied hands", facing domestic pressure that makes compromise over the Islands sovereignty with Japan pretty unlikely, especially as nationalistic groups (albeit differently) also operate in Japan and pressure the government there.²⁵

3.1 The Government: Chinese Foreign Policy and its Offshore Island Conflicts

While the focus of the thesis is on the domestic level and its various interactions, this domestic interaction is in essence caused by bilateral tensions between China and Japan. Therefore, the conflict not only has to be embedded into Sino-Japanese Relations as a whole (previous chapter), but is also put into the context of general trends in Chinese foreign policy. A focus on traditional principles of Chinese foreign policy and the more recent *China New Assertiveness* debate both have its link to territorial conflicts. Lastly, the inclusion of new actors into Chinese Foreign

²⁵ Due to a lack of language skills and space, domestic Japanese nationalist activism cannot be covered in detail in this thesis. However, Japanese activists are part of the empirical analysis in chapter IV. Also, a similar conflict over the Dokdo Islands between South Korea and Japan has emerged over the decades and cannot be covered here (for a look into South Korean activists, refer to Choi 2005)

Policy is among the most profound changes in the nearer past – a necessary condition for the impact of political activism investigated in this thesis.

Evolution of Chinese Foreign Policy

China's increasing importance over the last decades has led to an intensive debate focusing on the kind of role that China will play in the world. The aforementioned country's anticipated 'peaceful rise' (和平崛起 *heping jueqi*) as a response to critical Western books such as *The Coming Conflict with China* (Bernstein/Munro 1997) that warned of the "China threat" is just a part of this discussion. These debates emerged in the post-cold war world that before had been dominated by geopolitics and (changing) strategic alliances. Discussions also sparked because hegemonic stability theory predicts that the rise of a new superpower (which China is expected to become) has often not only led to drastic changes of the world order, but even to war.²⁶ So far, however, China has integrated itself into the existing world order, becoming a member of important international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO; on a global level), and ASEAN plus three (on the regional level). At the same time, China has also been actively formulating its interests with other developing states in summits and forums like BRICS (standing for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

When identifying more general principles of Chinese foreign policy, it is worth to take a look at the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* that were first codified in a bilateral agreement between the PRC and India in 1954. The principles stand for:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty;
2. Mutual non-aggression;
3. Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs;
4. Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit;
5. Peaceful co-existence (United Nations 1958: 79).

Very much to the present, the principle of non-interference has proven to be most influential (Noesselt/Hieber 2013: 4). From the Chinese perspective, conflicts such as Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan are domestic in nature, and are not subject to any criticism and interference from abroad. Obviously, mutuality, as in the first principle, is easier outspoken than realized. China has fought wars over sovereignty disputes in the past (for example with India in 1962), and the DSI

²⁶ Important scholars of Hegemonic Stability Theory include Charles Kindleberger, Robert Gilpin, Robert Keohane, and others.

conflict in this thesis is just one example of many border disputes where China and a second country were not able (or not willing) to follow on the principles. Developing a joint understanding of sovereignty is a tough ask. As for the future, China seems not likely to compromise much on its core interests, while the world is expecting China to carry over more responsibility at the same time. The country will have to take clear positions in its foreign policy (ibid: 3).

Newer Debates: Whither China's New Assertiveness in Territorial Disputes

It is often stated that China's foreign policy has become more predictable and reliable after 1990 (e.g. Lai 2010). China's New Security Concept (1997) also reaffirmed the principles of peaceful co-existence, non-interference in foreign events, mutual development of economic relations and trust-building with foreign nations (Kang 2013: 170). However, as conflicts have been intensifying, newer debates focus on the discussion whether China's increased power position is leading to a more assertive behavior in its foreign relations. To China's credit, it is not the only country with territorial conflicts in the area, as Koo states:

“Thirty-five territorial dyads in the region [are] contiguous on land or within 400 nautical miles (nm) – the sum of two hypothetical countries' 200 nm exclusive economic zones (EEZs) – of water between their undisputed land territories. Most of these dyads have outstanding territorial disagreements with each other: China–Taiwan, China–Japan, China–Vietnam, China–Philippines, North Korea–South Korea, South Korea–Japan, Japan–Russia, Philippines–Taiwan, Thailand–Myanmar, Thailand–Cambodia, and Cambodia–Vietnam, among others.” (Koo 2009: 207)

With the US having renewed military alliances in the region in recent years, and its “pivot to Asia” discussions in the media, Chinese perception of a new containment strategy against the country has also been surging (Noesselt/Hieber 2013: 4).²⁷

Some western perceptions of China's foreign policy in the *New Assertiveness* arguments are indeed related to China's behavior in territorial conflicts with neighboring countries in East and Southeast Asia. The assertiveness argument is especially popular among US media and scholarly work (Johnston 2013: 7). The term emerged around 2009/2010 when Chinese foreign policy seemingly took a hard stance in a number of issues, including the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change and criticism to the US arms sale to Taiwan, amongst others (ibid: 9). Johnston criticizes a lack of clear definition and causal mechanisms that would characterize Chinese assertiveness, a term that is not at the core of any International Relations theory. He proposes himself the term seems to imply “a form of assertive diplomacy that

²⁷ The containment argument can be frequently found in both media as well as academic work in China. However, even if it was perceived this way by China, to my knowledge, it is very hard to find an evidence in official US documents such as White Papers etc. defining Chinese containment as a policy goal.

explicitly threatens to impose costs on another actor that are clearly higher than before” (ibid: 10), therefore using a “if you do A, we will make you feel for it with B”-logic.

How much empirical substance is behind the “New Assertiveness paradigm”? Johnston states that the “new assertiveness meme underestimates the degree of assertiveness in certain policies in the past, and overestimates the amount of change in China’s diplomacy in 2010” (Johnston 2013: 7). Diplomatic outbursts and strong reactions *have* certainly happened before, like when the US bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade (1999) or when Beijing carried out massive military exercises directed against Taiwan (1995/96). The latter case (sovereignty over Taiwan) is one of China’s core national interests, therefore showing assertiveness is probably not surprising. Johnston also goes on to criticize that most of the cited “assertive diplomacy” evidence turns out far less convincing if analyzed more thoroughly (ibid: 14-45).

With regard to China’s maritime and offshore islands disputes, the picture is a little more blurred. On the one hand, China has always emphasized its sovereignty claim over the DSI in the East China Sea as well as over disputed islands in the South China Sea, long before the New Assertiveness debate came up. As for the South China Sea, it has been common for Chinese foreign policy to support negotiations over the status of the islands. However, the PRC has evidently carried out more offshore military and paramilitary maneuvers in the South China Sea in recent years (ibid: 19). In May 2014, the erection of a Chinese oil platform in close distance to the Vietnamese mainland raised international attention once more. Similarly, in the DSI dispute, Beijing declared the creation of the Air Identification Zone in 2013. Both cases would suggest unilateral action from the Chinese side that support the New Assertiveness thesis. Johnston agrees that these two disputes might be the only case where the New Assertiveness argument has some empirical backing (ibid: 19).

One has to be careful to judge too quickly though: It is not just the PRC that had intensified its territorial claims, in contrast the other involved parties had also taken steps that led to complicating the disputes: As for the South China Sea, Fravel notes that other countries sought to strengthen their legal claim to the islands, departing from the previous negotiation approach (Fravel 2011). China’s *assertiveness* could therefore also be interpreted as reactive to more assertive action from other claimants. In the DSI case, the Japanese government had nationalized ownership of the DSI in 2012 and had long established its own EEZ over the disputed area, so that the ‘assertive’ Chinese creation of a similar Air Identification Zone could also be seen as a response to more assertiveness from Japan. While this thesis does not aim to compare both offshore islands cases (and also focuses on Chinese domestic politics for the DSI),

it is interesting to note that the more recent DSI outbursts in 2012 and 2013 both resulted from state action by Japan (in 2012) and the PRC (in 2013). The DSI conflict (just like the South China Sea conflicts) has certainly risen on the agenda of both governments. Throughout the thesis (chapter 3, 4 in conjuncture), it will be shown that profound domestic reasons are a core reason for the elevation of importance of the DSI conflict. Still, Johnston's position is correct that unilateral assertiveness arguments often simplify and overstate – especially in media reports that sometimes tend to accuse China too quickly. The overstatement will become visible by taking a closer look at *when* China sharpens its rhetoric towards foreign policy issues – in the DSI case, this often happens as a result to domestic pressure or outside provocations, and statements are often cooled down when the regime seeks to de-escalate.

While the scientific substance of the “New Assertiveness” claims are probably limited, its real-world influence cannot be denied. When paradigms gain profound importance in domestic political discourse, it is sometimes not so important whether they are grounded on actual facts. Indeed, both the “containment” perception in China and the “assertiveness” perception in the US are popular notions, and they might lead to narrow-minded analysis of political actions by the other side. Actors might possibly even draw false and dangerous conclusions as a result.

New Actors in Chinese Foreign Policy

Most of the following chapters deal with domestic actors that have gained considerable influence on Chinese foreign policy in the last twenty years. The useful distinction between *foreign policy* (exclusively shaped by governmental action) and *foreign relations* (involving more, and also non-state actors; Heberer/Senz 2010: 9) is also applicable to China, where a diversification of the actors has taken place. Besides the central government, provinces, the military, think tanks, corporations, and civil society all have gained in importance for China's foreign relations (ibid). Even in traditional fields where the government is the dominant actor, balancing between different and partly contradictory public expectations and interests is now a necessity (Noesselt/Hieber 2013: 1). Some voices urge the Chinese government to take political positions that equals its “real” power position. The government mostly reacts with a mixed strategy: Partly containing emotions, partly satisfying them through symbolic actions or statements (ibid: 4).

In authoritarian systems like the PRC, civil society as a term is often reduced to political participation and the creation of civil structures (Heberer/Senz 2010: 24). While their number is steadily growing in today's China, civil society cannot be treated as a unitary actor. Mostly,

they have a rather indirect influence on Chinese foreign policy, which they seek to achieve through influencing public opinion (ibid). This general statement also stays true for DSI activists in China – they indeed try to influence the public with their actions. Still, they operate in a field the public is very sensitive about, loaded with historical issues, so the thesis expects the influence of nationalist activists to be quite a bit bigger than it probably would be in other fields. The role of civil society in Chinese politics is further going to be elaborated in chapter 3.3.

3.2 The Role of History Politics in Chinese Nationalism

This section introduces the power of historical myths in political systems. After a theoretical input to the field, the profound impact of Chinese redefined myths in recent times is presented. Myths emphasize foreign aggression and imperialism as well as national Chinese humiliation, with direct references to the past in Sino-Japanese relations – a core reason why activists' mobilization efforts can be successful (chapter 3.3) due to high sensitivity in the Chinese public (chapter 3.4).

3.2.1 History as Mythmaking

“History never appears as History in its true sense – [as an] absolute truth of the past” (Jin 2006: 32). Historical facts are just half of the picture, it is the interpretation of history (and who has the power to do so) that matters most, and this interpretation can change over time and according to a number of factors. Anti-Japanese popular nationalism is a consequence of a more recent new interpretation of history in China, and its emergence is reconstructed in the next chapter. This section, however, focuses on the conceptual dimension of historical myths, and its various implications for identity formation within the state.

At minimum, three types of history exist: *experiences* (history that people make), *events* (history that historians create) and *myths* (history that people use; Cohen 1997). Past and present are in a dynamic interchange, with the past serving purposes of the present. A pioneer in the field has been Paul Cohen's *History in Three Keys* (1997), where he set up the given distinction to analyze the Boxer Movement in China. He seeks to demonstrate that there is a difference between what *actually* happened and what people *believe* to have happened (Jin 2006: 33). A good historian (despite an always-existing bias) is interested in finding out the truth of the past, trying to seek various perspectives to balance his view against other interpretations. Mythologists, however, might not totally discredit historical facts, but they are much more

interested in a single, unified interpretation of history, and “draw on it to serve the political, ideological, rhetorical, and/or emotional needs of the present” (Cohen 1997: 213). Besides using the past selectively, mythologists tend to focus on simplistic narratives that common people can understand easily, thereby making cohesive effects on their own group easier to achieve (Cole/Barsalou 2006: 10).

In this sense, historical myths rather than ‘just’ historical facts are also central to understanding identity. Identity is a deeply constructivist term, as constructivism emphasizes the “socially constructed nature of agents or subjects. Rather than taking agents as givens or primitives in social explanation, as rationalists tend to do (...), constructivists are interested in problematizing them, in making them a ‘dependent variable’” (Fearon/Wendt 2002: 57). Such a view entails that at different times, distinct historical myths (“the subjects”) can dominate perception. The quote also highlights agency. Whoever has the power over a certain territory is also able to shape the content of historical myths according to their purpose – through agency. Unsurprisingly, opposing groups within a state often will tell different historical myths, using it as a resource in their competition for power. Collective memory in a constructivist approach is usually “rather manufactured than given” (Wang 2008: 785), and authorities utilize a set of tools (such as history education, mass media) to make sure *their* myths become firmly established. Quite possibly, this is even easier in authoritarian systems, as the state power over media and education is probably expected to be more monolithic.

Authorities by no means execute this “plan” with drums beating and trumpets sounding, it is a much more subtle process. If common people were asked whether their view of history is based on their own account or whether they just have adopted the official state position, many would refuse the latter and probably see this as an “insult to their intelligence”. To be sure, I do not claim that what people believe to be true is one hundred percent congruent with what they are being told to be true. But a society always needs elements binding themselves together, and the very essence of what is binding them together – identities – can only be formed when “memories of a real or imagined past” (Jones 2002: 545) exist within a group. And these memories are profoundly (but not exclusively) shaped by those groups and elites in power.

What do historical myths consist of? Myths usually involve a *chosen trauma* (“the horrors of the past that cast shadows onto the future”; Volkan 1997: 18) and a *chosen glory* (“myths about a glorious future, often seen as a reenactment of a glorious past”; *ibid*). Besides also highlighting agency (because of the word “chosen”), the aforementioned distinction balances positive and negative historical memories. Different actors and elites might try to use

the same historical reference for a different purpose, e.g. the early events of the French Revolution would be a threat and possible trauma for aristocratic elites, but be glorious for republican groups trying to ascend power. Whoever wins the conflict can spread his interpretation of the past and use it for the present. Even when the same authorities stay in power, they can revise their interpretation of history. The CCPs condemnation of Confucius in Maoist China (a trauma) and Confucius today's renaissance in official discourse (a glory) is a good example.

Whatever myths are chosen, they are the foundation for ethnic, national, or religious identities (Smith 1986), precisely because “group members” and “group enemies” can be defined according to those myths. Discussion on both ethnicity and nationality in a constructivist approach focus on their construction and reproduction (Wang 2008: 785), and both heavily draw from the past as a resource. Despite its strong focus on socialization, ethnicity also involves certain irreversible primordial ties such as blood, kinship or language (ibid), which by themselves, however, are not sufficient to construct identity.

The relation between myths and national identities is even more complex. The Chinese poet Gong Zizhen (1792-1841) once said that “to destroy a nation, its history must first be erased” (quoted in Jones 2002: 545). The quote illustrates that collective memory is an integral part of nation-building, and Smith even states: “No memory, no identity, no nation” (Smith 1996: 383). The chosen glories (such as the German *Wirtschaftswunder* after World War II) and chosen traumas (such as the cruelties of Nazi Germany) do not only call for common heritage, they also serve concerns and needs of the present, and present national political action will also be weighed on the basis of those myths. Elites know that “once a trauma becomes a trauma, the historical truth about it does not really matter” (Volkan 1997), and they can utilize this to forge closer bonds within the nation, usually putting the (governing) elite group as a central component in collective memory. Thus, elites present themselves as a preserver of the nation. There is a longstanding Chinese tradition – beyond communist times – to interpret the past in such a way. New imperial dynasties always wrote an official history of the preceding dynasty, thereby obviously also inserting their own interpretation of the past, and unsurprisingly putting their own ascension to power in favorable terms, while pointing to the decline of the previous dynasty. These dynasty histories quickly became equivalent to the “official opinion” (Jones 2002). In this sense, the CCP has been no exception, as it has always tried to massively interpret history in its own interest and with ideological purpose in mind.

Last, historical myths and their relation with agency need to be discussed. The section

just given might seem to suggest that “Chinese society [is formed in a way] according to which the CCP is all-powerful and has the ability to use the history issue and public opinion strategically as diplomatic tools whenever it pleases” (Gustaffson 2011: 35). Wang even equals the position of the CCP with a “supreme historical court” (Wang 2008: 786). Present-day reality is more complex, though. This thesis attributes the CCP an important role in establishing and setting historical myths, and also spreading them through education systems and mass media. However, it used to be easier for Chinese authorities to control their version of history. Chinese society has changed dramatically, and other agents such as activists now seek to draw from historical myths for their own purposes – myths do not longer only serve the state’s interest. Just like Faeron/Wendt proposed in the quote above, activists and activist groups are also “relevant agents”, utilizing socially constructed subjects. And the public also has a certain degree of agency, especially considering that a lot of its actions (which are obviously also influenced by collective memory) do not seem to be officially orchestrated, even if they are influenced by myths. This interplay will become apparent when reading all the following chapters in relation with this section.

3.2.2 A New Type of Top-Down History Politics in post-1989 China

While historical myths are central to any society, contents in each case obviously will differ drastically. In Communist China, the *chosen glories* and *chosen traumas* have been reconstructed dramatically over the last decades, thereby serving different purposes for the CCP. This reconstruction of myths in the last decades runs parallel to a changing society with “wide-ranging reform programs [that] have affected almost every sphere of life” (Jones 2002: 545). The primary instrument to transmit myths has always been history education in the state’s education system, and schoolbooks as well as teaching outlines are central elements to the elected narratives. The importance of content is apparent because textbooks are by no means neutral, on the contrary they are “instructing people how to think and act as national subjects and how to view their relations with outsiders” (Wang 2008: 787). Teaching outlines reflect the political agenda and thus the elite’s intentions behind history education. The latter are now discussed in detail before turning to domestic reasons for the changed myths in post-Tian’anmen China.

Alisa Jones 2002 article *Politics and History Curriculum Reform in Post-Mao China* identifies four phases of history teaching outlines and reflects them in the light of the country’s

political circumstances.²⁸ History was not a cornerstone of education in the early PRC, as elites had a primary aim to focus on moral-ideological education to legitimize the political system. The party had established a supervising committee over the *People's Education Press*, the institution that had a monopoly over schoolbooks at the time. History was primarily explained with the laws of historical materialism, meaning that regime change was attributed to class struggle (*jieji douzheng* 阶级斗争), and people were taught that the dangerous sprouts of capitalism (*zibenzhuyi mengya* 资本主义萌芽) had to be removed from society to reach socialism. World history was almost non-existent in the curriculum, and when it was mentioned then “the evils of imperialism-colonialism, and their inevitable demise and displacement by communism” (Jones 2002: 551) were emphasized. While 10% of class hours were reserved for history after World War II, its relevance was further reduced over time. The Cultural Revolution transformed history classes into pure ideological education, focusing exclusively on revolutionary tradition in the sole year that history classes were still taught in 1965.

Only after Mao Zedong's death in 1976, the subject history slowly reappeared in a more traditional fashion. Organization of history education was recentralized and put back into the hand of the state that the Cultural Revolution had sought to overcome. The first teaching outline in 1978, however, still reflected that the CCP had not yet found a new consensus on historical myths that were supposed to be taught. The outline still gave a very important role to the laws of historic and dialectic materialism as well as class struggle. At the same time, the Chinese Republic (1912-1949) and the Qing Dynasty were still under heavy criticism. Jones concludes that the content of the outline is similar to the 1949-1957 phase, but the successful time of Communist rule in China was emphasized – while the chaos of the Cultural Revolution was downplayed and hardly mentioned. The 1980 outline showed some differences, especially in terms of the downgrade of revolutionary language and vocabulary (such as the omission of class struggle), and entailed some first cautious attempts to teach about China's long cultural history with a more positive notion.

Although this chapter of the thesis is entitled with a “new type of post-1989 history politics”, and while Tian'anmen was a crucial factor for a state-induced change of history education, these changes were in fact more gradual – Jones' third phase between 1981 and 1986 reflects this ongoing transformation. ‘Historical issues’ were still ‘political issues’ at the time being, but noticeable changes slowly crept into the outlines. With the new *State Education*

²⁸I will also use Jones' phases. For reference of the following section, see Jones 2002: 548-562. Some direct quotes and further remarks from different authors are cited separately.

Commission (that also included historians for the first time), elements of leftism in the curricula were gradually removed. History class time was increased by 25% in 1981, and then-Premier Zhao Ziyang's call for strengthening patriotism in order to better understand China's national conditions (*guoqing* 国情) was taken up in the outlines. In the content dimension, ancient Chinese history was given more room, the 'Great Men' in Chinese history were reincarnated as rolemodels for today's China, substituting the proletarian role model worker. By doing so, the old Chinese tradition of 'praising and blaming' (*baobian* 褒贬) was reintroduced, giving history back its traditional role of being a "mirror" for the present and future", and legitimizing current action through historical narratives. World history also reentered the curriculum, and the Chinese Republic (until 1949) was also presented in a slightly more favorable light.

Crucial to this thesis, however, is the following phase of 1987-1995 that has caused a massive influence on Chinese public opinion (chapter 3.4). History and historical failures had become a valuable source of public criticism in the late 1980s, like in the documentary *Heshang* that was soon banned by the authorities. Student demonstrations had increased in scale and intensity, Marxism-Leninism as well as Mao Zedong Thought were challenged, especially through the democratic movement on Tian'anmen Square in 1989. The protests were cracked down, and liberal politicians such as Premier Zhao Ziyang were removed from their posts. One of the most crucial elements of Zhao's removal was the renaissance of power for the conservative faction within the CCP, and it soon resulted in changes for Chinese History Politics.

Patriotism is at the core of the aforementioned reforms: "The crisis led the party to reaffirm its patriotic credentials as China's past, present and future savior" (Jones 2002: 559). The 1992 outline reflects this new focus. The outline actually does not depart too far from previous versions in the 1980s – it just intensified the reforms that had already started to be included into the curriculum before. In a crucial decision – according to Jones – the CCP chose a dialectic approach to explain its historical myths to children: further departing from Marxism-Leninism and historical and dialectic materialism for Chinese history, while very much sticking to the laws of historical materialism theory in world history. A new focus on mighty Chinese cultural history was taken into the curriculum, including a full rehabilitation of formerly criticized Great Men such as Confucius, and Imperial China was no longer condemned. The textbooks are very careful to note, however, that the preservation of this 'great' culture would not have been possible without the CPC's war of resistance against Japan and other imperial foes. This is precisely where world history comes into play.

Taking the relevant example for this thesis – Japan – both history education as well as media reports on the topic altered drastically after the Tian’anmen events. Since 1949, there had not been an emphasis on the suffering at the hands of Japan, the regime instead always pointed to its military strength (PLA) and leadership qualities (CCP) that led to victory over the foe. Notably, the PRC had focused on other ‘enemies’ than Japan after 1949, first on the now Taiwan-based Guomindang (KMT), and later on the Soviet threat. Concerning Japan, authorities even prohibited research on Chinese suffering during the Nanjing Massacre conducted in the 1960s, and when they were published in 1979, they still stayed an internal document (Yang 1999: 858). Such repression on research dealing with Chinese humiliation continued into the 1990s. This had profound geopolitical reasons in the 1970s and 80s: Japan – whom China just had established diplomatic relations with – was seen as a counterbalancing factor against the Soviet Union (chapter II), and China feared possible cuts in much-needed Japanese investment on the Chinese mainland (Reilly 2004: 277-279). Post-1989, however, the revolutionary *victor image* was changed into a *victimization image* (Wang 2008), Japan being at the forefront of the new blames. Domestic needs again were crucial to this change – in this case, it was about finding new regime legitimacy sources for the CCP (He 2008). Reilly argues that Chinese textbooks gradually adapted to this new image, with some heroic victor legacies in early 1990s textbooks,²⁹ but more and more textbooks, academic research/publications, memorial sites, extended media coverage etc. on the Chinese suffering at Japanese cost appeared (Reilly 2004: 279f.). In this sense, many of today’s often attributed nationalist credentials in China are “inextricably intertwined with the Chinese resistance to Japan’s invasion” (ibid: 278), reappearing in new rounds of the DSI dispute.

The aforementioned changes in history education – but also the parallel developments in media, museums/arts and academic research – can be summarized as to what has been called the *Patriotic Education Campaign* (*Aiguo zhuyi Jiaoyu Huodong* 爱国主义教育活动):

“Focus (...) on strengthening patriotism, faith in the Party, and cultural pride; on understanding that foreign ideas of ‘democracy’, ‘human rights’ and ‘peaceful evolution’ are the sugar-coated bullets of ‘reactionary enemy forces’ conspiring to undermine China; and on teaching the young to understand China’s ‘national conditions’ (*guoqing*), which would give them patience and determination to strive for socialist modernization, so that China would never again be humiliated. Nevertheless, despite the crackdown and renewed vigilance against ‘poisonous (foreign) weeds’, the conservative victory was not total, for socialist modernization was still to be attained through reform and opening, as Deng made abundantly clear in his 1991 ‘Southern tour’” (Jones 2002: 559f.)

²⁹ Reilly cites the textbook *Zhongguo Lishi* [Chinese History; published 1996]: “Japanese imperialism started the war of invasion against China, bringing heretofore unseen disasters to the Chinese people... But the Chinese people’s heroic resistance, at great cost, led to the eventual victory... with a great contribution to the global anti-imperialist struggle” (Reilly 2004: 279). The first part indicates the “new” victimization image, while the last part is reminiscent of post-1949 victor narratives and slogans.

There is certainly no lack of academic understanding that both historical grievances itself as well as using historical myths for political purposes are a major reason for continued troubles in Sino-Japanese and East Asian Relations as a whole. There have also been many voices that attribute today's nationalism in China to the Patriotic Education Campaign (Zhao 1998). But it's not only *top-down state-centered nationalism* (Seckington 2005) and governmental action that has spurred troubles. Only when taking *bottom-up popular nationalism* (ibid) into account – and especially its spontaneous popular expressions of nationalism – the true impact of historical myths on the conflict becomes visible. As for China, this kind of *bottom-up popular nationalism* (expressed with regard to Japan) is only possible due to a changing society as a whole. The next chapter will illuminate these changes (and especially the role of civil society), and also introduce in how far political activism is able to maneuver and operate in this widening space.

3.3 The Activists: Growing Role in Chinese Civil Society and Politics

While chapter 3.3.1 illuminates the development of civil society in China in both its theoretical and academic discussion as well as its historical development, chapter 3.3.2 gives special prominence to the role of the internet and its mobilization capacities in this process – which is of vital importance for the activists' efforts.

3.3.1 China's Embryonic Civil Society: Theoretical Discussion and its Historical Development

Most contemporary scholars agree that “something of a civil society has emerged” (Yang 2003: 453) in China, but there is much debate what this “something” actually consists of. Civil society as a concept derives from western theoretical contributions and is located between the individual, state and society. Civil society as an analytic focus has long been neglected in favor of *Development Theory*, a paradigm that put the state at the center of national development, with a strong focus on social and national development through industrialization and urbanization (Lerner 1958; So 1990). However, a redefined relationship between state, market and society has been sought after 1990, as many countries were facing tremendous problems with state bureaucracies and ongoing economic crisis. In the West, Giddens (1994; 2000) was among the most influential scholars proposing a *Third Way*, namely a socially responsible capitalism, seeking the inclusion of civil society and responsible business actors into partnerships with the state to achieve an equilibrium in the market. Discussions on participation

of civil society in developing countries has also started long ago, debating its possible influence that will lead to social change (Tai 2006: 48).

Civil society is often seen as the third sector of society, distinct from government and business, as political parties primarily seek political power, and business organizations mainly strive for their own profit (Thiery 2010: 1248). Actors in civil society (amongst others) include citizen initiatives, associations, cultural and educational institutions, development agencies, religious groups (ibid); and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have taken over state duties, operate highly efficient and on an international level.³⁰ The voluntary aspect of participation is a very strong characteristic of an active civil society. Yang identifies four basic and interrelated elements of civil society:

“(1) Autonomous individuals and (2) civic associations in relation to the state, (3) engaged in more or less organized activities in a (4) public sphere ‘outside the immediate control of the state but not entirely contained within the private sphere of the family’.” (Yang 2003: 455)

It is important to note that both individuals as well as associations can be part of the activities in the public sphere – something that is true for the DSI conflict as well, with individual netizens taking a role besides more formal organizations.

The next sections on the cultural and political context will show that Chinese civil society is in many ways “*embryonic*” (e.g. Shi 2004: 226) or “*nascent*” (e.g. Huang 2013) – and quite different to the West.

Civil Society and Cultural Context

As for the cultural context, three points are briefly discussed here: the meaning of public sphere, the term civil society in the Chinese language and the compatibility of civil society with Confucianism and Taoism.³¹

Public sphere (#4 mentioned above) requires a cultural-specific conceptualization to be identified in its relation with civil society. The term is characterized by Jürgen Habermas as a “society engaged in critical public debate” (Habermas 1989: 52), it is a discursive space where issues of mutual interest are discussed, with a (possibly) common opinion as a result. In the West, the public sphere is associated with the *bourgeois public sphere* that “cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history of that ‘civil society’ originating in the

³⁰ The most important groups for this thesis, the nationalist activist groups, as well as online activists, are introduced in the following chapter 3.3.2. The current chapter is to be understood as a conceptual introduction.

³¹ This section draws heavily from Tai Zhixue’s chapter on civil society in the Chinese context (Tai 2006), with some additional quotes.

European High Middle Ages” (ibid: xvii). Tai Zhixue argues that this is just *one* specific model of civil society, and instead of imposing this model as a normative concept to China, one should rather see civil society as a functional term (Tai 2006: 51). Schak/Hudson support this argument:

“Civil society is not all or nothing, either existing or not existing. It may appear and make some advances, then stall or go backwards, and this pattern varies with the different levels of authoritarianism as opposed to democratization in the societies concerned. Moreover, it is not unilinear but path-dependent.” (Schak/Hudson 2003: 1f.)

Thus, some cultural, historical and political conditions that have affected the development of Chinese civil society need to be addressed.

As for the term civil society in the Chinese language itself: While there is a relatively straightforward English translation for society in Chinese (*shehui* 社会), things become a lot more diffuse with regard to civil society, as many concurring terms (with different attributed meanings) exist. He (1997: 60-62) overviews the academic discussion in the 1980s/90s and lists four terms. Three terms are associated with the influential Chinese scholar Wang Shaoguang: *wenming shehui* (文明社会; meaning civilized society; a civil society largely led and created by the state), *shimin shehui* (市民社会; meaning city/urban people’s society; strengthening the role of urbanization and commerce that leads to the creation of a social force beyond the state), and *gongmin shehui* (公民社会; meaning public people/citizen’s society; with an emphasis on public good and good citizenship in state-making). He furthermore also identifies the term *minjian shehui* (民间社会; popular society; highlighting the antithetical relation between civil society and the state). The term *gongmin shehui* seems to be most common, but even leading Chinese scholars have used different terms (Tai 2006: 62).³² As for one of my key articles in Chinese resources for the DSI activists, the term “*minjian*” was chosen (Zhang 2013), and the organizations investigated in this thesis also all carry “*minjian*” in their name. The terminological discussion entails a different understanding of what kind of civil society should exist in China (also see next section): A state-led project with government-approved organizations, serving as an extended arm of the state? An autonomous civil force, legally protected by the government, but also pursuing its own interests? Or a civil society that does not see its role antithetical to the state, but rather joins forces with it, contributing towards achieving common good and goals together?

³² He notes that Deng Zhenglai prefers *shimin shehui*, Liang Zhiping uses *minjian shehui*, and Zhang Zuhua *gongmin shehui* in publications. No matter which term is used, all authors stress the transformational role civil society can play in China’s reform process.

As for traditional Chinese thought and its relation to civil society, Confucianism and Taoism can be considered and discussed (Tai 2006: 65-71). Pye (1985) notes that in Confucianism, state and government are viewed as extensions of the family. The state therefore has a paternal role and is expected to have authority and protect public good in its best possible way. The individual is expected to undergo *self-cultivation*, a lifelong task that also involves subordination of the individual to the interests of a larger unit (like the state). Many believe this fundamental Confucian orientation is incompatible with western individualism – the latter being a characteristic that in the West is believed to help creating the power amongst different sets of people (or the “society”) through organizing and articulating their interests – also against the state. Furthermore, the word “community” has never been used by Confucius, and the term only later has been included in the continuum between individual, family and state by scholars. Others are not as skeptical, however, and argue that self-cultivation is not limited to the individual but extends to the family and to the world – with the power to change it, too (Tu 1988: 115).

As for Taoism, Tai notes (2006: 69), its main topic actually even centers around the individual and his quest to find the Great Way (*dao* 道), and it postulates according to philosopher Lao Zi that the best government governs the least, and centers its actions in order to achieve the individual’s dignity. This kind of desired lean administration would obviously require active individuals and groups (or basically civil society) to fill the gap in modern societies.

One can conclude that civil society is definitely an imported term and concept to China, but equivalents and reference points in the Chinese context have tried to be identified. On top of cultural conditions, political boundaries (in form of the authoritarian political system) have also set limits to the development of a fully-fledged Chinese civil society. China would probably still be a different kind of civil society than in the West, due to some of the aforementioned (and even more) cultural reasons, but political reality also has caused important constraining effects.

Civil Society and Political Context: Relation to the State

Not just terminology reveals a delicate relationship between civil society and the state, this is also reflected in a pretty complex political environment. “The country went from having zero domestic NGOs before 1994 to having 414,614 non-governmental organizations in the first quarter of 2009” (Gao 2013). In addition to those aforementioned organizations with a formal

registration (*Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization* GONGO), there are many unregistered NGOs and corporations (officially) that in essence are also NGOs. In sum, the PRC has the most civic organizations on the planet.

Research has shown that existing social organizations have undergone profound changes, and new types of associations have appeared. Generally speaking, social organizations have flourished in the last twenty years in China. Also, the level of autonomy both organizations and individuals enjoy from the state has increased (Yang 2003: 456). The level of autonomy is crucial to define the relationship with the state, and it has led He Baogang to call China a “*semi civil-society*” (He 1997). He thinks that neither being autonomous nor dependent is not just a state-imposed norm, but also a strategy sought by NGOs, because adapting to the political landscape can make their organization function more effectively. Thus, NGOs seek protection for their status from the state, but it probably also makes their work more predictable and regime-friendly (Tai 2006: 52).

Political reality in China today is thus neither comparable to Mao’s China nor to democratic systems. In the Mao Era, societal organizations were completely reliant on the state for legal protection, personnel and material support, while today’s China has attributed a structure that carries many characteristics of corporatism, and Tai (2006) notes that corporatism was once conceptually developed for fascist states, not democracies. How to interpret the strength of the role of the state is still a vibrant discussion among scholars. Some observers see the system to be evolving from state to societal corporatism “structured sectorally, but unlike state corporatism, it functions in a manner that represents grass root interests” (Chan 1994: 171). Some scholars regard the Chinese state to still be the leading force in China’s civil society, identifying similarities between China with previous developmental stages in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea (Unger/Chan 1995). More recent work by Jude Howell (2012) argues to focus on bringing capitalism back in analyzing China’s civil society development. Howell believes the previously often chosen analytical focus on corporatism overemphasized the role of the state while neglecting market forces. Howell states:

“Dual pressures of state and market generate incremental cycles of civil society development in the reform period, noting the gradual development of associations linked to interests that benefit from the turn to capitalism, the emergence of non-governmental labour organizations and the rise of social welfare organizations” (Howell 2012: 271).

Probably not all sectors in which NGOs operate can be treated the same way. Some fields seem to be more open to work in, others more restrictive. Business associations, for instance – who have been attributed most academic interest – are believed to be more autonomous from the

state (Tai 2006: 58). Environmental organizations also have had increasing room to operate, especially since the top leadership itself has identified environmental problems and smog as a serious threat to regime stability (Gao 2013). As for the organizations and individuals related to this thesis, they operate in a sensitive field, which I would call “national interests”. DSI activists mainly strive for a goal that they have in common with the government – national sovereignty over a disputed territory. Activists, also like the government, heavily criticize Japans present politics and attribute them to “resurgent imperialism and militarism” and “right wing influences”, and thereby match the content of the government’s educational campaigns. While the activists still have a complicated relationship with the state, being patriotic is a comparably effective way to be operating in Chinese civil society and exerting influence (more in chapter IV).

However, there are other fields where the regime is a lot less tolerant for civic movements, including citizen rights, and control has been observed to tighten up under President Xi Jinping (since 2012). A good recent example is the *New Citizens Movement* (*Zhongguo Xin Gongmin Yundong* 中国新公民运动), a loose organization whose members meet for dinners in cities around China to discuss civic participation, plus they also have organized a number of demonstrations against party corruption and other topics. Their aims “parallel the aggressive crackdown on official graft that President Xi Jinping has pursued” (NDTV 2014), but the regime still has “shown little willingness to tolerate independent monitoring of officials’ wealth” (ibid). A Beijing-based lawyer, key figure of the group, went to trial, and it’s not been a single case in recent times (Ramzy 2014).

Media has been experiencing similar intensified control. Censorship has always been present, but the party is now acting more forcefully – despite an increased diversification of media sources available. The party “cannot control what people think, but it does try to manage how things are being discussed” (NDTV 2014). In lack of a press law, journalists actually feel the need to stand together and organize themselves, but this is precisely what the government seems unwilling to permit:

“The Chinese government thinks it has given its subjects enough freedom, however it has not realized that (...) people expect more civil rights and liberties. People’s expectation of civil rights has outpaced what the government can tolerate, that is why many people, especially journalists, feel they are being suppressed by the government” (Gu 2013).

Therefore, the general assessment stays true – that is, China’s reform process has created spaces for civil participation, even if they differ from sector to sector. Still, there are red lines that cannot be crossed, but these lines are pretty broad in our case. However, the public (that activists

can mobilize with their actions), is a much more delicate act for the government, as there is a fine line between allowing protests and turning them down before they get out of control.

3.3.2 The Special Role of Online Activism and Internet Protest in China, and Its Mobilization Opportunities

The Role of the Internet in Civil Society: Conceptualization

When talking about the space civic organizations have gained in China in the last two decades, the internet has to be attributed a big part of this process. The internet is the “most liberating medium of mass communication in China” (Tai 2006: 79), and internet and civil society “energize each other in their co-evolutionary development” (Yang 2003a: 405), not least because the Chinese state today has “numerous permeable holes” (Yang 2003b: 457), and many of those holes can be found online, as many examples in the past have shown (see next section).

The internet is also a constantly evolving medium: While Yang stressed the popularity of mails, search engines, chatrooms, newsgroups and bulletin/message boards in 2003 (ibid: 458), a number of new phenomena have appeared since then. Most influential has been the development of social media networks, and the Chinese counterparts to Facebook and Twitter, called “Renrenwang” (人人网) and – especially important – “Weibo” (微博). Blogs have a similarly influential role, too (Hassid 2012).

Social media provides “the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content that has individual value but reflects shared values” (Howard/Parks 2012: 359), it is used by “the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume both the tools and the content” (ibid). The content is a “digital form of personal messages, news, [and] ideas” (ibid). Usually, user content is unfiltered and can directly be addressed to the audience – something that is not possible in traditional media, especially in its bigger forums where Chinese censorship and governmental influence is the strongest. Yet representatives of the Chinese state are also very active participants in Chinese online life, they visibly and invisibly shape online discussions through influencing debates, setting permissible boundaries, and take charge when they feel the necessity to do so. No matter what, power in the information age increasingly means “communication power” (Castells 2009). There are a number of governmental regulations for the Chinese internet, a core theme being that the released information should never be harmful to “national interest” (Yang 2003b: 459). The government furthermore also asks for official registration procedures and hands out operating licenses (ibid).

The Supreme Court last year warned of three years' prison for anyone spreading "slandorous information" (NDTV 2014), and control recently has rather been tightening up than relaxed.

Still, social media networks have become popular alternative information sources to state-controlled news sites. "With the help of Weibo", journalist Du Bin says, "people are getting more opportunity to learn what is happening around them, they are more actively voicing their views and protecting their civil rights, and that's why more and more people are colliding with the government" (Gu 2013). In this sense, the Chinese public has become a lot more critical, true at least for the urban population that has regular access to internet services and uses it on a daily basis. While the role of the public is discussed a little bit later in the thesis, it is now time to take a closer look at individuals and organizations utilization of the internet and social media for their purposes.

(Online) Activism and Its Mobilization Capacities

Before anything else, the term *activism* needs clarification. Research on political activism "compares ways that citizens participate, the processes that lead them to do so, and the consequences of these acts" (Norris 2007: 628). A whole body of literature concentrates on the Western world and questions how the gap of declining party and organizational memberships can be filled (ibid: 634-637). Traditional "old-style" party and organizations typically have a highly formalized organizational form, full-time paid officials, hierarchical structures, and clear boundaries between members and non-members (Clarke/Rempel 1997). Social Movements³³ that have emerged since the 1960s instead are characterized "by more fluid boundaries, looser networked coalitions, and decentralized organizational structures" (Norris 2007: 638). And further:

"The primary goals of new social movements often focus upon achieving social change through direct action strategies and community building, as well as by altering lifestyles and social identities, as much as through shaping formal policy-making processes and laws in government." (ibid)

It is much easier for people to participate in activities by those new social actors. People can just turn up when an event is scheduled and thereby express their opinion (ibid).

Thus, activism is clearly located in the civil society sphere. Efforts can be undertaken in social, political, economic, environmental and other fields, as activism usually focuses on certain topics that are key to the agenda of the specific activists. Activists do not pursue political

³³ Social Movements usually consist of groupings of individuals or organizations joining forces and pursuing political or social interests.

power, but they try to influence politics through informal ways, such as demonstrations, open letters, campaigns, street marches, strikes, sit-ins, rallies, calls for boycott et cetera. The interests of activists do not necessarily overlap with those of the state, and can even go much further than what the state defines as their interest. Speaking of media usage, the internet has also been attributed a positive role for activism in academic literature, as the world wide web increases speed, reach and effectiveness of their communication and mobilization efforts (Ope 1999). Activism can be an individual effort, but the term also includes a number of individuals pooling their resources in organizations to pursue their goals, even if (as stated) some of their activities often are open for anyone to “jump in” and participate.

As for *online activism*, there are numerous examples in the past where a public’s strong online reaction has led to a change of behavior in Chinese politics: Some frequently cited instances are the SARS outbreak in 2003 (where authorities tried to cover up the poor handling of the government and had to buckle under public – also online – pressure; Tai 2006: 79), the 2007 protest against a chemical factory in Xiamen that was eventually removed (a blog warned people of health risks, and more than 20,000 demonstrators were mobilized; Hassid 2012: 224), and public anger after the disastrous 2011 train accident in Wenzhou (where, yet again, netizens in more than 26 million messages condemned crisis management and the lack of responsibility shown by officials, leading to a more thorough investigation; *ibid*: 223).

Some theoretical remarks on these successful *mobilization* efforts are necessary to recognize the role of the internet and online activism in these and other examples. The internet certainly reduces “barriers of geographical and social location” (Yang 2003b: 466) for individuals and organizations, they can reach more people much more easily and directly, and usually with unfiltered messages. Common people will forward and share what they find interesting online, and again reach other people that they are affiliated with. Online action does not stop with sharing interesting news stories, however. It also has a special significance for organizing protest in authoritarian China. The “traditional” way of mobilizing organized protest and demonstrations in China is very limited due to the state usually sanctioning and forbidding these kind of activities (*ibid*: 469). The CCP is very sensitive in this regard because of the 1989 Tian’anmen student demonstrations. But given that protest in general “relies on *communication media* to spread its message and organize activities” (*ibid*: 474), the internet has now taken the place of more conventional communication media (such as newspapers and TV), and political activism can therefore be facilitated from the *bottom-up* much easier than before. In the pre-internet era, such *bottom-up* efforts were hardly possible because state media in China is under

much stricter control. The revolutionary wave of demonstrations in the Arab Spring in 2010 illustrates the power the internet can have when the masses are able to organize themselves beyond the authoritarian state's direct influence (also see chapter 3.4).

Still, authoritarian regimes obviously also try to control the internet as good as possible, because they fear nothing more than losing regime stability, with demonstrations resulting from mobilization efforts possibly proving dangerous for the government. Hassid argues that he can solve the puzzle whether online discourse and activism lead to more protests and tension, or just functions as a way for citizens to express their dissatisfaction with certain events, thereby functioning as a seismograph for the government (in the former the internet would be the “*pressure cooker*”, in the latter the “*safety valve*”; Hassid 2012: 213). Analyzing online blogs, he argues that both scenarios happen, depending heavily on the issue and its treatment in the conventional Chinese media. His quantitative approach shows that blogs serve as a safety valve on topics where the mainstream media set the agenda, while they function as a pressure cooker when online forces gets ahead of journalistic work (ibid: 212). This is to say that the CCP acts less repressive when it has set the agenda itself, and “bloggers are allowed a great deal of latitude to write posts that are satirical or even harshly critical of official policy, so long as discussion remains online” (Hassid 2012: 221). Sometimes, such internet pressure can even be helpful for the central government, as e.g. it often faces problems controlling local governments, and internet protest acts as another monitoring device (Lorentzen 2006).

The situation is very different, however, when small incidents and dissatisfaction with local governments gather momentum online, leading to spontaneous “offline” demonstrations, seemingly lacking a responsible organizing force. Hassid's study concludes that governmental censorship and repressive actions have often been at full flight in these cases, cracking down on any kind of mobilization (Hassid 2012: 224f.). His arguments fit quite well with the aforementioned handling the Chinese government has shown when dealing with corruption: It has called battling corruption as one of its central aims under President Xi Jinping, but it rather likes it to be state-led and within the party itself, and much less enjoys civic organizations like the *New Citizens Movement* trying to get ahead of the state, which is why the regime acted so repressive. One should also not underestimate the capacities the Chinese state invests into cooperation with the mostly private-run websites and services:

“All Internet companies operating within Chinese jurisdiction – domestic or foreign – are held liable for everything appearing on their search engines, blogging platforms, and social-networking services. They are also legally responsible for everything their users discuss or organize through chat clients and messaging services. In this way, the government hands many censorship and surveillance tasks to private companies that face license revocations and forced shutdowns should they fail to comply. Every one of

China's large Internet companies has a special department full of employees whose sole job is to police users and censor content." (MacKinnon 2011: 38)

MacKinnon's article "*China's Networked Authoritarianism*" (2011) serves as an important reminder that while the internet has certainly given some scope to individual and civil society's organization activities online (and offline), the permissible boundaries are constantly in flux and can be significantly altered according to the state's preferences. Fortunately for DSI activism, these boundaries are pretty broad in their case, but parameters were also altered when things got out of control, as the empirical part will show.

3.4 The Public: Anti-Japanese Tendencies, Cyclical Patterns of Public Participation in Demonstrations

While the focus of the thesis is on reconstructing activism and mobilization efforts in the DSI conflict, this section shall briefly discuss the recipients of these mobilization efforts – the public. They are also recipients of Chinese state education and therefore very aware of Japan-related historical myths. Thus, the role of public opinion in China, the influence of public pressure through demonstrations and the way the government handles them are covered here.

Chinese Increasingly Negative Public Opinion towards Japan

Leaders in an autocratic system like the PRC lack an electoral constituency to judge on their foreign policy, so they are mainly dependent on support of the fellow Politburo members – while this statement was absolutely true for Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai half a century ago, things have become more complex. Foreign policy specialists and the public have all become part of the foreign policy process (Douglass 2009: 2). To stay in power in China today, "reciprocal accountability" to a certain "selectorate" has been called an important factor even for an authoritarian system like China (Gilli/Li 2012). Also, the PRC has tried learning to win over public support from the collapse of the Soviet Union – a fate that they desperately want to avoid (Roeder 1993).

Therefore, public opinion is certainly not neglected by the CCP. Douglass classifies three types of "opinions" that are relevant to the foreign policy actors – elite opinion, sub-elite opinion and public opinion (ibid). Elite opinion, besides the politburo, involves the 27 ministries and commissions, the central committee with its 371 members and a big bureaucracy apparatus³⁴, as well as influential public intellectuals, such as scholars. Different factions in this

³⁴ As of Douglass' numbers in 2009

apparatus such as the Conservatives, Liberals and Moderates (Fewsmith/Rosen 2011) balance each other. Many observers think balancing has led to a more moderate and predictable foreign policy.

The two components sub-elite and popular opinion are of more interest here. Sub-elite opinion is “below the elite but above the general public” (Douglass 2009: 5) and expresses its positions through organized activity in both corporations and civic organizations, thereby protecting their interests and pursuing policy goals (ibid). Public opinion, as a third factor, is high on the government’s agenda, and officials seek to know what the public thinks. *Bottom-up* and *top-down* interaction takes places, as the government knows that ignorance of public opinion would trigger strong resistance (ibid: 6), but the government can also try to seek popular support for its policies (ibid). When nationalism is involved like in the DSI dispute, public opinion is a double-edged sword and very sensitive. The significance of public opinion in the field has been acknowledged by Chinese politicians themselves. As early as 1995, then-Foreign Minister Qian Qichen stated that Chinese citizens have the right to claim war reparations from Japan and declared they will not be hampered by the government (Ping An 1998: 194). One can imagine how much the government weighs public opinion now almost twenty years later – in an era where the internet has profoundly changed and intensified civic and public action, discussion and participation in political matters, as stated earlier.

Turning to actual public opinion on Japan in China, the Genron NPO and China Daily in August 2013 released the 9th *China-Japan Public Opinion Poll* (Genron NPO/China Daily 2013). The poll’s results are an excellent resource because mutual perception over the years is traced, which is especially useful as Sino-Japanese relations in the last decade went through warmer periods of cooperation and tougher times of increased conflict. A couple of figures from 2013 show the worsening perception of each other (see ibid):

- 90.1 percent of Japanese citizens replied they have unfavorable impressions about China, with half of the respondents stating that the islands conflict is the most important reason for their bad impression. For the Chinese polled, 92.8 percent came to the same conclusion about Japan, with 77.6 percent accusing Japan of causing the conflict;
- 72.1 percent of Japanese polled and 77.5 percent of Chinese polled view the territorial conflict on the DSI as the main source of concern in their bilateral relationship;
- For solving the conflict, 49.1 percent of Japanese polled see negotiations as the best way to solve the conflict peacefully, and 42.4 percent propose to ask the *International Court of Justice* in this matter, while the position amongst Chinese seems more vigorous, as

58.1 percent demand China to “strengthen its virtual control over the area”, and 54.8% also want to get Japan to acknowledge the existence of a territorial conflict (which it has always denied, until very recently);

- For reasons given why the mutual impression is so negative, almost 50% of the interviewed Japanese complain that “China criticizes Japan mainly over historical issues”, while 63.8 percent of the Chinese polled indeed stated that Japan lacks an apology and remorse for its invasion to China. Also, while 90 percent of the Chinese polled knew about the Manchurian Incident, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and the Nanjing Massacre, knowledge on Japan’s post-war developments and achievements proved to be poor;
- Historical Issues have their own subcategory in the poll. In 2013, fewer Japanese respondents expected historical issues to be resolved gradually than before, instead difficulties are foreseen by more respondents. On the Chinese side, at the beginning of the poll in 2005, there existed a far more optimistic view that the historical issues will be resolved as the bilateral relations develop – Sino-Japanese relations were in a better state then. In the most recent survey, however, many Chinese respondents mentioned that the bilateral relations will not develop unless the historical issues are resolved;
- Asked specifically what must be resolved between the two countries, nearly 60 percent of the Japanese polled cited China's anti-Japanese education and critical expressions about Japan in Chinese school textbooks. Among the Chinese polled the most important issue was seen in Japan's need to express a proper apology over its invasion to China;
- The study also criticizes the “lack of personal interaction between the two societies; dependence on domestic media for information on each other's countries, as well as structural factors” (ibid).

Some of the poll’s content is worth to be put into the context of this thesis. The fact that both sides have a rather unfavorable view of each other is not a new phenomenon, but numbers still altered throughout the years. Favorable never exceeded unfavorable views since the first poll in 2005, but they did exceed 30 percent in Japan (2007) and were close to 40 percent in China (2010).³⁵ 9.6 and 5.2 percent of positive mutual perception in 2013 mark a sharp decrease on both sides.

The poll also stresses the growing importance of the DSI conflict in bilateral relations

³⁵ While the Genron NPO/China Daily survey has been undertaken since 2005, there have been other polls on Japanese perception in China (for example quoted in Kang 2013: 166ff.). Numbers and trends are similar.

between the two sides. While common Chinese hardly knew anything about the DSI in the mid-1990s (Si 2012), it is now perceived to be the biggest threat in Sino-Japanese relations. The underlying issues here clearly are historical in nature though, as the Japanese polled obviously feel wrongfully condemned while the Chinese polled criticize Japanese to not acknowledge their past. Given the *New Education Campaign* and its historical myths, it is not unsurprising that Chinese citizens are very aware of historical events, while they are not really knowledgeable of post-war Japan developments. Thus, one can conclude for the Chinese side that historical myths have always had a latent influence on Chinese public opinion towards Japan, with unfavorable always persisting over favorable views. The recent DSI conflict dyads intensified these latent tendencies and have led to an even worse opinion on Japan within the Chinese public. In this sense, the public should be very receptive for any mobilization efforts, as activists and others' efforts deal with issues that are high-stake to the Chinese public. Activists precisely tackle Japan on those spots that the Chinese public is very sensitive about.

The Patterns of Anti-Japanese Demonstrations in China

When people show patriotism in an issue they care about, the CCP faces a (partly self-created) dilemma: If the government is perceived to be acting too softly, publicly expressed nationalist sentiments is likely to contain criticism of the leadership's action; while being too hard in foreign policy might satisfy nationalist thinking, yet harm national interests and stable foreign relations (Reilly 2014: 200f.). As being patriotic is also a state-injected norm for any Chinese citizen nowadays, the government can hardly completely forbid such emotional "patriotic venting" (online and offline), it can only try to control it.

The dilemma has a further component: Public online patriotism and public offline demonstrations are closely connected in today's China. Reilly's framework to analyze the *waves of popular mobilization* in anti-Japan protest is useful to illustrate this connection, and the thesis also applies a similar framework in the empirical part. Reilly borrows from Sydney Tarrow's *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (1998). A single *wave of contention* usually consists of a single small event that starts to trigger reactions like a snowball rolling downhill, with the public reacting to any bid of media information it can get (as sensationalist as it might be). Protest participation broadens, including acts of activism that are usually first stimulated online and then transformed into offline on-street actions (Tarrow 1998). However, protests in the PRC not only appeared very quickly, they were also contained when crossing specific red lines. When the mobilization is too strong and protests turn violent, costs begin to shift negatively for the regime, as economic interests and stable diplomatic

relations are in the government's interest. Therefore, government-led *de-mobilization* efforts begin, "cooling down online sentiments and constraining public demonstrations" (Reilly 2014: 201). Still, Reilly notes that the "waves" in anti-Japan protests come back whenever a new unexpected event takes place, and a new wave is likely going to be stronger than the last one, with a repetition of Tarrow's aforementioned cycle (ibid).

This thesis, however, does not just look at the effects of anti-Japanese protest on foreign policy in the DSI conflict, the following empirical part rather takes a much closer look on the sometimes mobilizing forces, sometimes at least conflict-intensifying forces: activists, arguing that their increased influence has also contributed to make the DSI conflict so prominent now.

IV. Activists in the Diaoyu Islands Conflict Evolvement since 1990: An Amplifier to a Growing Societal Popular Movement?

4.1 Methodological Remarks and Key Questions

This thesis draws its research material from a variety of sources. Chinese and English material on activism in the DSI dispute in general is relatively sparse – also, as Zhang states, research is also still just in an initial stage (*qibu jieduan* 起步阶段; Zhang 2013). When searching for "Baodiao Movement" (*baodiao yundong* 保钓运动) on the most important Chinese-language academic database *Chinese Academic Journals* (CAJ), only 68 results appeared as of April 2014.³⁶ Furthermore, a wide variety of mediums has to be considered because the conflict (and its discourse) has changed in nature: Society has gone from purely offline to also (albeit not exclusively) online; information resources (that once were dominated by state media only) have been enriched by a wide variety of accessible media content (including various magazines, academic journals et cetera), and – in contrast to the 1990s – social media and the internet has had an impact on the latter conflict peaks. As for the Chinese sources used in the thesis, most material was found on CAJ, but also via Google and Baidu search engines, and *China Core Newspaper Database*. As for social media, content is taken into account as well, even if online content might have been blocked or deleted, which indeed also happened. Still, as the thesis is not a discourse analysis, it is probably impossible to grasp the full picture of conflict peaks.

To be consistent with the theory chapter, the following questions will be asked

³⁶ Baodiao (*baodiao* 保钓) means to „keep / preserve / defend the islands“, usually referring to the DSI. This chapter often uses expressions such as „baodiao activism“.

throughout the chapter: Have historical myths (such as “condemnation of Japanese war atrocities”, “historical debt”, “new Japanese militarism/imperialism”, “right-wing forces”) been a feature in DSI conflict peaks, in both official state media as well as popular expressions? Has usage of these myths seen a change, probably intensified? As being patriotic (as mentioned) is also a state policy, can activists groups and netizens utilize this space/public sphere the government has opened for them for their purposes (seeking attention, mobilizing for protest)? Does the internet, being the most liberating communication tool, largely contribute to this mobilization ability? And further: Can certain empirical evidence confirming the author’s suggestions be found in 2004 / 2012 but not in the 1990s when both societal as well as technological conditions were not developed as much?

These questions all boil down to the essence as to why the DSI conflict has experienced such a big *change over time*, analyzed for the Chinese side in this chapter. It is argued that state-induced top-down nationalism and growing bottom-up civil society space enabled mobilization, and in conjuncture created the strong waves of anti-Japanese protest in China. These developments have resulted in the fact that the DSI conflict has dramatically risen on the agenda for the Chinese government, it is now important both on the domestic and foreign policy level. Fortunately, the DSI conflict is a long-standing one, thus it is a nice showcase to test possible influences of the changing conditions in China (as outlined above and in the theoretical chapter). In essence, the empirical part analyzes conflict peaks spanning over 22 years.

Each conflict peak analysis does not aim to be a full case study, which would be beyond the scope of the thesis. The chapters try to give a general gist of what happened in what sequence, how the actors (government, civil society/activists, the masses) participated in the conflict, whether their reactions stayed consistent or showed change. The sections (and the conclusion) finally relate these findings to the questions illuminated above.

4.2 Activism Actors

The Evolvement of the “Baodiao Movement”

As stated, activism to preserve the Diaoyu Islands has a long-standing tradition, and is fittingly called the Baodiao Movement in Chinese. The Baodiao Movement has its roots overseas, expanded over the decades, finally experienced a spillover to the Chinese mainland, and has now established a profound influence on the PRC as well. A 2014 Chinese interview with Tong Zeng, President of the *China Federation for Defending the Diaoyu Islands* (CFDD), is entitled “*Baodiao, From People’s Passion to a National Operation*” (*Baodiao, cong minjian reqing dao*

guojia xingdong; Si 2012), approximately pointing to this evolution of importance. Tong Zeng himself has been one of the most important individuals behind the Baodiao Movement (Huanqiu Huaren 2014), and is frequently cited in this chapter.

The Baodiao Movement does not consist of *one* homogenous actor, it is in many regards a transnational movement, operating with various closely associated organizations and individuals – even if the focus of this thesis is on the PRC. In the 21st century, the DSI conflict itself has reached the heart of the people of the PRC, as Tong states himself:

“Before 1996, ordinary Mainland people were very unfamiliar with the Diaoyu Islands, and they did not understand the meaning of the Diaoyu Movement. (...) That ordinary Mainland people went from a status of not knowing the Diaoyu Islands to an enormous enthusiasm for the Diaoyu Movement nowadays proves the significance of the Diaoyu Movement.” (“在 1996 年之前，中国大陆的老百姓对钓鱼岛非常陌生，对民间保钓运动也不明其意。（。。。）中国老百姓从不知道的钓鱼岛到如今对保钓运动的极大热情就证明了民间保钓运动的意义所在。”; Si 2012: 22).

1970s: The First Wave of the Baodiao Movement

The Baodiao Movement started outside of the PRC, and its origins have to be located within Chinese foreign students in the US in the early 1970s.³⁷ At the time being, Chinese foreign students mainly originated from Taiwan and Hong Kong. The crucial event for the formation of the Baodiao Movement was the Nixon-Sato Declaration in 1970, settling the return of the Ryukyu Islands to Japan by 1972. The U.S. Department of State later also clarified that the DSI would be included in this move, although they did simultaneously stress that territorial conflicts should be jointly solved by all parties. Minor events also happened, like a Taiwanese fishing vessel approaching the DSI stopped by Japanese authorities (Wang 2009: 131). Therefore, the main reason for the creation of the movement was the dissatisfaction of Chinese foreign students on the US “returning policy”.

The first *Baodiao Action Committee* was founded at Princeton University in 1970, publishing a pamphlet that was soon spread amongst Chinese university diaspora. Similar committees in New York and many other places were formed. On January 29, Baodiao activists demonstrated in front of the United Nations Office, claiming to defend the Diaoyu Islands (“*Baowei Diaoyu dao!*” “保卫钓鱼岛!”; Liu 2012). The New York Committee published the *Baodiao Manifesto* on January 30, 1971, postulating “opposition to the revival of Japanese Militarism, determination to safeguard Chinese sovereignty of the Diaoyutai Islands, opposition to the American support of Japan’s claim, opposition to any joint development in the area before

³⁷ Some different opinions on the origin of the movement are also discussed in Zhang 2013: 83.

Chinese sovereignty on the Islands is recognized” (cited in Wang 2009: 131). Committees continued to spread, seven cities hosted demonstrations in the same month, later a second round happened in April when the US and Japan were about to sign the agreement (ibid: 131f.).

The demonstrators tried to pressure the KMT government on Taiwan (at this time the legitimate China in the world) to take a stronger stance, but they failed with these ambitions. When the PRC soon after normalized its relations with the US, activists became torn between the PRC and Taiwan (and unsure who should be defending sovereignty of the islands), and some actually went to meet Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai (ibid). Furthermore, the Baodiao Movement actually transcended to Hong Kong, where the *Hong Kong Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyu Islands* (*Xianggang Baowei Diaoyudao Xingdong Weiyuanhui* 香港保卫钓鱼岛行动委员会) was formed, a group that staged an eventually police-suppressed protest on July 7, 1971 (Liu 2012: 24). The movement soon lost its steam, however, and the 1970/71 height remained the last one for a long time.

Since 1990s: Second Wave and Expansion of the Movement

While the exact events of the following conflict peaks (1990-2012) are subject of the following empirical chapters, some short facts demonstrating the extension of the Baodiao Movement since the 1990s are presented here. While the 1980s did see anti-Japanese protests in mainland China, it was not related to the DSI dispute, and the Baodiao Movement did not yet manifest in the PRC. In 1990 and 1996, Japanese activists went to the islands to erect lighthouses. Their actions triggered reactions from baodiao activists on both occasions, but mainly outside the PRC. 1990 saw reactions in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, and in 1996, they jointly planned their first boat tour to the DSI. The tour became possible thanks to the (re-)establishment of the *Hong Kong Action Committee for Defending the [Diaoyu] Islands* (*Xianggang Baodiao Xingdong Weiyuanhui*; 香港保钓行动委员会) in 1996. As for mainland China, the CFDD was founded as a reaction to the 1996 Hong Kong boat campaign – but the relationship with the communist state proved to be very difficult in the first years of the organization, as Tong Zeng notes (Si 2012: 22).

The movement’s spillover to China has still proven to be a milestone, though. Consequently, the first boat tour by activists from Chinese mainland took place in 2004. At this point, “the Baodiao Movement became a common undertaking for all ethnic Chinese” (“保钓运动已成为华人圈的共同事业”; Ma 2012: 4). Even further internationalization efforts of

baodiao activist organizations has been called a key for the future of the movement (Shi 2010), and some indicators suggest this desire has started to be transformed into concrete action: The *World Chinese Association for Defending the Diaoyu Islands* (*Shijie Huaren Baodiao Lianmeng*; 世界华人保钓联盟) was founded in 2011, and the 2012 Diaoyu boat tour was launched after the World Association had just met (Liu 2012). In this sense, the second wave of the movement first expanded its actions from Hong Kong to the Chinese mainland and Taiwan. Then, in a second step, the movement has also become more unified in its organizational structure, coordinating actions on an international level closer than before.

As for the movement's actions, organizing demonstrations and boat tours as their main operations are most frequently described in the literature. Boat tours organized by activists only started in the second wave of the movement, although fishing vessels had also contributed to the conflict in the 1970s, as stated. The articles in Chinese language focus on demonstrations for the first wave, but on boat activism for the second wave. As for the 1990s and 2000s, statements on how the activists were involved with anti-Japanese protest remain relatively sparse or are even completely absent in Chinese sources – even if the movement has been acknowledged to have reached the people's hearts (Si 2012). This scarcity of information is not so apparent in English academic literature, where the activists' actions are more directly referred to in connection to anti-Japanese protest (such as in Reilly 2014). Furthermore, baodiao organizations also plan and carry out a lot of additional activities, especially on (war) memorial days. Memorial activities were not regularly cited in academic texts, but became clear in the Ke Hua interview (Shi 2010) and on the activists' websites (see next section). A closer look at the PRC-based CFDD, but also online activists, in the next section will enable to map the activists more precisely.

Present-Day PRC: The China Federation for Defending the Diaoyu Islands (CFDD)

The CFDD website³⁸ contains a long section with a self-introduction, and their goals can be summed up by the following quote from there:

“To the greatest extent in all force, declaring to the common people the actual facts about the issue of the Japanese government stealing and occupying the Diaoyu Islands, clearly explain our Chinese children this solemn standpoint; countering Japanese despicable behavior to falsify (its) invasion history and to cover up war crimes, uniting forces in all righteousness to defend the Diaoyu Islands.” (“尽一切力量，

³⁸ The website is also mentioned in the references (CFDD 2007), the direct link to the main site is: <http://www.cfdd.org.cn/> (tracked: October 9, 2014). Furthermore, the World Association mentioned before can be reached here: <http://www.wcaddl.org/portal.php> (tracked: October 9, 2014).

对世人宣解日本政府窃占钓鱼岛问题之真相，阐明我中华儿女之严正立场；反击日本篡改侵华历史、掩盖战争罪行之卑劣行径，团结一切正义力量保卫钓鱼岛。”；CFDD 2007）。

The quote reveals quite a bit about the psychology behind the Baodiao Movement. The first paragraph reflects a deep sense of grievance over perceived injustice at Japanese hands. The activists express this critique with strong words, especially aiming at children and at the next generation that did not experience war at first hand. Furthermore, besides “stealing” the territory, contemporary Japanese attempts to cover up their imperial past are criticized. Thus, the quote shows dissatisfaction not only with historical issues and their treatment, but also with the resulting present political reality. Determination to display agency and action with all possible efforts is also clearly expressed.

After introducing important historical events in the federation’s history, the document goes on to introduce the federation’s members. 21 individuals are listed by name, plus chair (*huizhang* 会长) Tong Zeng. There are also some group members (*tuanti huiyuan* 团体会员), most seem to be from private business, likely sponsoring the federation financially (*ibid*). Amongst sponsors are the *Patriots Alliance Network* (covered below - *Aiguo zhe Tongmeng Wang* 爱国者同盟网), the *Anti-Japan Goods Alliance Network* (*Fanri Huo Lianmeng Wang*³⁹ 反日货联盟网), and the *918 Patriot Network* (*18 Sep Aiguo Wang* 918 爱国网⁴⁰). The latter organization runs a website as well, focusing on Japanese war crimes, and many user posts seem to express strong feelings and even hate towards Japan on this site.⁴¹ The federation’s manifesto (*xuanyan* 宣言) follows in the document, adopted at a 2003 Xiamen Conference, and it includes a couple of passages worth quoting:

“Peacefully resolve issues left over from the war (...) Ensure territorial integrity of China, promote justice, defend the Diaoyu Islands, and reach this goal respecting all law regulations and obligations of this place” (“和平解决战争遗留问题(。。。)维护中华领土之完整，弘扬正义，保卫钓鱼岛，并为达此目的尊重各所在地法律之规定及义务。”; *ibid*).

Besides pointing to Japanese war crimes, these quotes show that the federations still envision a peaceful solution of the conflict, thereby respecting relevant laws in their operations. Two principles for their work are explicitly mentioned: uniting the Chinese people, and territorial sovereignty over the DSI (*ibid*). As a PRC organization, the first principle includes the notion that mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong are all inseparable parts of China, and people will – according to the federation – unite themselves in order to strive for sovereignty over the DSI.

³⁹ No exact English translation for the organization’s name was found.

⁴⁰ No exact English translation for the organization’s name was found.

⁴¹ Some examples can be traced here: <http://www.china918.net/en/wfr/wfr01.htm>.

Another quote illustrates the federation's adversaries are Japanese right-wing forces and the Japanese government, while the activists welcome everyone in China who is willing to participate in the organization – explicitly including the government in this call.

“Our actions therefore counterattack the crime of Japanese right-wing forces and the government to falsify history and to occupy the Diaoyu Islands. (...) We welcome the government, organizations and individuals who are capable to promote our objectives.” (“我们之行为乃在反击日本右翼势力及政府之篡改历史、侵占钓鱼岛之罪行。（。。。）我们欢迎政府、组织、个人能促进我们的宗旨。”; *ibid*)

Last, the manifesto also states the principle of responsibility for mutual help (*huzhu zhi ze* 互助之责; *ibid*). The federation's actions (especially boat tours) can be dangerous, and mutual responsibility in case of death or physical injuries seeks to balance against these dangers (*ibid*).

The website is structured into several sub-categories, resembling both the historical dimension as well as its focus on civic action. Besides introducing the federation (*guanyu lianhe hui* 关于联合会), the two main areas of operation have separate sub-sections called “Defend the Diaoyu Islands” (*baowei Diaoyudao* 保卫钓鱼岛) and “Patriotic Activities” (*aiguo huodong* 爱国活动; *ibid*). Further sub-sections are headlined “Never Forget National Humiliation” (*wu wang guochi* 勿忘国耻), “Patriotic Poems” (*aiguo shishi* 爱国史诗), and “Patriotic Theory” (*aiguo lilun* 爱国理论; *ibid*).

Thus, the Federation takes up some core elements of the *Patriotic Education Campaign*, in particular the *victimization* image in the form of “national humiliation”. The activists also label their own activities as “patriotic”, which indeed confirms the expectation that the activist group tries to label their actions in accordance with official grand policies. The sub-sections provide much material on all possible matters, including Japanese scientists supporting the Chinese sovereignty claim (*ibid*). Past protest material is also widely published on the website, including open letters, announcements for protests in front of the Japanese embassy, amongst others (*ibid*).

The CFDD also uses QQ, MSN, and has its own Weibo account.⁴² Postings are obviously much more frequent in times of conflict peaks, as for example in 2012. The Weibo account has last been used in April 2014, though, reflecting the earlier claim that social media is primarily an important communication tool in crisis. When activists are willing to organize

⁴² Available at:

http://www.weibo.com/p/1005051795077170/weibo?from=page_100505_home&wvr=5.1&mod=weibomore#_1oginLayer_1409930536658.

larger activities, and communicate to a wider popular audience beyond the core members of the organization, the internet gains in importance for activist communication.

Present-Day PRC: Patriots Alliance Network (PAN; Aiguozhe Tongmeng Wang)

The PAN is closely associated with the *CFDD*. The PAN is not just a group member of the Federation, but a lot of joint efforts have been undertaken in the past, making the PAN an integral part of the Baodiao Movement. The PAN's web forum can be reached at <http://www.1931-918.com/forum.php>, signaling that September 18 is a crucial date for the organization – the day where Japan provoked the Mukden Incident in Manchuria, starting point to the Japanese imperialist conquest and action in China in the 1930s. The website “publishes, among other information, latest news, major (past and future) events, announcement, forums, photos, essays, historical facts, and VIP pages” (Tai 2006: 283). The founders of the website, according to Tai, have a shared view and anti-Japanese sentiment (*ibid*). Just like the *CFDD*, the PAN has been key to past anti-Japanese outbursts in China. The PAN's role has included spreading news about online petitions to urge the Chinese government against the Japanese UN Security Council Seat bid (*ibid*), against Japanese high-speed rail technology, demanding war compensation (Weiss 2014: 129), raising money for Diaoyu boat activism (*ibid*), and last but not least providing online forums for extensive talk on Chinese suffering at Japanese cost. The latter also resembles the regime's historical myths, and the organization unsurprisingly labels themselves as “patriotic”, too. It seems that the PAN's agenda is slightly broader than those of the Diaoyu-related organizations though. For instance, the PAN also organizes activities concerning reunification with Taiwan, and the website was one of ten allowed by the authorities to do propaganda and signature campaigns before the 2004 Taiwan elections (*ibid*: 236f.). At other times, the website has been closed. Various internet posts and complaints can be found that ask why the PAN is not accessible.⁴³ Closing down the website has usually been related to sensitive memorial days or a high tide in Sino-Japanese conflict. In this sense, the PAN is one of many focal online destinations for letting off anti-Japanese steam, but also to discuss and organize concrete action, with the government obviously always taking a close look at these actions and their potential consequences.

⁴³ For example: <http://zhidao.baidu.com/question/185149724.html> (tracked: October 14, 2014). Weiss (2014: 130, 149, 162, 229f.) also notes about various instances of governmental monitoring against the PAN website.

4.3 Some General Findings on the Activists' Attitude and Action

Although the thesis focuses on different peaks in the DSI conflict to explain its *change over time*, some general remarks are useful in order to better understand the activists' mindset. Very helpful in this regard – amongst the relatively sparse Chinese material – have been two Chinese journals with long in-depth interviews of Tong Zeng and Ke Hua, who chair(ed)⁴⁴ the mainland and Hong Kong Baodiao Movement organizations respectively. This section will deal with the following topics: the transnational character of the movement, economic components of activism, relationship between activists and the authorities, mutual influence between overall Sino-Japanese relations and Chinese domestic government-activist relations, the general attitude of the activists towards Japan, and lastly differences between Hong Kong and mainland Chinese sources on the DSI conflict.

Transnational Character of the Movement

Ke Hua pointed to the importance of networking between the different Diaoyu movements in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Shi 2010: 61). In one sense, the 1970 Baodiao Movement can already be seen as transnational, because the protests in the US back then did indeed spillover to Hong Kong. Still, baodiao activism soon lost its momentum after that, and the creation of a truly sustainable transnational movement in the 1970s never really manifested. Besides Hong Kong, there was even less of a chance for the movement to reach the PRC, as Ke stresses: The first protests happened at the heights of the Cultural Revolution, prior to rapprochement between the US and China, and the PRC's priorities were not on the DSI dispute at all (Shi 2010: 61).

As for the present, Ke notes that nowadays, broad sections amongst Hong Kong and Taiwanese young people are depoliticized, making it quite difficult to win over new activists (ibid). As for mainland China, he states that free accessibility of information is still not on the same level as in Hong Kong (ibid). Yet, Tong Zeng (who has been familiar with the DSI dispute since 1990) mentions that he was deeply impressed after the death of Hong Kong baodiao activist Chan Yuk-cheung (David Chan) in 1996.⁴⁵ This experience led Tong to found the CFDD (Si 2012: 22). As Tong is the currently most important baodiao activist in mainland China, his deep impression in 1996 actually resembles Ke's anticipated spillover effect, having lead Tong to begin organized baodiao activity in the PRC after 1996. Still, the aforementioned

⁴⁴ Tong Zeng has been head of the CFDD since 2004. Ke Hua served as the chair of the *Hong Kong Diaoyu Action Committee*, being a participant of DSI boat tours four times himself.

⁴⁵ As for the 1996 DSI conflict peak, see chapter 4.5.

World Chinese Association for Defending the Diaoyu Islands was only founded in 2011, and jointly planned boat operations by a transnational organization with participants from mainland and China and Hong Kong first happened in 2012. In this sense, the organized Baodiao Movement itself only recently became truly “more” pan-Chinese, even if baodiao actions have always had transnational effects.

Concerning transnationality, sources from the Chinese mainland somewhat differ in tone. Two arguments are stressed: First, the pure fact that the Baodiao Movement finally spilled over to mainland China in the early 21st century has been called a stepping stone, now being a “common undertaking” (*gongtong shiye* 共同事业; Ma 2012: 21) for all Chinese. The attributed importance obviously relies on the assumption that the PRC is the most important “Chinese” actor in the conflict (and not the Taiwanese government, for example). Second, ethnicity is a constant feature in texts with PRC origin. The word “Chinese men“ (*huaren* 华人) is mentioned repeatedly, but the meaning of *huaren* extends over national boundaries, indicating that to reclaim the DSI, a joint pan-Chinese effort is required – under PRC leadership. Also, reunification between mainland China and Taiwan is seen as intertwined with solving the DSI conflict. In this reading, only a strong and unified China possesses the authority to succeed in reclaiming the disputed islands (also see further sections).

Economic Components of Activism

Political Activism requires substantial financial capabilities. A lot of the money for activism actions are raised through funding, which certainly has proven to be a tough task for the baodiao organizations in mainland China and Hong Kong. As stated, there are some group members in the CFDD, assumingly giving the organization core financial support. Boat expeditions are expensive, though, and the activists did successfully run for additional money in 2004 and 2012 online campaigns.⁴⁶ There have also been setbacks that have delayed boat rides, as Ke confirms:

„In case we had economic support, we would go to the Diaoyu Islands each and every year to proclaim sovereignty“ (如果有经济支撑, 每年都要去钓鱼岛宣示主权。”; Shi 2010: 62).

External events such as the financial crisis also impacted on the organizations. The Hong Kong activists had to sell one of their two boats as a result (ibid). The interviews also come across as if many of the leading activists invested a substantial part of their own financial resources into the movement.

⁴⁶ Also see section 4.6 and 4.7 for more details.

Relationship between Activists and Authorities

The theoretical chapter already elaborated that the relationship between activist groups and the Chinese government is by no means easy, and the following empirical sections will further exemplify their delicate relationship. Some interesting quotes not related to one specific conflict peak are of interest to illustrate this. As elaborated, activists have *some* scope to operate, but it is not unlimited. While this prediction had to be expected for political conditions in the PRC, it also stays true for Hong Kong. Ke Hua in his interview states in detail how difficult it proved to realize a planned trip to the Diaoyu Islands in May 2009. Hong Kong's *Maritime Affairs Office* (*haishi chu*; 海事处) first repeatedly delayed approval for setting off, citing insufficient fire prevention and fire-fighting equipment as a reason (ibid: 62). When the activists declared they wanted to go fishing around the Diaoyu Islands, authorities replied: "You are not fishermen" ("你们不是渔民"; ibid). At the end, the officials became very direct as to why they would not allow the activists to set off:

"The Official Maritime Affairs Office Official said: We know you would like to go to the Diaoyu Islands, but there are Japanese military ships out there, we want to ensure your safety, and cannot allow you to go" ("海事处官员说: 我们知道你们是要去钓鱼岛, 但外面有日本军船, 我们要保证你们的安全, 不能放你们出去。"; ibid).

In reality, authorities likely had to carry out a directive from higher political (mainland) levels – especially as a court appeal attempted by the activist group got delayed multiple times, too (ibid: 60). For 2012, Legislative assembly member Leung Kwok-hun even directly admitted that letting off activists was a mainland and not a Hong Kong decision (Weiss 2014: 200). Tong Zeng stated similar difficulties for mainland boat operations as well:

"We notified the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before activists attempted three previous voyages, but they notified Japan, asking them to ensure their safety. This time, we didn't tell the ministry." (South China Morning Post 2004).

Tong says that he sees baodiao activism as "acting in concert" (*peihe* 配合) with the government, attributing his organization an echoing (*huying* 呼应) function (Si 2012: 25). This assessment is true in a way because the activists pursue the same diplomatic goal as the government – reclaiming the DSI. Still, in political reality the activists are trying to show agency, with actions that can become diplomatic threats to the government. In this sense, "acting in concert" can sometimes prove to be difficult and a complicated relationship, just like the behavior of the *Maritime Affairs Office* exemplifies.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The evolvement over time in the relationship between activists and the authorities in the PRC will further be made clear in the empirical case studies. Changes have occurred.

Also, while the activist organizations and the government fundamentally share the same political positions – the DSI are China’s “innate territory”, with Japan “illegally occupying” the Islands – the activists have shown dissatisfaction with the degree of the government’s assertiveness in the conflict. In 2009, Tong complained that “the central government’s emphasis on ownership over the islands is not enough” (South China Morning Post 2004). Another activist (Feng Jinhua) told reporters that “the Chinese government must exercise real administration of the islands in establishing its sovereignty claims” (Qingnian Cankao 2004). The activists have also argued in favor of developing the islands for tourism, which the government has rejected. Former PLA soldier Zhang Likun stated: “It’s really nonsense. Why can’t we develop our own territory?” (South China Morning Post 2004b).

On the reverse, the government fears that nationalist protest can turn against the government itself. This fear is best exemplified with the 2010 DSI boat collision incident, where a Chinese captain and his team were captured, only to be released after days of diplomatic crisis. A CFDD member was called to “drink tea” (meaning to be interrogated), he was told that repression of demonstrations by activists is not the goal of the government, they rather feared that external forces might try to take advantage of the situation (Weiss 2014: 172f.). Artist Ai Weiwei, for instance, had tweeted that he would take part in anti-Japanese demonstrations if he could thereby also criticize the Chinese government (ibid). CFDD members still managed to stage a demonstration at the Foreign Ministry on September 3, criticizing that East China Sea gas talks were supposed to be continued, which would be a “surrender of sovereignty and national humiliation” (*sang quan ru guo* 丧权辱国; ibid). In this sense, nationalist activists and especially the aforementioned organizations seem to be regarded as genuine defenders of Chinese national sovereignty by the state. Activists apparently are not seen as a threat to the rule of the government per se, even if they sometimes criticize the government (as seen above). Tong Zeng himself affirms such a “regime-friendly” position in the three basic principles for his organization:

“First, do not go onto the streets and cause trouble; second, do not go to universities to hold speeches and incite students; third, in no way connect with outside anti-government organizations.” (“一，不上街闹事；二，不到大学演讲，煽动学生；三，绝不和境外反政府组织联系。”; Huanqiu Huaren 2014).

Thus, the nationalist activist groups *can* operate, but the authorities have to carefully consider the scope, because certain actions of the group can activate and mobilize broader masses of people. Mass demonstrations are the real source of concern for the political leaders, as amongst these people there might be some with a more radical opinion, dissatisfaction with the

government et cetera. According to Weiss, that is why the government fears activists such as Tong Zeng might unite with young activists or students that seek to overturn domestic political rule (Weiss 2014: 173).

Mutual Influence between Overall Sino-Japanese Relations and Chinese Domestic Government-Activist Relations

The theoretical chapter claimed that Chinese activists operate in a society with widening spaces for civic action. While this widening space since the 1990s is a true general trend, it is too easy to assume a totally linear development, where activists would be able to operate increasingly freely over time, no matter what political conditions were like. The empirical chapters will show that the development of civil society, the utilization of the internet, diversification of Chinese media coverage and other factors have indeed increasingly facilitated activism. Still, there are constraining factors in the PRC, an authoritarian system with suppression capabilities, and the Chinese state has used those capabilities even when the PRC was already considered to be more “open” than before. Jessica Weiss’ *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China’s Foreign Relations* (2014) exemplifies this for the period 2006-2010: Back then, a constraining factor for Chinese activists had been the overall improvement in Sino-Japanese political relations, sometimes referred to as a period of “*warm spring*” in media reports. Activists still shared the fundamental goal with the government to gain sovereignty on the DSI, but Chinese authorities acted relatively “softly” on the matter towards Japan in the late 2000s.

Weiss (2014: 130, 149, 162f.) identifies several empirical examples for her claim: In 2006, the PAN was shut down temporarily; in 2007, activists sailed from Fujian Province to the DSI, but authorities warned the Japanese Coast Guard in advance. When they returned to China, activists were interrogated and had to sign papers not to undertake another journey; in 2008, improved bilateral ties led to the possibility of talks on joint gas development between China and Japan. The CFDD publicly demonstrated against this move, publishing an open letter that warned of „strong reaction among the Chinese public“. Still, the letter was soon instructed to be taken down, or the website would be shut down by authorities.

In this sense, activists were not completely hindered in their civic actions, they utilized all available tools they had – much more than they had ten years earlier, as will be shown. Still, at the time being, the Chinese government had a strong interest not to risk deteriorating relations with Japan, and the DSI dispute was more secondary in this period, as other preferences were considered to be more important. While containment of activists’ actions will also be visible in

the empirical sections for 2004 and 2012, governmental interference occurred much sooner in the years in between. Interesting enough, Tong Zeng's warning (cited above) of a strong reaction from the Chinese people indicates that the government must now be very careful *when* to suppress, as it fears nothing more than nationalist protest that turns into strong domestic criticism, but quick suppression when not taking a clear enough stance on the DSI issue might also be as dangerous. Also, when Sino-Japanese relations were at a new low point only a couple of years later, such early containment was neither possible nor desired, and it would not have fit with overall developments in Sino-Japanese relations, as the 2012 analysis will show.

The General Attitude of the Activists towards Japan, and the Influence of Historical Myths
When preparing the topic of the thesis, one always expects certain findings. It is especially the attitude of activist groups towards Japan that have surprised me in multiple regards.

First and foremost, a more aggressive rhetoric towards Japan in the activist group statements was among the expectations I had. This included the notion that civic organizations (like activist groups) pursuing a sectorial goal would probably be more radical in their communication than governmental officials. I was not sure whether the activist groups would encourage a military conquest of the DSI, or whether their statements would take an over-condemning nationalistic tone towards Japan. Both did not prove to be true. As for solving the DSI dispute, the activists (at least today) always stress the need for a diplomatic solution of the conflict. Ke explicitly draws the horrifying scenario of a maritime military conflict:

„Presently (at) this location, in case your military ships will set off, then we also put military ships there, both sides facing each other is not good.“ (“目前这个地方，你们军船要离开，不然我们也放军船在那里，双方对峙也不好了。”; Shi 2010: 62).

As for Anti-Japanese demonstrations in Mainland China (2004, 2012), the activist groups actively participated and organized activities (see relevant sections). Still, the CFDD in 2012 expressed their expectation on Weibo that Chinese citizens should stay rational in protest and not harm any Japanese physically (see section 4.8). A key finding for the empirical sections will be that activists are more moderate than some other participants of anti-Japanese demonstrations. When the DSI dispute was at a height again in both 2004 and 2012, claims to boycott Japanese goods quickly appeared within Chinese society. Again, Ke Hua expresses clearly that such a boycott would not make much sense at all, as Japanese products would be of good quality (Shi 2010: 61).

Also, while evidence of historical myths – using the past for the purpose of the present – were found (see next section), Ke says that observing a revival of imperialism (*junguozhuyi fuxing* 军国主义复兴) in Japan would be a clear overstatement. He claims that the Japanese government is indeed the main adversary for activists in the conflict, yet stresses today’s Japanese politicians are not of the same caliber like during World War II (ibid: 62). Furthermore, according to Ke, ordinary Japanese usually would have a neutral opinion on most topics and issues, just in the DSI dispute they were following a „distant opinion compared to us“ (“与我们的想法的距离“; ibid: 61) – even if that still means that any other than “his” opinion in the DSI conflict would be irrational in nature. One has to bear in mind, however, that Ke Hua is Hong Kong-based and therefore probably can be expected to have a more balanced opinion than counterparts in mainland China. Indeed, mainland-based Tong Zeng in 2014 indeed accused Japanese politics of falling back into the old times (Huanqiu Huaren 2014).

However, the aforementioned relatively favorable view of current Japan as a whole is contrasted with a clear-cut negative view on Japan’s past. The very historical myths (circling around Japanese war crimes) that were presented in the previous chapters can be traced within the baodiao organizations in multiple ways. First and foremost, the CFDD’s own website introduction lists specific myth-related aims:

“To counter Japanese despicable behavior to falsify (its) invasion history, and covering up war crimes.”
 (“反击日本篡改侵华历史、掩盖战争罪行之卑劣行径”; CFDD 2007).

The website also has its own sub-section and article, going into detail to what is referred to by the war crimes and how Japan deals with it from the activists’ perspective.

Second, Tong Zeng not only chairs the CFDD, he also leads the *Chinese Association for Claiming Compensation from Japan*, an organization with considerable media presence, too (Japan Times 2014). Having spent his whole life as a history activist, this fact about Tong Zeng is probably not too surprising. Still, history-related aims such as quoted above could not have been formulated in mainland China before the historical myths were changed to a *victimization* image, focusing on Chinese suffering at the hands of imperial foes, and Japan in particular. There is even more reference to the *Patriotic Education Campaign* when looking at the organization’s website tabs: Two separate tabs focus on patriotism activities (*aiguo huodong* 爱国活动) and patriotism theory (*aiguo lilun* 爱国理论). Thus, the organization is trying to operate in the discursive space that the government’s history politics reforms profoundly opened up. Ke Hua (for Hong Kong) similarly stresses the importance of organizing activities on memorial days etc., to further raise awareness about history issues (Shi 2010).

Last, Ke Hua in detail discusses the question why their baodiao organization is involved in DSI-related activism, but not active in other Chinese territorial conflicts like in the South China Sea:

“This is not just a territorial issue, it is also an issue of justice. Foremost, the Japanese military invasion war was a war of injustice, Chinese people paid with so many lives and properties! Who are the harmed people of this war? Why does the defeated nation [Japan] still use weapons? Where have you seen a defeated nation turn around its head, even occupying territory of the winning nation [China]?” (“不单单是注重领土的问题，还是个公义的问题。首先，日军侵华战争的是一场不义战争，中国人配上了多少生命，财产！战争受害者是谁？战败国为什么还要用武力？哪有见过战败国回头还要占领土胜国的土地的？”；ibid: 61).

Furthermore, he says:

“If another state had stationed its troops on the whole territory of China, could you accept that? If Great Britain had stationed its troops in Tibet, could you accept that? The actual situation is that Japanese troops have been stationed in our ‘innate territory’ for a long time, how can you explain this?” (“如果别的国家在中国整个地方驻有一支军队，你能接受吗？如果英国佬在西藏驻军，你能接受吗？实际情况是：在我们这个‘固有的领土’，现在长期有日本的军队驻扎，这怎么解释？”；ibid).

In other words, the activist groups are operating because the DSI conflict to them is not just a territorial issue. From their perspective, it is rather about feeling justified to commit oneself for a good cause, with a strong emotional component driving the activists for action. Thus, the change of historical myths in China have had a huge impact – not just on public opinion, but also on organized baodiao activism, because it has made these innate views (that probably existed before) politically acceptable.

Rhetorical Differences between Western, Hong Kong and Mainland DSI Material

Hong Kong-based Ke in his interview also mentions that the Chinese mainland opinion on Japan tends to be one-sided (*danchun* 单纯; ibid). Indeed, going through mainland-Chinese research and articles, a different, more assertive tone was frequently present. When introducing the conflict item, one mainland Chinese research article right at the beginning expresses the straightforward message that Japan is “illegally occupying our Diaoyu Islands and its affiliated islands” (“非法侵占我钓鱼岛及其附属岛屿”; Liu 2012: 24). A more thorough discussion on relevant arguments why the DSI are claimed to belong to Japan or China usually does not take place, while such a more balanced and neutral approach was chosen in English publications. Instead, both academics and governmental statements express the factual view that the DSI are China’s “inherent territory” (*guyou lingtu* 固有领土), usually not going into detail why this is the case. At the same time, frequent usage of quotation marks seems to intend a de-

legitimization of Japanese sovereignty claims.⁴⁸ Also, similarly clear distinctions that Ke Hua drew between the Japanese government in World War II and today were usually not found in mainland texts. Rather, lines between the Japanese government and activists often become blurred in mainland sources. As a matter of fact, Japanese activists such as the *Japan Youth Federation* frequently went to the islands to erect lighthouses, but some texts sound like the Japanese government was actively provoking and supporting these actions:

“Starting in the 90s of the last century, Japan’s actions on the Diaoyu Islands have started to become more openly flagrant. The Japanese side caused conflict on the Diaoyu Islands, erected temples, planted lighthouses on the islands, and sent out bunches of military ships to stop Chinese citizens to land on the islands” (“上世纪 90 年代后期以来，日本在钓鱼岛的活动开始明目张胆。日本方面在钓鱼岛制造事端，在钓上建神社，树灯塔，出动大批军舰阻止中国公民登岛。”；Dong 2004: 13).

Notably, in this reading, a lack of separation exists between civic Japanese actions (like activism) and coastal guard ships that indeed are operating for the state. Plus, emphasizing that Chinese *citizens* were denied their right to land on the islands while pointing to “Japan” *as a whole* (as the source for trouble) does not seem to be accidental. The quoted statement is not a singular one going through the Chinese material, as another round-up article on the stance of research in the DSI conflict shows:

“The popular Diaoyu Movement experienced a couple of high tides in 1970-1972, 1990, 1996, 2003-2004 and 2010, the emergence of these high tides is a reaction to Japanese governmental and “right-wing” forces that in the Diaoyu conflict have violated Chinese territorial sovereignty” (“民间保钓运动在 1970—1972、1990、1996、2003—2004、2010 年之后出现几次高潮，这些高潮的出现都是对日本政府、日本“右翼”势力在钓鱼岛问题上侵犯中国领土主权的回应。”；Zhang 2013: 84).

Here, both the government and right-wing groups are separately mentioned, but presented to be acting in absolute unity to repeatedly provoke conflict with China. Actual political reality in Japan is obviously much more complex, as the case studies will exemplify. Such a lack of diversification is not a unique feature of the DSI conflict though – many observers have noted that Chinese perception of foreign action goes through some kind of a “Chinese domestic filter”, usually blurring the lines between official governmental and civic/private action, often condensed to phrases such as “the French”, “the Japanese” etc.⁴⁹

Also, there is lack of sound theoretical work on the DSI conflict in Chinese language. I found one text substantially dealing with theories of social science in relation to the DSI dispute (Yang 2013). Most articles provided an overview on history and growth of the movement, reminding of anniversary publications (with headlines like “*The Forty Years of the Baodiao*”

⁴⁸ Such as stating Japan’s “sovereignty” (*Riben “zhuquan”*; 日本“主权”) et cetera.

⁴⁹ Besides academic references, this was also stated explicitly in a public hearing in Tuebingen by Prof. Dr. Thomas Heberer, February 2012, with the author of this thesis present.

Movement” – “保钓运动这四十年” in Ma 2012).

One last important difference between Western and Chinese texts lies in the reference of Taiwan. Entire academic Chinese texts exist on this topic, where solving the DSI puzzle is directly related to reunification with Taiwan (Lu 2009). Other scholars analyze obstacles to Sino-Taiwanese cooperation in the DSI issue (Xu 2012). As mentioned before, the impression is given that in order to solve the DSI conflict, a “strong China” is needed, only to be achieved through reunification with Taiwan first.

4.4 Key Questions for Analyzing the Conflict Peaks

For the following empirical chapters, a couple of key questions listed here should guide the reader through each conflict peak:

- What were the most important events in each relevant conflict peak? Who provoked the conflict, how did it surge, and when was it de-escalated?
- Were activists involved at any stage in the conflict peak? Were they capable to conduct actions, or even mobilize, and if yes, how did they do so? Did they do so offline or online? Where (PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong) did activism take place?
- What arguments did activists use when trying to mobilize? Did historical myths play a role? How can the relationship between government and activists be described in the relevant peak?
- Did public protests happen? Is it possible to determine whether activists have directly or indirectly contributed to public protest? Did the government react tolerant or repressive? Is it possible to even show a certain degree of influence on authoritarian leaders in the PRC?

The conclusion will come back to these questions and show that *change over time* in the DSI conflict can be attributed to China’s domestic level and the growing role of political activism.

4.5 The 1990 Peak

Sequence of Events

The most important sources for this section are Downs/Saunders (1998/9: 127-131), Bong (2002), and Koo (2009: 219ff.). Some of the main Chinese sources of the thesis (like Ma 2012 and Liu 2012) do not even cover the 1990 peak, which indeed proved to be a rather minor one

in the end. Still, 1990 marked the first time since the 1970s that the DSI dispute truly affected Sino-Japanese relations. The two countries were not on the easiest terms anyways, since the Tian'anmen Massacre of 1989 had largely isolated the PRC on the international level. Japan initially also upheld sanctions against China, including a cut of official development aid, loans and other boycotts – the Group of Seven (G7) that included Japan had decided so as well (Downs/Saunders 1998/99: 128). Yet, Japan was the first among major powers to unilaterally reconcile with China soon after, and a loan agreement in November 1990 signaled Japan's goodwill. The DSI crisis occurred before this agreement, and it has been argued that the prospect of the agreement for the then-isolated PRC gave diplomatic leverage to Japan during the 1990 conflict peak (ibid).

The crisis broke out on September 29, when the Japanese *Maritime Safety Agency* considered recognizing a lighthouse built in 1978 as an “official navigation mark” (ibid). The lighthouse had been repaired a year before by the aforementioned *Japan Youth Federation* activists (ibid). When the Japanese activists pressed and urged their government to approve their wish, the Taiwanese government officially protested against this move, insisting it would not tolerate violation of Chinese sovereignty (Chung 2004: 42). Notably, the PRC stayed very calm on the matter, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs only commenting on October 18 that the Japanese government should restrict ultra-nationalist activities (Downs/Saunders 1998/99: 129). Taiwan's reactions by comparison were stronger, the cabinet also held an unscheduled meeting after Taiwanese activists were caught by Japanese maritime forces on October 21. The cabinet strongly protested against Japan's move, affirmed Taiwan's sovereignty claim, but also stressed the need for a solution of the conflict by diplomatic means (ibid).

At the same time, Hong Kong saw anti-Japanese demonstrations (ibid). The CCP did everything possible to avoid similar outbreaks in mainland China, fearing a development that “public anger towards the lighthouse incident (...) [might be] translating into regime disapproval” (Bong 2002: 35-38). This kind of containment strategy only one year after Tian'anmen is probably not too surprising. Compared to later internet eras, suppression was much easier to achieve: Measures included a blackout of oversea coverage on the DSI dispute in mainland China, prohibition of planned student rallies at universities, and increasing security personnel simultaneously (Downs/Saunders 1998/99: 130). The regime feared that students “with ulterior motives might exploit anti-Japanese sentiment” (ibid). Such containment did not come without protest, however. Students criticized that loans were prioritized over the government's own rhetoric and standpoint, with handbills circulating “We want the Diaoyu Islands, not Yen”

(quoted in *ibid*: 131f.). What is referred to as “living up to the rhetoric” here likely reflects that students were not permitted to show patriotism – a core component of what the regime wanted to foster amongst students.

In this sense, the Chinese government never wanted to provoke an escalation of the DSI conflict in 1990. Reentering the international community was the primary goal at the time being, and overall Sino-Japanese relations were considered very important in this regard, as Japan was the first major country to appease Beijing after 1989. An internal circular to party cadres during the crisis confirms this interpretation (*ibid*: 131). Tokyo also deescalated its rhetoric, Prime Minister Kaifu promised a “cautious attitude” (23 October 1990; *ibid*: 129), and in April 1991, the Japanese government finally rejected the lighthouse application (Bong 2002: 30).

The Role of Activism

Activism did play a role in the DSI dispute of 1990, but not much on the Chinese side. Activism by the *Japanese Youth League* was pivotal in the 1990 peak, putting the Japanese government in an uncomfortable position, as Japan sees itself as the rightful owner of the islands, denying that a sovereignty issue even exists. In this sense, the activists’ application for official recognition should not bother the government so much. It still does, however, because Japan knows about the possible negative consequences in bilateral relations with China if it was to ratify the application.

Japanese activists therefore were responsible for the 1990 conflict peak, but there is hardly any evidence that an organized form of Chinese activism already existed. Both Hong Kong and Mainland activist federations were only founded at the time of the next conflict peak in 1996. In Taiwan, the *Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyu Islands* (*Baowei Diaoyutai Xingdong Weiyuanhui*; 保卫钓鱼台行动委员会) was founded. Unsurprisingly, the first of any baodiao organizations was founded in Taiwan, given the high level governmental protest. Activists formulated goals and handed a protest letter to Japanese officials in Taipei (Guo 2011). The dispute was definitely noticed among Hong Kong citizens, leading to the aforementioned public demonstrations. The fact that protests were also held in North America proves that the 1970s Diaoyu Movement roots probably still somehow existed in oversea communities. Also, mainland students willing to stage a demonstration – and pointing to “patriotism” as the reason for it – reflects that changing the historical myths probably was a more gradual instead of a radical process. The *New Education Campaign* only crept in a couple years later, and probably intensified feelings amongst broader segments of society, yet mainland students already felt

aggravated by Japanese action in 1990 (as they were in 1985). Students chose to argue with patriotic slogans, simultaneously criticizing the government's priority on the economy. These kind of slogans would come back in later conflict peaks, too.

Still, the 1990 conflict peak had a considerable impact on one of the eventual most important baodiao activists in mainland China, Tong Zeng. He stated explicitly that the 1990 events got him into the DSI dispute:

„Beginning in 1990, I concentrated on the Chinese popular Japanese compensation movement“. I published the essay “China Demands for Japanese Victim Compensation Brooks no Delay”, hoping to open up a path of upheld justice for the numerous Chinese victims of the Japanese Invasion War. In the process of doing this task, the issue of the Diaoyu sovereignty belonging gradually aroused my attention.”
（“自1990年开始，我专注于中国民间对日索赔运动。发表了《中国要求日本受害赔偿刻不容缓》一文，希望为众多日本侵华战争的中国受害者开辟一条伸张正义的通路。在做这件事情的过程中，钓鱼岛的主权归属问题逐渐引起了我的注意。”；Si 2012: 22)

The quote furthermore reflects that Tong Zeng is a history activist by heart, and his later actions and engagement for baodiao activism therefore can only be interpreted within the context of political usage of history.

The Role of the Government

The mainland Chinese government opted for a containment strategy from the get-go, showing little interest in stirring up the conflict. Despite also (re)announcing its claim for the DSI, this call occurred very late, compared to more determination displayed by the Taiwanese government. As Downs/Saunders (1998/99) convincingly argue, geopolitical considerations and China's weak international position in general heavily influenced such a restrictive attitude. In addition, 1990 is in the pre-internet era where information flow (and media reports) was still much easier to control for authorities. Messages of the events around the DSI must still have reached mainland students circles, as empirical evidence shows, but their action remained rather isolated and small in scale, also compared to Hong Kong. Despite facing criticism of being unpatriotic, it proved relatively easy for the CCP to contain emotions quickly, plus the Japanese government similarly showed conciliatory signs soon after the first flare-up.

4.6 The 1996 Peak

Sequence of Events

The most important material for analyzing the 1996 conflict peak is Downs/Saunders (1998/99: 131-138), Reilly (2014: 203ff.), Dreyer (2001), Guo (2011), Ma (2012: 20) and Liu (2012). Especially Chinese sources regard the 1996 peak as the true beginning of the second baodiao

wave. Indeed, the 1996 DSI crisis proved to be much more intense and more difficult to control for authorities, and, for the first time, contained a considerable influence of Chinese activists (even if mostly outside the PRC).

In 1996, China's international position was back to normal state, but other geopolitical struggles resulted in tense relations with Japan and the US. In a 1992 law, China had called the DSI territory a part of China (Guo 2011). Closer to the 1996 DSI conflict, main sources for trouble included mainland military exercises and missile fires around the time of Taiwanese presidential elections in 1996 that even led the US to send a carrier battle group to the Taiwan Strait (Downs/Saunders 1998/99: 132). Japan and the US also tightened up security bonds as a result, a move that also complicated Sino-Japanese Relations, especially when the DSI dispute erupted again.

Five steps contributed to the high waves that were to come with the 1996 DSI conflict (as presented in Downs/Saunders 1998/9: 131-138). First, just like in 1990, Japanese activists provoked a lighthouse incident again, with the *Japan Youth Federation* erecting a second lighthouse on July 14. Then, the Japanese diet also ratified UNCLOS, simultaneously declaring a 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone that included the DSI (July 20). Activists (like in 1990) also applied for official recognition of the lighthouse by the government (July 25). The fact that then-Prime Minister Hashimoto made the first visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine in eleven years (on July 29) also aroused emotions on the Chinese side. On August 19, another nationalist Japanese group called *Senkaku Islands Defense Association* placed flags on the islands during a second trip within one month. As Dreyer notes, these flags were particularly provocative:

“Adding to the insult, it was the Asahi, or rising sun, flag that had been in use during World War II rather than the Hi no Maru, the orange sun on a white background that has been Japan's official flag in the post-war period.” (Dreyer 2001: 378)

Last but not least, Japanese Foreign Minister Ikeda affirmed claims to the islands during a trip to Hong Kong at the end of August, also adding that “the territorial issue does not exist” (quoted in Downs/Saunders 1998/99: 134) – such a denial of the DSI conflict has been a constant feature in official Japanese statements.

Chinese reactions in 1996 were more fierce and direct than in 1990, an observation that also includes the PRC. Amongst other events, Vice-Premier Zhu Rongji blamed Japan for failing to understand China's sensitivity over the DSI (Koo 2009: 211), the foreign ministry accused Japanese right-wing activist groups to be acting in concert with Japanese authorities (Downs/Saunders 1998/99: 133), and a *Renmin Ribao* article clarified that “whoever expects

the 1.2 billion Chinese people to give up even one inch of their territory is only daydreaming” (cited in *ibid*: 135). It was also ruled out that Japanese loans could anyhow alter China’s sovereignty claims (*ibid*). On the other side, Japan faced general election on November 20, so a quick cordial signs to China were also out of the question (Koo 2009: 211).

Japanese Foreign Minister Ikeda’s statement can also be seen as a catalyst for the reemergence of the Baodiao Movement (Chung 2004: 46), as it reappeared in Hong Kong, Taiwan, North America and made first steps into mainland China after the minister’s visit in the end of August. Soon after, on September 2, Hong Kong citizens founded the *Hong Kong Defending the Diaoyu Islands Action Committee*, and Taiwanese residents followed on September 8 to establish the *Preparation Assembly for Defending the Diaoyu Islands (Baodiao Lianmeng Choubei Hui 保钓联盟筹备会*; Guo 2011: 82).⁵⁰ Taiwanese and Hong Kong activists joined forces and set out for their first-ever boat tour to the DSI. The boat trip failed miserably, as one of the leading activists, David Chan, lost his life when he wanted to swim to the DSI. 50,000 Hong Kong residents publicly mourned for Chan’s death⁵¹, anti-Japanese demonstrations took part in both Hong Kong, Taiwan and North America, products were boycotted, and a petition signed by 15,000 people urged China to take a tougher stance against Japan (*ibid*; Downs/Saunders 1998/99: 135). Tong Zeng and others founded the CFDD soon after, as Tong in his 2014 interview stated he was both deeply impressed and saddened by the tragic events (Si 2012). After Chan’s death, baodiao organizations also received generous donations from all over the world, solving their financial problems, and enabling another boat ride with 30 activist and 19 media vessels on October 6 (Ma 2012: 20). The second boat landing attempt proved more successful, as four activists were able to step their foot on the islands (*ibid*), and it marked the first time a Chinese flag had been placed on the islands (Bong 2002: 204).

After mass demonstrations in Hong Kong, both governments stepped up efforts to control the situation. Even before, parallel to the first boat tour, the Chinese and Japanese Foreign Minister had met at the United Nations. Qian Qichen (PRC) urged Japan to control activists and remove the lighthouse, with Tokyo responding that it would not recognize the lighthouse, even if there was no promise to remove it. Both sides still affirmed their claim to the islands (Downs/Saunders 1998/99: 136). In contrast to earlier statement, Premier Li Peng

⁵⁰ Unfortunately, it was impossible to find out how these organizations are related to the organizations that were mentioned in the 1990 conflict peak. After 1996, it seems that there has been one organization responsible for one territory (PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan), and the 1996 organizations continue to exist, plus the later internationalization organizational efforts of the movement that were mentioned in the previous chapters.

⁵¹ *Baodiao* organizations organized the event.

now stated that only small groups in Japan were causing the problem, omitting that they were anyhow encouraged by the government. Also, a media blackout on the issue was now put into place (ibid: 138). On the Japanese side, Prime Minister Hashimoto affirmed his country would “properly” handle issues in Sino-Japanese relations, yet affirming that removing the lighthouse was impossible for the government, as the DSI were private ground (ibid: 137). Further progress and de-escalation was made the following year, when China and Japan signed a fishing agreement (Reilly 2014: 205).⁵²

The Role of Activism

On the Chinese side, activism in 1996 for the first time exerted political influence on the DSI dispute. Japanese activism and the lighthouse incident of 1996 have been compared with a fuse (导火索; *daohuosuo*) for the Baodiao Movement (Guo 2011: 81). Japanese activism led to the first boat trip by Chinese activists, followed by the tragic death of David Chan that reached the heart of the Hong Kong masses, which (ironically) again inspired a second boat tour and heavily contributed to the foundation of the CFDD in the PRC, as Tong Zeng himself admitted (Si 2012). Chinese sources unsurprisingly stress the importance that the movement finally reached the PRC:

“During the Baodiao Movement of the 70s, mainland people did not participate at all, during the 90s (they) started to conduct interaction with Hong Kong and Taiwanese people.” („70 年代的保钓运动，大陆人士并没有参与，90 年代大陆开始同港台保钓人士进行互动“; Guo 2011: 82).

Even though it was possible to found a PRC baodiao federation, activists in 1996 on the mainland were still under heavy observation and limited in their action. Tong said that (due to political stability reasons) the federation could not officially register in China at the start, leaving it in a grey area (Weiss 2014: 117). Also, when Beijing had decided to deescalate the conflict, authorities ordered Tong and other leading activists to leave Beijing on the sensitive Manchuria Invasion anniversary on September 18 (ibid: 118), and a planned demonstration on the mainland was prohibited, too (ibid). Therefore, repressive state action in 1996 still occurred relatively fast, underlying Tong Zeng’s earlier cited interview statement that the first years were tough times for the federation (Si 2012: 22).

The Role of the Public

While the 1970s overseas baodiao demonstrations remained exclusive to student circles, participants in Hong Kong represented broader sections of society, with ten thousands of people

⁵² The area of the DSI has traditionally been a natural fishing ground.

mobilized by the activists. Thus, Guo states that the Baodiao Movement reached China from “outside”, yet the 1996 peak fostered “societal cohesion” (*minzu ningjuli* 民族凝聚力; Guo 2011: 83) within the Chinese community. The growing public attention to baodiao activism is not only exemplified by the David Chan mourning and anti-Japanese boycott and protests, but also due to the fact that financial donations to the activists came in from all over the globe. Baodiao activists have always made sure their boat trips are accompanied by media officials, and the extensive coverage obviously created attention beyond the Greater China region.⁵³ Taiwan had also seen protests after initial Japanese activists’ boat landing (Ma 2012: 20).

In the PRC, public actions were restricted much quicker by the authorities, as Downs and Saunders note (1998/99): Chinese newspapers after their initial criticism on Japan ignored Hong Kong and Taiwan mourning and protests (*ibid*: 135). Although the internet was still a young medium, two hundred messages on bulletin boards were deleted (*ibid*: 137), university demonstrations against Japan were banned, schools instructed to inform students that the Chinese nation can defend itself (*ibid*: 136). Influential people were told not to write about the issue, and the central government also called local government to control pro-baodiao activities. Even National People’s Congress members were instructed not to issue a protest note to Japan (Tung 1998: 152). It seems that the DSI events still reached the mainland people, however: 37,000 letters and petitions and 150,000 signatures related to the DSI dispute reached the *People’s Daily* and *People’s Liberation Daily* (Downs/Saunders 1998/99: 138).

The Role of the Government

While not as passive as in 1996, the PRC government still carefully chose its actions in the 1996 dispute. The Patriotic Education Campaign had just launched a year ago, and the new anti-Japanese myths were spreading within mainland society. The government did not just change school curricula, but also sponsored a film on the Nanjing massacre, activities on the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Shimonoseki and the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II (Downs/Saunders 1998/99: 134). While permitting anti-Japanese media coverage on the mainland initially, it seems that public mourning for Chan and the tragic consequences of the first baodiao boat ride led the government to start de-escalation measures: Authorities wanted to avoid a spillover of Hong Kong and Taiwanese public protest to the mainland at any cost (Reilly 2014: 204). Beijing – despite its popular rhetoric that loans could not change the DSI

⁵³ While there are different conceptions, Greater China here refers to the PRC, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and Singapore.

sovereignty – was interested in stable economic relations: “When forced to choose, Chinese leaders pursued economic development at the expense of nationalist goals” (Downs/Saunders 1998: 152). The early containment did draw criticism within China.⁵⁴

In this sense, while the CPC was successful in preventing a spillover of protests to the PRC, the regime for the first time experienced the potential power and danger of political activism in congruence with nationalism. Chinese activists (and ironically the death of a leading activist) were crucial in bringing the DSI on the domestic level of Chinese politics – and, as the next section will show, activists would do so again in 2004, this time also reaching the PRC public.

4.7 The 2004 Peak

The most important material for the 2004 peak in this thesis is Reilly (2014: 205-208), Kang (2013), Weiss (2014), Tai (2006), Dong (2004) and Ma (2012). While baodiao boat trip activism can be limited to 2004, the DSI dispute and activists’ actions also played a role in the 2005 large scale anti-Japanese demonstrations in China (directed against Japan’s bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council). Thus, the latter event is also briefly discussed in this section.

Sequence of Events

In the early 2000s, the Chinese government became more tolerant towards baodiao activities after finding out that the Japanese government had leased the DSI to private owners in 2002 (Weiss 2014: 129). Meanwhile, not only had the CFDD been founded, also an affiliated company was registered in Hong Kong and an office set up in Beijing in 1999 (Reilly 2014: 205). Beijing never permitted activists’ petitions to develop the DSI for tourism, public activities and a ‘Diaoyu’ stamp though (ibid).

Before the 2004 events, 2003 already proved to be a “test year” (Weiss 2014: 129) for mainland baodiao activism. The PAN collected donations (*mujuan* 募捐) for boat tours in April 2003, and baodiao activists were supported by various organizations and companies (Dong

⁵⁴ Downs/Saunders (1998/99: 136) note that critical posters and handbills were handed out in Shanghai, and Hong Kong residents complained that the regime was too soft on Japan given that it had just shown so much “strength” towards Taiwan with its missile fires. The *Chinese Academy of Social Science* warned that a suppression of anti-Japanese sentiment could spill “greater trouble than political turbulence of 1989” (quoted in ibid). The last quote illustrates the overarching political maxim of regime stability in the authoritarian PRC.

2004). In total, activists undertook four attempts to land on the islands in 2003 and 2004, they were stopped each time by the Japanese coastal guard which was pre-informed by Chinese authorities (Reilly 2014: 205). Consequently, activists set sail another time on March 24, 2004 without prior notice to the government: “We kept the trip secret, so the Chinese government couldn’t stop us” (ibid), as Reilly quotes one activist.

The March 24 trip turned into a serious diplomatic crisis for Sino-Japanese relations. The seven activists were the first mainland residents who ever successfully stepped onto the DSI (Ma 2012: 21). Japan quickly arrested the activists, accusing activists they were violating immigration laws. Beijing demanded the immediate release of the activists and urged Japan to make sure of their personal security, and also warned of the “powerful indignation of the Chinese people” (Renmin Ribao 2004). Indeed, other activists protested in front of the Japanese embassy in Beijing, also burning a Japanese flag – a shock to Tokyo, especially because the police was present and tolerated this move (Weiss 2014: 129). After yet another demand by the Chinese side to release activists on March 25, activists were finally released the next day. Activists celebrated their triumph over Japan and called their journey a “big victory” (quoted in Reilly 2014: 206). Apparently several hundred people were waiting for the activists return at the airport in Shanghai, but Chinese authorities denied activists a public reception, took activists into custody, and prohibited further protest events and media contacts (Reilly 2014: 206). 2004 continued to be a troublesome year: During the summer, Chinese maritime research ships operated in the Japanese Exclusive Economic Zone, Japan responded with similar operations in the area (Pryzstup 2004). More protests in front of the embassy followed in July (Koo 2009: 226). While the Chinese and Japanese foreign minister affirmed the importance of bilateral relations, scheduled meetings were cancelled, China denied Japan an apology on the flag burning (Reilly 2014: 206). The Chinese side also expressed that Sino-Japanese relations were at their lowest since reestablishing diplomatic relations (Koo 2009: 225). However, both sides did not want to escalate the conflict, and talks on joint exploration on natural resources resumed in 2004 (ibid: 226f.).

As stated, events in 2005 proved to be even more difficult to handle for the Chinese government. Not only did China condemn the Japanese government which – due to domestic pressure – had announced to take control of a DSI lighthouse, and activists announced they would return to the islands (Reilly 2014: 207). Moreover, other issues in Sino-Japanese relations reappeared, and led to large-scale anti-Japanese demonstrations in China. Besides a new version of the controversial 2001 history textbook, the main driving force for protests was

Chinese citizen's opposition to the Japanese bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (Tai 2006, Weiss 2014, Reilly 2014). China initially did not openly oppose the Japanese bid, but in March 2004, the Chinese diaspora community in the US launched an online petition against Japan's acquisition. The *Alliance for Preserving the Truth of the Sino-Japanese War's* main goal as quoted in Tai Zhixue is demanding the Japanese government "to shoulder the responsibility and finally accept the consequences of the Japanese unmerciful assaults of its neighbors" (Tai 2006: 274). As long as Japan would not face its own history, the country could not become a permanent member on the Security Council. Initially, the petition did not gather steam. Once mainland Chinese media had picked it up, the petition spread online at a tearing pace. Special sub-sections on websites made it easy to "sign" the petition, and people took the petition offline to the main shopping streets in China (ibid: 275). 22 million signatures were gathered until the end of March (compared to just 401,556 on March 20, 2005), also because popular websites such as sina.com, sohu.com and 163.com took part (ibid). 41 million signatures from all over the world were handed to the United Nations General Secretary Kofi Annan on June 30 – Annan had initially signaled his support for the Japanese bid.⁵⁵

"Online petition quickly spread to the offline world in triggering anti-Japanese protests" (ibid: 277). Protests took place over three weeks (April 2-3 at Chengdu, Shenzhen; April 9-10 at Beijing, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and others; April 16-17 at Shanghai, Shenyang, Shenzhen, and others; Kang 2013: 172). This social movement was only possible thanks to the help of the internet, as the latter played a "pivotal role in organizing protest (e.g. time, place, and route of protest) and in disseminating news in relation to the protests to Chinese netizens as well as overseas websites, despite government orders to stop such public gatherings" (Tai 2006: 277). Demonstrations turned increasingly violent in its third week (including attacks on Japanese citizens and property), and Chinese authorities reacted with a concentrated propaganda effort in the media as well as internet censorship to cool down emotions. The government restricted "marches, demonstrations and rallies, (...) a number of anti-Japanese blogs and websites were shut down or temporarily blocked" (Kang 2013: 175f.). Circular pamphlets were issued to party members, newspapers called for stability, and the CCP Youth League asked its members to express patriotism rationally (ibid). Although demonstrations were scheduled by netizens for the May holiday week, none in reality actually took place (Tai

⁵⁵ Kofi Annan promoted reforms of the United Nations in general, and the Japanese bid happened in conjuncture with Germany, Brazil and India (the so-called "G4").

2006: 281). Still, the Chinese government soon after announced its refusal to the planned UN Security Council reform (Weiss 2014: 133f.).

Role of the Activists

Mainland activists in 2004 had an unprecedented ability to operate in China, because the “recent opening up of Chinese society has created more public space for bottom-up emotional venting and political advocacy” (Koo 2009: 225), especially for small and poorly financed groups such as the baodiao organizations (ibid). The successful 2003 PAN online campaigns that enabled boat rides exemplify the pivotal role of the world wide web. Activists in 2004 and 2005 operated with “online petitions, boycotts, demonstrations and other collective actions” (Kang 2013: 172). Other online petitions initiated by activist organizations in 2003 also included resistance to Japanese participation in a planned Beijing-Shanghai high-speed rail line, and a compensation petition that demanded Japanese compensation for Chinese victims of an incident with chemical weapons left over from Japanese imperialist rule, signed by 1 million Chinese citizens (Tai 2006: 274f.).

The 2004 boat ride was very successful for the CFDD, and the fact that the activists’ capture was widely reported on the media only increased attention for the group. The increased attention is exemplified by citizens that were planning to give the activists a public reception after their release. Also, the federation set up its own website after the boat trip, showed plans for future trips, informed about its sponsored and organized activities, and established an online bulletin board to discuss and share information on its activities and Sino-Japanese relations (Kang 2013: 171f.). Since then, the website “is well-known as a Chinese nationalist website representing nationalistic views on China’s relations with Japan” (ibid). Unsurprisingly, Kang also notes a massive increase in message board posts between mid-2004 and spring of 2005 when anti-Japanese protests reached its height: 23,000 postings alone occurred between March and April 2005 (Kang 2013: 171f.). Despite the 2004 arrest by Japanese authorities, Tong Zeng affirmed that baodiao activism would continue:

“Baodiao people firmly believe that China’s popular baodiao movement will for sure continuously advance for a long period of time.” (“保钓人士坚信, 拦时中国的民间保钓运动一定会继续进行下去。”; Dong 2004: 13).

Tong also noted that the 2004 main goal was to prepare touristic activities on the DSI (ibid) – a prospect activists had officially applied to the Chinese government before. As stated before, the application was rejected, which obviously did not stop activists to pursue their goals.

Activists risked a lot with their successful boat landing in 2004, as previous attempts

had resulted in the government pre-warning Japan of the coming activists. While the Chinese government did everything they could to release the captured citizens in their last unannounced boat trip, activists with their actions also seriously contributed to the overall decline in Sino-Japanese relations. In sum, while the activists won a lot, the government was faced with challenging diplomatic problems as a result.

In 2005, baodiao activists also “contributed to a spiral dynamic of mounting tensions” (Reilly 2014: 207). The PAN, the CFDD, and the *Anti-Japanese Goods Alliance* had organized street protest against the aforementioned Japanese government’s lighthouse leasing incident (Weiss 2014: 133). When online resistance against Japan’s UN bid was about to spillover to the streets, baodiao organizations sponsored activities:

“Once the internet petition took off, we organized a series of street petitions all over the country”, said a baodiao leader.” (quoted in *ibid*)

It is not possible to determine the degree of contribution and responsibility of baodiao organizations for each and every of the 2005 street protests. Mainland organizations were not responsible for the petition, but they effectively used the opening space to rally for their own cause – DSI sovereignty. Indeed, the DSI dispute became a constant topic in the 2005 demonstrations. A Shanghai protest that was largely organized online and via SMS included suggestions for banners protestors should bring to the event, amongst them the slogan “Return Diaoyu (Senkaku as called by Japan) to China!” (Tai 2006: 278). Besides the DSI islands, other issues in Sino-Japanese relations such as the disputed schoolbooks were also part of the demonstration (*ibid*), the common theme being to express “strongest outrage against the Japanese government’s evil acts of protractedly refusing to acknowledge the crimes Japan committed during World War II” (*ibid*). The aims of the demonstrations thus reflect the regime’s historical myths very well.

Once demonstrations turned violent, however, activist organizations quickly had to draw “a clear demarcation between us and them” (quoted in Weiss 2014: 141), because attacks on Japanese citizens and properties had nothing to do with “gathering signatures but venting (...) Our members had no way to stop them” (quoted in *ibid*). This view is consistent with 2012, when baodiao organizations similarly rejected physical violence in their demonstrations (see next section), and opposing violence also saves the organization’s continued existence.

Role of the Public

The public was very receptive to the 2005 online petitions once they became widely accessible on the net. The impressive numbers of signatures reflect the general negative public perception of Japan that further intensified in 2005 when the UN bid-decision was at high stake. The petition was able to reach so many people because nationalism by 2005 had already become a defining feature of Chinese society. As a PLA Officer noted: “The strengthening of public opinion and popular nationalism on both sides has worsened this issue, noticeably increasing the difficulty for both governments to control tensions” (quoted in Reilly 2014: 208). When some protestors turned violent, the public apparently understood the regime’s media offensive as a warning not to continue with protests. Consequently, the demonstrations scheduled for early May 2005 never happened. Public opinion had already been expressed vigorously anyways.⁵⁶

In 2004, the activists’ island trip also got widely noticed by the public, as the planned public reception for captured activists after their release exemplifies. Media coverage during the capture further increased public awareness of the activist organization, their goals and the issue at stake.

Role of the Government

The government’s role in 2004 and 2005 has been interpreted in two ways: Tai (2006) and Weiss (2014: 146) argue that online and offline activism had a clear influence on the government in 2005, as it would consequently refuse Japan’s UN reform bid. Evidently, a Foreign Minister spokesman declared that the internet petition would be a sign that Chinese citizens do not want to see Japan in the UN Security Council, and Japan could only win the “trust of the people” (ibid: 141) if it was developing a “responsible attitude” (ibid).

On the other hand, the CCP also started clear demobilization efforts in both 2004 and 2005. In 2004, it denied the activists a public reception and continued attention; in 2005, protests were turned down once they were getting out of hand. Activists and the PAN in particular directly suffered from these counter mechanisms, as a government official stated that “there’s no point in investigating who started it; why it happened is more important (quoted in Weiss 2014: 149).

⁵⁶ An example for critical voices on the government is quoted on the PAN: “To this day, the government has not taken a clear stance opposing Japan’s permanent membership. If the Chinese government doesn’t veto Japan’s entry into the UNSC [UN Security Council], this government will be no different than the Qing government” (quoted in Weiss 2014: 141).

Another explanation is offered by Kang. He argues that there has been a variation in interaction between government and public expressions of anti-Japanese nationalism in China: While protests were allowed between 2003 and spring of 2005, the government had shown a more repressive approach before and after that. Kang cites Fewsmith/Rosen who claimed that a low level of elite cohesion, a high degree of tension in bilateral relations and high level of popular mobilization makes the impact of public opinion on politics more likely (Fewsmith/Rosen 2001: 173f.). Arguing that many issues indeed strained bilateral relations in this period, the fact that leadership transition to Hu Jintao was still not completed before 2005⁵⁷ was also a crucial factor in the government's lenience to anti-Japanese protests. When it was feared that "uncontrolled anti-Japanese nationalism could seriously harm China's national interests and stability" (Kang 2013: 175) in both 2004 and 2005, the government still quickly took the aforementioned suppressive measures. The government's two-edged approach is best exemplified by the following two expressions: While protestors were earlier supported in their "rightful use of their constitutional right for free speech" (Reilly 2014: 206), authorities in 2005 warned the population of continuing "illegal demonstrations" (Tai 2006: 281) that would harm social stability.

4.8 The 2012 Peak

While the DSI dispute contributed to large-scale anti-Japanese demonstrations in 2005, the conflict was an important, albeit not a focal point of public outrage. In 2012, similar demonstrations took place within the PRC, and this time the DSI dispute was at the core of the protests, underlying the grown importance of the issue in Sino-Japanese relations. Activism contributed to the 2012 conflict peak, albeit in changed fashion to 2004/05, as the chapter will show. The main material for this peak is Reilly (2014), Weiss (2014) and Feng (2014), although it has to be noted that academic work on the 2012 peak still is quite seldom. Thus, more media reports are used for the analysis of the 2012 conflict peak.

Sequence of Events

Diplomatic relations had been progressing nicely for Shinzo Abe's first term as prime minister in the mid-2000s, but the DSI dispute reappeared in 2010 (covered in chapter 4.3) and 2012. New Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda was considered a hardliner towards China

⁵⁷ Former PRC President Jiang Zemin still chaired the Central Military Commission.

(Weiss 2014), but his first couple of months in office in 2011 displayed conciliatory signs to the PRC. A *Renmin Ribao* article urged Noda to respect China's core interests including the DSI (Renmin Ribao 2011), and Noda soon announced not to visit the Yasukuni Shrine during his term (Xinhua News Service 2011). In the end of 2011 during a Noda visit to Beijing, both countries even agreed to launch discussion on bilateral mechanisms for maritime security and crisis management as well as on environmental projects in the East China Sea (Japan Economic Newswire 2012).

While Noda showed interest in stable Sino-Japanese relations, nationalist forces in Japan pursued other goals. On April 16, 2012, the aforementioned Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintaro held a speech in Washington DC, announcing that his city planned to buy three long-time privately owned islets that are part of the DSI, seeking to draw the money from a private fund (Reilly 2014: 208). Despite criticism against nationalist forces in Japan from the Chinese side, both Prime Ministers Wen Jiabao and Noda still agreed that the DSI should not impact bilateral ties mid-May (MOFA 2012). In June, Japanese vessels sailed to the islands, including six Diet members (ibid). Chinese baodiao activists reacted with a Hong Kong-led and Taiwan-escorted boat trip on July 4, although they did not reach the islands (Reilly 2014: 208).⁵⁸ On the sensitive July 7 (Japan's day of invasion to central China in 1937), Prime Minister Noda suggested his government (instead of the city of Tokyo) might 'nationalize' the three islands (ibid). Beijing condemned that Noda was breaking 'tacit consensus' (*moqi* 默契; cited in Weiss 2014: 195). With elections upcoming, the pressure for a purchase by Noda to satisfy conservative forces increased (ibid). Notably, even official PRC fishing vessels crossed the area on July 11-12 (Reilly 2014: 209). A second round of activist boat tours followed on August 12, and five out of seven Hong Kong activists successfully landed on the islands on Japan's day of surrender (August 15; ibid). Activists planted the PRC and ROC flag; and a Japanese group followed a couple days later with their own flag (ibid). Chinese baodiao activists were captured, but released a couple days later (ibid).

The first wave of public protest followed, also because the mainland government had allowed media coverage of baodiao activism, including a CCTV live coverage (Weiss 2014: 200). Thousands of people marched on the streets in Chinese metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Shenzhen, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, Jinan, Changchun or Wuhan (ibid: 201). While most demonstrations stayed peaceful, attacks on Japanese cars or restaurants were also

⁵⁸ Interesting enough, activists were still held back to undertake a boat trip by Hong Kong authorities in January 2012, and on other occasions before as well (Weiss 2014: 201).

registered (Reilly 2014: 209). The CCP was not interested in wide-spread protests, however, as it prohibited further protests in front of the Japanese embassy in Beijing, and condemned violence on Japanese property (Weiss 2014: 202).

The Noda administration finally announced their purchase of the three islets on September 11 for 2 Billion Yen (ibid: 205), thereby also responding to the pressure the Tokyo governor had exerted on the government, especially after the fund campaign had already reached 1 Billion Yen in July (Weiss 2014: 195). Chinese media responded with headlines such as “China says NO” (cited in Reilly 2014: 209), and anti-Japanese sentiment started to roar online. The amount of posts reached unprecedented dimensions, including more than one million responses to a poll on whether China should take military action against Japan on *Phoenix* (cited in ibid).

The government reacted to public anger by affirming that it would “never yield an inch” (cited in ibid) of the DSI. Chinese state media also did not consider Noda’s difficult domestic situation, but understood Japan’s action intended as to undermine Chinese sovereignty (Weiss 2014: 205). A common theme of official propaganda was to emphasize Japan’s historical debt to China (ibid). The CCP even sent maritime surveillance ships to the region, an unprecedented move by the Chinese government (ibid). The largest anti-Japanese demonstration in the PRC history took place on September 18 (anniversary day of Japan’s Manchuria occupation), events spread to more than 100 cities practically all over China (ibid). Again, most demonstrations stayed peaceful, but the ones that escalated damaged more Japanese property and human-beings than ever before, amongst them a man attacked with an iron bar because he was driving a Japanese car in Xi’an (Reilly 2014: 210).

De-escalation efforts by the government started to grow stronger around the anniversary date, though. Just like in previous protest waves, the government utilized all possible means to cool down sentiments: handing out orders to local officials ordering them to calm people down, sending text messages to citizens telling them to express patriotism rationally, publishing news stories that urged to de-escalate (Reilly 2014: 211), and blocking phrases on Weibo such as “anti-Japan” (*fanri* 反日), “smash car” (*zache* 砸车), “protest” (*kangyi* 抗议), “demonstrate” (*youxing* 游行), “assembly” (*jihui* 集会) and “demonstration” (*shiwei* 示威; China Digital Times 2012). Demonstrators who vandalized were also taken into custody in various cities. These measures helped in order to end demonstrations quickly.

Role of the Activists

Activists' actions were largely responsible for triggering the first wave of protests in August 2012. State media coverage of their voyage clearly helped, as attention for activists increased. Interesting enough, Hong Kong activists sailed off, but reactions were mainly triggered on the Chinese mainland, once again reflecting the pan-Chinese character of the DSI dispute. As for the second wave, activists were not so present, as Japanese governmental action was met with furious anger by the Chinese public, and the second wave of demonstrations reminded more of a social movement against the Japanese government.

While baodiao activities were mostly prohibited after 2006, 2012 marked a welcome change for activists. In January of the same year, activists were still held back, but they were not anymore during the summer. Hong Kong Legislative Council Member Leung Kwok-hung notes that the mainland central government decides about matters like letting baodiao activists sail off or not. Leung adds that if the government let activists sail on the mainland, it would prove hard to control them, because activists were likely to sail from everywhere (Weiss 2014: 200). Thus, allowing restricted activism from Hong Kong was the government's ultimate choice. The fear of uncontrollable activism from the mainland also resembles the grown sympathy for activist actions in mainland China. Also, Fewsmith/Rosen's claim that societal forces can operate better in times of bilateral crisis seems to be validated yet again for 2012.

Activists were also given a considerable amount of media attention. Tong Zeng, Head of the CFDD, noted that it was a good sign that PRC ships instead of activist boats were now also sailing to the islands, as 'official' ships were more persuasive than activists could ever be (Ynet 2012). While not able to sail themselves, Tong also congratulated his Hong Kong brother organization for successfully landing on the islands (Renmin Wang 2012), calling it a "forceful counterattack" (*youli huiji* 有力回击; Beijing News 2012) on Noda's nationalization plans. During the street protests, the CFDD also organized marches and protests, they also gathered in front of the Japanese embassy in Beijing and handed in a protest letter (Weiss 2014: 201). At the same time, activists called for calm and rational action during the anti-Japanese protest on Weibo (CFDD 2012). Anti-Japanese demonstrations, Tong warns, could even infringe the shared goal of all Chinese people:

"However, Tong Zeng, who has always been in the front line of „anti-Japanese struggle“, still maintained a clear-headed rational attitude, he controlled and cautiously persuaded everyone your brain must not be high-fevered and commit aggressive actions, that kind will just bring society unrest, it will give other countries an excuse, and weaken our original justice." ("然而一直处在“对日斗争”第一线的童增，却保持着清醒理性的态度，他克制而谨慎地劝说大家，不能头脑发热做出过激行为，那样只会给社会带来动荡，给别国以借口，削弱我们本来的正义性。"; Huanqiu Huaren 2014).

The considerable media attention for activists were a clear signal to Japan not to buy the DSI. Soaring public anger can be an effective tool for authoritarian China in its bilateral relations, as Weiss notes (2014). Activists used the additional societal space and the *window of opportunity* to pursue their goals.

Role of the Public

Given their spontaneity, it is very hard to determine who exactly organized each and every of the anti-Japanese protests of 2012. Most website reports and scholarly work (like Weiss 2014: 201) refer to *netizens* (wangmin 网民), some to the baodiao organizations. In any case, almost all protest calls were usually spread on Weibo (the Chinese twitter) and big bulletin boards such as Tianya (ibid).

In her Weibo discourse analysis of the DSI crisis in 2012, Feng also notes that the opinions online are “variegated manifestations of *bottom-up* spontaneous popular nationalism, which should not be dismissed as simply an outcome of government manipulation“ (Feng/Yuan 2014: 119). She also notes that most Weibo postings “carried strong adversarial sentiments toward the perceived senseless and aggressive provocation and confrontation on Japan’s part” (ibid: 126), and much support for a tougher stance by the Chinese government towards Japan (ibid). Some criticized the government for being “too soft, ineffective and lacking resolution” (ibid: 128). Unsurprisingly, baodiao activism and successful boat ride was praised by the Weibo community (ibid: 10). While ideas on product boycotts were formulated and executed online (ibid: 130), street petitions were also closely followed by the community. Demonstrations were at first encouraged, but once violence took place, “strong disapproval and deep anxiety” (ibid: 131) entered the discourse, and opinions were mixed.

As for the protestors themselves, they came from a variety of social backgrounds (Weiss 2014), and thus represented a true mass movement. Students became active as well, but were prohibited to hold a demonstration in Beijing (probably given the 1989 student demonstrations; ibid). The wide-spread involvement of broad sections of Chinese society reflects that the DSI dispute in 2012 had firmly reached the heart of the Chinese people – much different from 1996, as Tong Zeng once noted. Awoken emotions once again reflected the deep influence of historical myths on the Chinese population, as their online⁵⁹ and offline attitudes and actions display a strong sense of *chosen traumas* that were suffered at Japanese cost. With increased

⁵⁹ Feng (2014: 12-14) dedicates a whole section to historical memories and contemporary grievances, too.

availability of the internet's micro-blogging services surging, public participation both on- and offline reached new heights in the 2012 wave. A similar level of participation can be expected in future cases of crisis as well.

Role of the Government

The government's lenient approach towards activist action and allowing public protests is reminiscent of the 2004 conflict peak. In contrast to earlier DSI disputes, however, the 2012 flare-up was largely caused by Japanese politics rather than activists-provoked incidents. Weiss (2014) states in detail how the Chinese government until the very end hoped to avoid the purchase of the three islets by the Noda administration.

Beijing's tied hands in 2012 originated from two sides. While the CCP was trying to pressure Tokyo, the purchase of the islands in Japan followed strong domestic considerations as well. Upcoming elections, balancing between and satisfying different societal forces in Japan were important to the Noda administration, and eventually undermined their earlier efforts for improved relations with the PRC. Furthermore, Beijing had to take a strong stance against Japan due to the high level of public pressure. As the Weibo discourse shows, the Chinese government could not afford to be too soft on Japan, while it was not interested in completely disrupting Sino-Japanese relations. Therefore, allowing anti-Japanese protest also put the government at the forefront of societal patriotism, as a *Renmin Ribao* editorial shows:

“No one would doubt the pulses of patriotic fervor when the motherland is bullied,” the editorial said. “No one would fail to understand the compatriots' hatred and fights when the country is provoked; because a people that has no guts and courage is doomed to be bullied, and a country that always hides low and bides its time will always come under attack” (cited in CNN 2012).

Only a couple days later in the September round of protests, the government would restrain such activities, lecturing “the public on the true meaning of patriotism” (ibid).

Still, governmental action showing a tough stance against Japan also continued into November 2013, when Beijing announced the creation of an *Air Defense Identification Zone* that includes the DSI territory (Washington Times 2013). Beijing's move caused another round of the DSI dispute, with strong articles in official newspapers directed against Japan's occupation of the island and its imperialist past. As in 2012, this round of conflict was largely caused by governments, hazarding the possible economic and political consequences the DSI dispute would cause for bilateral relations while showing Japan (and the Chinese public) that Beijing was serious about its territorial claim.

V. Conclusion

The DSI conflict evolved over the decades and has undergone a dramatic increase of importance to the Chinese government and the public. Activism has contributed a big part to the elevation of the conflict, and has also been an important amplifier between the government and the public. Isolating the role of activism in the dispute – despite being mentioned – has been neglected in academic literature. So far, it has not been analyzed comprehensively over an extended period of time. This section discusses the results of the empirical chapter for the activists, acknowledging their interaction with the public and the government, thereby arguing activism had a significant impact on the remarkable *change over time* (referring to the intensification of the DSI dispute) in the DSI dispute.

The Public

As for the public, its level of participation in the PRC has increased dramatically over the course of the DSI conflict. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, people already showed their commitment to the DSI dispute in 1990 and 1996. With more access to media information available, and with a possibly still existing memory of the 1970s Baodiao Movement, public participation reached its first height after the death of activist David Chan in 1996. Ironically, it was just this event that inspired PRC activists to found the CFDD, even though the organization only really took off a couple years later. While the CCP still tried to avoid a spillover of public activities to the mainland in the 1990s, such a blackout of information was not possible anymore in the 21st century, the age of internet and social media. When overall bilateral relations between China and Japan hit a crisis in both 2004/05 and 2012, the CCP allowed wide-spread media coverage of activist action (2004, 2012) and the DSI dispute in general. The internet played a pivotal role in spreading information, organizing activities and demonstrations for both conflict peaks. In 2005, the online petition against Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council further amplified the role of internet protest that later also spread to the "real" world. In 2012, the conflict peak was not so much about other topics, but all about the DSI dispute itself, and social media (especially Weibo) and netizens utilized all tools available to mobilize the public for protest.

Public participation in the DSI dispute has also broadened when looking at the background of protestors. As Weiss (2014) argued, PRC protestors in 2012 represent the whole Chinese society. This is a stark contrast to the 1970s and 1990s, when the DSI dispute was hardly known to the Chinese public, and the few "public actions" in the PRC and abroad

remained mainly exclusive to student circles. Nowadays broad participation in the PRC also has two implications for the Chinese government: On the one hand, public attitudes and actions reflect that people are conscious about historical myths on the Japanese invasion (the “*chosen traumas*”) twenty years after the *New Education Campaign* took off. On the other hand, such a sensitive public as the Chinese one is prone to mobilization efforts from the grassroots. As the government prioritizes regime stability, authorities are very cautious about who is involved in demonstrations, and whether protestors aim to demonstrate against Japan or (also) against the CCP’s rule in general. Historical myths, just like anti-foreign protest, remain a double-edged sword for authorities, and in the future, they will have to carefully observe a Chinese public that will definitely remain sensitive to the DSI dispute in the future.

The Government

He (2007: 9-13) and others note that the Chinese government has *tied hands* in the DSI dispute. While generally seeking good bilateral relations with Japan, the DSI dispute presently is at the forefront of reasons why this is so difficult to achieve. The dispute has been shelved aside by the PRC (and Japan) for a long time, as reflected in Deng Xiaoping’s remarks from 1978 and the PRC’s slow reaction to the 1990 lighthouse incident. China’s rhetoric towards Japan has become fiercer, the PRC’s reactions more assertive over the course of the conflict peaks of 1996, 2004 and 2012. China now more openly than ever expresses that the DSI is China’s inherent territory, also accusing Japan of violating China’s sovereignty. Still, no matter what the government does, it seems locked into an islands dispute that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future: If China was willing to compromise on the DSI political status, the domestic backlash against the regime likely would be too strong. If the PRC was not willing to compromise, it can win over public support and use it as an effective bargaining tool against Japan, as Weiss (2014) notes. However, by doing so, the DSI conflict remains intact and carries the dangers illuminated in this thesis. Navigating between the Chinese public and bilateral relations, China’s government can also not directly influence Japanese domestic developments. With the conservative Liberal Democratic Party as a dominant political force, and even newly-established right-wing parties, Japanese politics is not likely to be changing much, and disputes related to history are likely to return.

The PRC and Russia around 1990 successfully negotiated on the border at the Ussuri River, only twenty years after almost fighting a war over the area. Negotiations were kept secret until the last moment (Chung 2007). When the DSI dispute was still rather minor up until 1990,

similar negotiations were probably also possible between China and Japan. Negotiations on joint exploration have taken place, but all ended very quickly, and a loss of face in those negotiations to domestic groups that have grown much stronger is not in the interest of both countries. In the end, the Chinese government probably more than anything fears a “risk of nationalist spillover” (Weiss 2014: 229) caused by the DSI dispute. Indeed, domestic groups (and the public) at some point might feel like challenging the state to live up to its own strong rhetoric and principles on the DSI in a kind of “rightful resistance” (O’Brien 1996).

Still, it has to be noted that the government’s situation is largely self-created: Historical myths are mostly dictated by educational policy, and myths have proven very influential as public opinion polls on Japan show. While the level of knowledge on imperialist Japan in China is high, post-war developments in Japan are largely omitted and ignored in the curricula, deliberately leaving a very one-sided opinion on Japan. Therefore, while historical myths can bolster overall regime legitimacy, they also seemingly complicate a true normalization of Sino-Japanese relations. The regime still has a strong capacity to suppress activist action and nationalist online discourse (as it happened between 2006 and 2010), but protest waves have become stronger each time. It will be interesting to see if the government can continue to de-escalate public sentiment effectively whenever necessary.

It seems that the only fundamental solution would be honest and true efforts to jointly reflect on the historical debt between the two countries (He 2007: 21-24). Germany and France are prime examples of how hereditary enmity (*Erbfeindschaft*) over decades can turn into friendship and cooperation. Still, such reconciliation at present unfortunately seems unlikely.

The Activists

Japanese activists provoked the 1990 and 1996, Chinese activists the 2004 conflict peak, and the Hong Kong boat ride was also the cause for the first wave of anti-Japanese demonstrations in China of 2012. The 2004 DSI events played an important role in the 2005 anti-Japanese demonstrations in China as well, as it was a constantly mentioned issue there. Activism over the decades has been increasingly well-organized, with federations in the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan founded, more recently establishing transnational structures. Activist organizations have utilized all measures of protest (boat tours, activities, petitions, demonstrations), and the opening Chinese society in the PRC has given them leverage to operate more freely, even if the government sometimes still suppressed their actions. Activists themselves do not seem to be regarded as regime-threatening by the authorities, rather the consequences their actions can

have on the Chinese public play a vital role in the government's decision whether to be lenient or repressive against baodiao activism.

The activists are only able to raise awareness and mobilize public support and participation so much because their agenda and communication resembles governmental history politics very well. In this sense, the public is very receptive to what the social force (activists) feeds them with, activists being congruent with officially 'accepted' and widely spread historical views. The activists' primary goal (reclaiming the DSI to China) happens to go well with core themes of governmental history politics (especially national humiliation). From the CFDDs website to CFDD head Tong Zeng being a history activist, it is a mission of historical justice that shines through behind the whole Baodiao Movement, as presented in many ways throughout the thesis.

However, determining the role of activists has to be put into perspective. While 1990, 1996 and 2004 disputes probably would never have occurred without Japanese or Chinese activist boat rides to the DSI, the 2012 and 2013 disputes were largely caused by governmental action: In 2012, Japan bought the islands from private owners (even if they were also pressured by right-wing forces to do so); in 2013, the Chinese government unilaterally created the *Air Defense Identification Zone*. Tong Zeng once foresaw such a development:

"I think development should be in the direction of the state exercising sovereignty. As for the state exercising sovereignty, I think three steps are needed: First, the people proclaim sovereignty; second, the phase of interaction where people proclaim sovereignty and state exercises sovereignty, I believe we are presently at this state of affairs; third, the state exercises sovereignty and acts in concert with the people proclaiming sovereignty. At this time, the government should move in front, the people carry on to correspond/cooperate." ("我认为应该向国家行使主权的方向上发展。国家行使主权我认为要有三个步骤，第一，民间宣示主权；第二，民间宣示主权与国家行使主权互动阶段，我认为就是我们目前的这个状态；第三，国家行使主权和民间宣示主权配合。这时，政府应该走在前面，民间进行配合。" ; Si 2014: 25).

Thus, it can be argued that political activism in the 1990s and 2000s has heavily contributed to the elevation of the DSI dispute to one of the most important issues in Sino-Japanese relations. In past flare-ups, both governments mostly reacted to unexpected events and societal forces (namely activists). Each time, activist actions received more attention, and public reactions grew stronger. Myths matter because they opened new spaces for activism and made the public sensitive to the DSI dispute. Mobilization matters because the public has transcended its protest against Japan onto the streets, again influenced and partly organized by activists. In the future, it will be interesting to see whether activism can trigger such widespread rounds of conflict, or whether the Chinese and Japanese government are really 'moving in front', actively challenging the DSI political status, like in the latest conflict peaks. No matter what, Chinese activists will

continue to uphold their sovereignty positions and operate whenever they can. Together with the public, activists are likely to heavily contribute to the perseverance of the DSI dispute for the foreseeable future.

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Abbreviations

Diaoyu / Senkaku Islands	DSI
People's Liberation Army	PLA
People's Republic of China	PRC
Republic of China	ROC
Chinese Communist Party	CCP
China Federation for Defending the Diaoyu Islands	CFDD
Patriots Alliance Network	PAN
Special Economic Zone	SEZ
Foreign Direct Investment	FDI
World Trade Organization	WTO
United States of America – US	US
Association of Southeast Asian Nations	ASEAN
United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea	UNCLOS
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	MOFA ⁶⁰
United Nations	UN
Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa	BRICS
Shanghai Cooperation Organization	SCO
Exclusive Economic Zone	EEZ
Non-Governmental Organization	NGO
Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization	GONGO
Japan External Trade Organization	JETRO
Chinese Academic Journals	CAJ
Group of Seven	G7

⁶⁰ Used for both foreign ministries throughout the thesis (PRC and Japan)

Chinese Terms

Characters	Pinyin	English⁶¹
中国民间保钓联合会	Zhongguo Minjian Baodiao Lianhehui	China Federation for Defending the Diaoyu Islands (PRC, activist organization)
爱国者同盟网	Aiguoazhe Tongmeng Wang	Patriots Alliance Network (PRC, activist organization)
改革开放	gaige kaifang	reform and opening up
人民日报	Renmin Ribao	China Daily
马关条约	maguan tiaoyue	Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895; Peace Treaty after the First Sino-Japanese War)
抗日战争	Kangri Zhanzheng	First Sino-Japanese War (called The War of Resistance against Japan in Chinese)
固有领土	guyou lingtu	inherent territory
和平崛起	heping jueqi	peaceful rise (a PRC policy)
阶级斗争	jieji douzheng	class struggle
资本主义萌芽	zibenzhuyi mengya	dangerous sprouts of capitalism
国情	guoqing	“national conditions”
褒贬	baobian	praising and blaming (traditional Chinese concept/way of thinking)
爱国主义教育	Aiguoazhuyi Jiaoyu Huodong	Patriotic Education Campaign (a PRC policy)
社会	shehui	society
文明社会	wenming shehui	civil society
市民社会	shimin shehui	civil society
公民社会	gongmin shehui	civil society
民间社会	minjian shehui	civil society
道	dao	the „Way“ (in Taoism)
中国新公民运动	Zhongguo Xin Gongmin Yundong	New Citizen’s Movement (a PRC civic society organization)
人人网	Renrenwang	„Chinese Facebook“
微博	Weibo	„Chinese Twitter“
起步阶段	qibu jieduan	initial stage
保钓运动	Baodiao Yundong	Defend the Diaoyu Islands Movement
保钓	baodiao	Abbreviation for baowei Diaoyudao (see below)
保卫钓鱼岛	baowei Diaoyudao	to defend the Diaoyu Islands

⁶¹ Column uses some abbreviations (see abbreviations section)

香港保卫钓鱼岛行动委员会	Xianggang Baowei Diaoyudao Xingdong Wei yuanhui	Hong Kong Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyu Islands (a Hong Kong activist organization)
香港保钓行动委员会	Xianggang Baodiao Xindong Wei yuanhui	Hong Kong Action Committee for Defending the [Diaoyu] Islands (a Hong Kong activist organization)
世界华人保钓联盟	Shijie Huaren Baodiao Lianmeng	World Chinese Association for Defending the Diaoyu Islands (an international activist union)
会长	huizhang	chair
团体会员	tuanti huiyuan	„group member“
反日货联盟网	Fanri Huo Liangmeng Wang	Anti-Japanese Goods Alliance (a PRC activist/civic organization)
宣言	xuanyan	manifesto
互助之责	huzhu zhi ze	principal of mutual aid/help
关于联合会	guanyu lianhehui	about the union (CFDD Website subsection headline)
爱国活动	aiguo huodong	patriotic activities (CFDD Website subsection headline)
勿忘国耻	wuwang guochi	never forget national humiliation (a core theme of the Patriotic Education Campaign; CFDD website subsection headline)
爱国史诗	aiguo shishi	patriotic poems (CFDD Website subsection headline)
爱国理论	aiguo lilun	patriotic (patriotism?) theory (CFDD Website subsection headline)
共同事业	gongtong shiye	common undertaking
海事处	haishichu	Maritime Affairs Office
配合	peihe	to cooperate
呼应	huying	to echo
丧权辱国	sang quan ru guo	to humiliate the nation and forfeit its sovereignty; to surrender a country's sovereignty
军国主义复兴	junguozhuyi fuxing	revival/renaissance of imperialism
单纯	danchun	one-sided
主权	zhuquan	sovereignty
保卫钓鱼台行动委员会	Baowei Diaoyutai Xingdong Wei yuanhui	Action Committee for Defending the Diaoyu Islands (a Taiwan activist organization)

保钓联盟筹备会	Baodiao Liangmeng Choubeihui	Preparation Assembly for Defending the Diaoyu Islands (a Taiwan activist organization)
导火索	daohuosuo	blasting fuse (military term)
民族凝聚力	minzu ningjuli	social cohesion
募捐	mujian	to collect donations
发泄	faxie	to vent, venting
默契	moqi	here: tacit understanding
反日	fanri	anti-Japanese, against Japan
砸车	zache	to smash cars
抗议	kangyi	protest, to protest
游行	youxing	demonstration
集会	jihui	to assembly
示威	shiwei	to demonstrate
有力回击	youli huiji	forceful counterattack
网民	wangmin	netizen (a regular internet, in this thesis also in the role of activists)