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The Death of Abe Shinzo in Chinese Media:
Necropolitics and Cybernationalism

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Abstract

This Bachelor's thesis entitled, "The Death of Abe Shinzo in Chinese Media: Necropolitics and Cybernationalism" examines the reactions from Chinese society to the death of former Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo. The analysis focuses on the contrast between the way in which official Chinese media reported and commented on the incident and the reaction of Chinese netizens on social media and online forums. As a result, the thesis sheds light on why Chinese netizens reacted the way they did and why some even celebrated Abe's assassination.

Key words: Necropolitics; Chinese cybernationalism; social media; Abe Shinzo; netizens;

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Introduction

The news of the assassination of Abe Shinzo, Japan's former prime minister, on the 8 July 2022 appeared in news outlets and official media all over the world. Many of them reported on his death with sympathy, showing support to Japan and criticizing the attacker. However, one may argue that traditional and especially official state media does not always express the sentiment of the public and that is where social media becomes important. The video of Abe's assassination was swiftly uploaded onto various social media sites and netizens were quick to share their opinion online. Particularly on Chinese social media, a significant amount of hate comments towards Abe and praise for the assassin appeared. The question as to why so many netizens wished to free the killer and expressed joy for Abe's death prompted my interest in this case.

The thesis comprises a theoretical part and an analytical part. The theoretical part defines and discusses key concepts employed in the thesis, particularly those of necropolitics – including its power and its influence over our lives – and Chinese cybernationalism in the context of Sinophone online culture. Next, the thesis will briefly discuss Sino-Japanese relations under Abe Shinzo and his image in the Chinese public opinion. The analytical part of the thesis focuses on two corpora of (1) media reports and commentaries and (2) online posts, respectively. There are a couple of reasons why Abe was not popular among the Chinese people, and all of them are reflected in the reaction on Chinese media platforms. The analysis of relevant comments and posts will reveal their connection with the categories of necropolitics and (cyber)nationalism.

1. Theoretical part

1.1. Necropolitics

The theoretical framework of the thesis draws on the work on necropolitics by Achille Mbembe (Mbembe 2019). The thesis will show how necropolitics is important to understand Chinese cybernationalism and netizens' reactions to the death of Abe Shinzo – from the idea of “desire for an enemy” (Mbembe 2019: 43) and the description of enemies and their influence on our lives, to how paranoia combined with the power of social media creates “the new human being” (Mbembe 2019: 114). Mbembe's discussion of the way in which he describes a thought that through death we become a subject is also interesting with regards to some netizens' indifference towards the death of Abe. This study also touches on the topic of “parading body

parts” (Mbembe 2019: 73) as in the medieval times, a ritual that became a standard feature of popular violence, e.g. through the display of severed heads mounted on pikes. The case of Abe’s death on social media suggests that today we no longer display actual body parts, but instead create memes of corpses of the deceased.

Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics draws in part on Foucault’s idea of biopower: “The ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die. To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty’s limits, its principal attributes. To be sovereign is to exert one’s control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power” (Mbembe 2019: 66).

Necropolitics is essentially the use of political and social power to dictate how some people are allowed to live, and how some must die. It is also sometimes referred to as an extension of Foucault’s term biopower – social and political power to control people’s lives. “Under the conditions of necropower, the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are blurred. Politics is therefore a death that lives a human life” (Mbembe 2019, 69).

Necropolitical power proceeds by somewhat of inversion between life and death, as if life was only a death’s medium. It ever searches to eradicate the distinction between means and ends. Crime constitutes a rudimentary part of revelation, and the death of its enemies is, in theory, deprived of all symbolism. There is nothing tragic about such death. Essentially, racism is the driver of the necropolitical principle to that extent that it stands for organized destruction and cheapening the price of life. In current society, the permanent simulation of the state of exception vindicates the war against terror – an absolute, indefinite war of annihilation that claims the right to torture and cruelty. A war that draws weapons from the “evil” that it pretends to be eliminating. It is about fantasy of separation, extermination even. It is about that which does not go together, which does not unify (Agamben 2005).

The desire for an enemy, alongside with desire for an extermination, they both diffuse psychic structures and generic passionate forces. They stir many contemporary struggles and stamp the dominant affective tonality of our times. These mobilizations and struggles thrive on a vision of the world that is anxiogenic and threatening, one that grants priority to logics of suspicion, in fact to all that is secret, or concern to conspiracy. If they are pushed to their ultimate consequences, they lead to a desire to destroy, spill blood. Nowadays, in the psychic life of nations, the drive of the need for an enemy is no longer a purely social need (Mbembe 2019: 128).

Power continuously appeals and refers to the exception, emergency, and a fictionalized idea of an enemy. It also labors to produce them. In Foucault's work – as it proceeds based on partition between the living and the dead. It takes control in which it invests itself. This control requires a distribution of human species into groups, subgroups and the establishment of a biological break between them. He also refers to this process using the term “racism”. Foucault claims, that racism is above all, aimed at permitting that old sovereign right to kill. In this logic, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death – “the condition for the acceptability of putting to death” (Mbembe 2019: 71).

The desire for separation, the desire for enemy, fantasy of extermination – there are several types of walls that express one's desire and not all of them serve the same functions. A separation wall serves to resolving a problem of excess of presence. This presence is seen by some people as the origin of unbearable suffering. To get back the feeling of existing as of now depends on breaking that excess presence. Absence, or disappearance, of that excess presence will by no means be felt as loss. The acceptance of that there is nothing common between us and them. Everywhere, the concrete buildings, borders, wire fences, are in place and around them are various checkpoints, trenches, watchtowers. Their sole purpose is keeping away those considered a threat. The desire for extermination is nothing new. Over the course of colonization, the repopulation of the world often fell into innumerable atrocities and massacres, “ethnic cleansings”, and genocides (Mbembe 2019: 43).

Today, increasingly on screens, we are now living only a single desire. The computer, phone screen is the new scene. The screen does not only look for abolishing the distance between reality and fiction, but it has become reality-generating. It forms part of this century. The twenty-first century opens onto admission about the extreme fragility of all. In the misery of extreme vulnerability, many are allured by some repetition of originality, while others are attracted by the void. They both believe that change can only occur through radicalizing difference and destruction. From the twentieth century, there is significant raising in acceptable forms and levels of violence that one can, or should, inflict on the weak, on the Other (that is not one of us). Hate movements, groups invested in economy of hostility, of enmity and multiform struggles against the enemy have all helped to contribute. They also contributed to widespread exploitation of social relations (Mbembe 2019: 181-185).

1.2. Chinese nationalism

Chinese nationalism is more cryptic than it seems. It has great power and intensity, as shown on the death of Abe Shinzo. Nationalism today seems to be the most widely shared value both

in the Chinese society and the government. The government is perfectly aware of this and has repeatedly exploited it with the goal of strengthening its hand in preventing any attempts of democratization and strengthening China's position in the face of its foreign partners. At the same time, scholars (Zhao 2004; Jia 2005)¹ introduced the concept of "pragmatic nationalism" because of the motivation by self-interest. Opening the Chinese economy and establishing of diplomatic trade links with those, who once "humiliated" China (the USA, Japan, etc.). This is evidence of a somewhat bringing the nationalist emotions under control (Cabestan 2008: 1).

For historical reasons, Chinese nationalism has many specifics. It is based on what is seen as past humiliation. Since the beginning of the modern era (circa since the Opium War in 1860) it is driven by the feeling of insecurity. However, several other forms of nationalism can be distinguished in the country. First of all, there is the official nationalism, that is inspired by the communist ideology and the Communist Party with maintaining its monopoly in politics. This is synonymous with "patriotism" in China. There is also a "revanchist nationalism" that runs on racist tendencies (Cabestan 2008: 2). It relies on popular ignorance of foreign countries and on the historical mistrust towards them. Based on the past humiliations, its manifestation took the form of anti-foreign emotions and xenophobic violence. Symbolized by the concept of China's "peaceful rise", another form of Chinese nationalism had risen. It derives its legitimacy from both a cultural specificity and from current Chinese economic and social realities, however it does not reject foreign influence. Seeking to modernize China and to regain a place in the international matters while preserving its culture, this form of nationalism is less aggressive, showing desire to favor political convergence with the rest of the world (Cabestan 2008: 2).

We cannot disregard the general context of the rise of anti-Japanese feelings in the Chinese society. In spring of 2005, the anti-Japanese mobilization displayed just that. Protests against paid visits to Yasukuni and against the approval of school textbooks with revisionist tendencies, showed the massive ambiguity of the Japanese towards the period of war (Cabestan 2008: 13).

Nationalisms fundamental goals are national unity, national autonomy, and national identity. Based on nationalism's traditional theories, the main question is political legitimacy, stating that national and political units should be congruent one state one nation. Nowadays,

¹ Zhao Suisheng, *A Nation-State by Construction. Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2004, pp. 29-31

Jia Qingguo, "Disrespect and Distrust: the external origins of contemporary Chinese nationalism", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 14, No. 42, February 2005, pp.11-21

the core issues of nationalism are not only territorial and political, but there are also ones concerning national identity and culture (Liu 2020: 127).

1.3.Chinese Internet and netizens

Rongbin Han's study, *Contesting Cyberspace in China: Online Expression and Authoritarian Resilience* reveals the complex internal dynamics of online expression in China, showing how the state, service providers, and netizens negotiate the limits of discourse. State censorship has conditioned online expression, yet has failed to bring it under control, but also finds that freer expression may work to the advantage of the regime. The topic of netizens and their need for attention is relevant to my thesis. Han's findings on netizen's political expression on Chinese forums are most relevant for this thesis. In addition, this study sheds light on pop activism and the reasons why mostly apolitical netizens feel the need to comment on politics even in some cases for entertainment purposes (Han 2018).

The Internet arguably provides new tools of connectivity, diffusion of information and attention which help citizens to connect better, express their ideas, organize, and mobilize. China has a strong authoritarian state that can very effectively control its population, and a massive economy providing a lot of job opportunities. Moreover, the Chinese Party-state is exceedingly capable of adapting to challenges. We can see this in the highly sophisticated censorship system, known as "The Great Firewall", and its various tactics on how to innovatively spread propaganda. The censorship system filters taboo words, blocks, or shuts down websites, deters deviant expressions and surpasses active netizens or dissident groups (Han 2018: 31,32). Censorship can also function by dissuasion through fear by banning the expression of or access to information and serves as punishment so that citizens are discouraged from doing so (Roberts 2018: 44). Despite that, state adaptability can hardly explain the scale of mobilization in China considering the widespread social unrest and mobilization enabled by the Internet. The state has also gone beyond the censorship and shifted their attention toward a more subtle, but invasive, management of popular opinion by employing innovative propaganda tactics such as hiring paid Internet commentators known as the "fifty-cent army" (五毛党), to face pro-regime voices and embracing popular cyber culture to make propaganda attractive (Han 2018: 109-112).

Unlike offline mobilization that tends to focus on closely defined, particular demands, online activism in China often in general targets the authoritarian regime and calls for more freedom. Popular term for Internet users in China is "netizens", particularly because it carries a

sense of citizenship and claim that is in general absent in authoritarian regimes (Han 2018: 2). The more resilient authoritarian regimes such as in China propose fascinating relationship between social empowerment, technological development, and authoritarianism. The Chinese party-state is able to almost permanently coexist with the emancipation and expansion of the Internet. However, the main explanation for it does not lie in the state's power to control and adapt, but more in the diversifying of online expressions. These expressions not only empower regime critics, but also pro regime voices, in particular those representing pro-state nationalism (Han 2018: 2).

Chinese netizens have not only managed to challenge and bypass state censorship in creative ways, but also altered the Internet into a platform for online activism. Compared to traditional media, in cyberspace there is a freer flow of information. It has also promoted civil society by increasing both internal communications and the interconnectedness of civil organizations, and it has helped citizens activism by permitting both overseas and domestic Chinese to mobilize against the regime or advocate for it (Han 2018, 4).

The first platforms for public expression were introduced to China in the form of bulletin board system by educational and research institutions in mid 1990s. The early forums provided only telnet access, later, the web platforms were developed and became mainstream. Besides discussion boards with thematic discussions, most today's forums provide within-site messages, chat rooms and blogging services. Those evolved into social media apps and while some are accessible to both registered and unregistered users, most of the platforms require a registration. Initially, a valid email address was enough for registration, increasingly more forums and apps are asking for additional identification information such as phone number or even official identity numbers (Han 2018: 6).

1.4.Pop activism

How the online expression in China has blurred the boundaries between cyber-culture and politics, developing a form of communicative activism that combines political content with new expressional tactics? It creates something called "pop activism" and it has three defining features. First, it depends heavily on linguistic and its creative use, performance, and media tools to captivate politics. Those tools serve as both means and end in themselves – they transform political topics and messages into subjects of cultural entertainment. Second, the word "pop" meaning is both in political content and its expressive tools are socially constructed through a process of online interaction among many actors, such as the state, various netizens groups and regime critics. The creativity and diversity of these actors have made the boundaries

of online politics and cyber-activism highly fluid. Third, pop activism at the same time represents the diversity of content and the merging of format online expression – while different actors seek different agendas, they all adopt similar tools for popular expression (Han 2018: 78).

Moreover, pop activism not only serves as a weapon to fuel social activism, it may also allow actors to follow other goals, political or apolitical. By the fusion of popular culture and politics while treating the actor's motivation as secondary, pop activism avoids reducing culture to a political instrument and highlights the mutual transformation of cyber-activism and politics. This way, it enables a more balanced and accurate evaluation of the Internet's impact on Chinese politics. In particular, it appreciates the ordinary netizens as the main consumers of online content, whose beliefs and values are most likely to result in many discourses rather a divided state-society struggle. Even though pop activism serves more as a tool of connection for resentful citizens, dissidents, and competition between various online groups, it also serves to netizen's pursuit of fun. We should not dismiss playful expressions as apolitical; it highlights the fluidity of cyberpolitics. While playfulness may help netizens evade state censorship, it may dilute the political message it carries as well, turning online expression into only entertainment or to popularize pro-regime voices (Han 2018: 77-78).

1.5.Chinese cybernationalism

The studies on the so-called Diba Expedition including e.g. Liu (2018) provide crucial insights to understand the cybernationalist trends that underpin the reaction to Abe Shinzo on the Chinese internet. Liu's volume gives a deep description of a new cybernationalism trend through an examination of the 2016 Diba Expedition from different angles, addressing the impact of information and communication on cybernationalism. I draw inspiration from this book for the analytical approach of my thesis.

Communication technologies as a complex play an essential role in structuring nationalistic discourse. We cannot undermine the complexity between nationalistic ideologies and communication technologies. Only when a communication technology has been domesticated and provided with a certain meaning, it can become part of our daily life as a technical and cultural complex. When technology as a cultural form evolves into a part of cultural construction and daily interaction, it will change people's mediate perception, experience and even behavior. From a cultural perspective, the mutual domestication of media

and social relations casts a light upon the relation between communication technologies and nationalism (Liu 2018: 130).

As a space that allows the public to express their views and participate in political and social activities, the Internet unavoidably reflects main social values. It is important to note, that the Internet enlarges differences and that opinions that we see online do not necessarily reflect public opinion. Therefore, online nationalism does not reflect Chinese nationalism as a whole. Although the Internet has produced some distinctive dimensions of nationalism, cybernationalism should be viewed in the broader context. It shows political performance that is influenced by global geopolitics and consumerism. It is not only rooted in historical memory but also in the digressive power that Chinese nationalists imagine China. So, online nationalism mixes local with global forces, politics, and economy and popular with official nationalism (Liu 2018: 26).

There is a vigorous difference between the cybernationalism nowadays and the one at the beginning of the twenty-first century. To an early cybernationalism related topics basically came from political events or the mass media while new campaigns usually stem from the agenda set by the Internet. Cybernationalism as a term in China appeared in 2003, it emerged as a political phenomenon in the late 1990s when the internet was introduced in China. In 1999 it first appeared in the Protesting against NATO Barbarism Forum, that later became Strengthening the Nation Forum in regard to bombing Chinese embassy in the former Yugoslavia. After that, followed waves of cybernationalism in succeeding political events. The rise of cybernationalism in China is believed to be related to China's rise and the restricting of international order. On the other hand, the Tzuyu Chou event and then incident of rightist history books started from Weibo and were made in cyberspace. The grassroots decentered expression online provides symbolic resources for the embracement of nationalistic ideologies. This kind of self-mobilization allowed easier access to nationalism, connection to daily life and personal identity (Liu 2018: 128).

In the Internet era, visual expression is not only a crucial channel for information, but it also to a great extent transforms the way netizens socialize and communicate, as well as their shared actions and historical memories. Recently, visual expression such as images, videos, games, animations, has gradually become the symbol of communication with the biggest impact on cybernationalism. As distinctive, explicit, and appealing as it may be, visual expression is enriched with a communication capacity, and becomes an essential instigation for nationalism. Cybernationalism tends to be seen as self-arranged with great anger, and its negotiators display an extremely masculine national consciousness. However, we should be able to determinate if

cybernationalism is completely spontaneous and comes from hatred. We should review its each and every action and its context. At this point, netizens who engage in those actions are the main points for grasping the nature of the structure as well as the most appropriate focus of observation and interpretation (Liu 2018: 110).

Cyber subculture – the action process carried out by agents on their own from the individual to a united collective mass. This can be understood through individualization. In discussion the contradiction between freedom and safety, the group is called “peg community”, who will come instantly. More precisely, netizens who create the virtual community and then get together to create chatter on the Internet, tend to seek a sense of satisfaction and form a group. This group isn’t a solidified group, and we cannot see it that way, but it is rather a “collective effervescence”. On the other hand, cybernationalism aims to get netizens together by establishing a combined target and a certain enemy. It tries to mingle the individual social psychology with the collective one and leaves netizens a place to show off their individuality. Correspondingly, netizens are able to integrate their hatred and love, popularization and innovation of language, and meme culture within their shared voice. The cyber subculture is mastered through this style, playful and emotional. The common belief and nationalism’s social united force have been strengthened by this kind of collective social interaction (Liu 2018: 56).

Point very important to highlight is that depicting culture as a tool for achieving political goals is not appropriate, because culture itself is a social product. The Internet had enabled both social actors and state to experience culture and politics in radically different ways than before. Ordinary citizens who had been in the past mostly passive recipients of political and cultural influences are now engaged in the production, consumption and distribution of those constructs and everybody’s opinion can be seen. Netizens mainly express disconnect, share complains and try to challenge authoritarian rules (Han 2018: 78).

To engage in politics, firstly the netizens and regime critics often have to get around state censorship. Put differently, political expressions must be guarded, so it is not surprising that netizens would disguise their opinions with fun and playful expressional formats. Secondly, these online expressions in China are pluralized, since various actors – the state and its critics, netizens groups – are all involved and are competing with each other to promote their preferred discourses. Third, most Chinese netizens are not politically motivated, they tend to be more interested in lifestyle topics. However, politics can also be made fun and those apolitical netizens can become political (Han 2018: 99-100).

1.6.Sino-Japanese relations under Abe Shinzo

Abe Shinzo was the longest-serving Prime Minister in Japanese history, serving for nine years in total, and he was also a President of the Liberal Democratic Party. When he came to power, Abe inherited a difficult political climate. Due to territorial disputes over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, Japanese relations with China had deteriorated. His policy towards China was more pragmatic than adventurous, especially after 2012. Abe's foreign policy efforts to reach out to Australia and India. He managed to grow non-traditional ties with New Delhi and extending military ties with Canberra. This also served a larger purpose of checking China's expansionist policies in the Indian Ocean region. The inclusion of Indonesia and Singapore as key partners sought to create shared interest in ensuring regional peace and stability and it also constructed an effective alternative to economic dependency on China. Abe wanted to reorient Japanese policy toward Taiwan. In 2015, Abe started referring to Taiwan as an "important partner" and "precious friend," publicly emphasizing shared values between Japan and Taiwan. Some of his foreign policy towards the Mekong Region posed an alternative to China's development strategy. The 2018 New Tokyo Strategy of Mekong-Japan Cooperation signaled the growing rifts between China and Japan. His infamous visit to the Yasukuni Shrine was another huge addition to already hectic relations with China, same as the failed Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, where Abe actively attempted to isolate China with the support of the Obama administration. Despite these actions, critics portray him as a politician, who tried to maintain the status quo in relations with China (Basu 2022).

2. Analysis

Analytical method employed is analytical critical method that puts emphasis on theories applied to larger society, and particular instances of social interaction, analyzing typical texts of social problems (Wodak, Meyer 2009: 23). In case of this thesis, it is how Chinese nationalism and cybernationalism is reflected in netizen's comments. Also, the Discourse-Historical Approach is employed, by focusing on politics and historical context (Wodak, Meyer 2009: 26). In this thesis it is the links between Chinese history and modern Chinese nationalism.

Also, using the content analysis by examining and interpreting both the mass media and social media. This analysis aims at with objectivity and generality describing what is said on a given subject in given place at a given time (Lasswell, Lerner & Pool, 1952). In the case of my thesis it is official media, WeChat and Weibo.

2.1. Abe Shinzo's Death in Official Media

My primary sources are official media and their reports on the assassination, articles written by netizens, in which they express their radical opinions. This section focuses on online articles on the shooting published by the official Chinese media, particularly Xinhua News Agency, People's Daily and China Daily. The next section will examine instead comments on Abe's death that were collected from WeChat by searching for hashtags such as #安倍晋三, #安倍晋三之死, and the most popular hashtag with over a billion views, #安倍晋三已无生命体征. While unable to register an account on Weibo, I was able to access links to online reports from foreign media through this platform.

The mass media in China are closely watched by the Chinese government and the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The main nation's media are China Central Television (中国中央电视台), People's Daily (人民日报), and Xinhua News Agency (新华通讯社) and they are all controlled by the CCP. While searching on these main websites, I found it extremely hard to find something. When trying to search on Xinhua website, it never showed the whole article, only a headline and a few lines so the idea of switching to the English version to see if it is any better came to mind. This time, when searching the Xinhua English website for Abe Shinzo, Shinzo Abe or 安倍晋三, it said that there were no related information. The next website I looked into was China Daily (中国日报) and finally found articles reporting on the death of Abe. China Daily is also owned by the Central Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party and is controlled. All the articles reporting on Abe Shinzo's death were brief, objective without any additional information. All the reports refer to Xinhua News Agency and probably only copies their reports. QQ News also had the same austere articles without any added information. When searching through SINA News, which is a part of Weibo, had longer articles with a lot of information on Abe's politics and its benefits and disadvantages towards Japanese politics. Only after searching on English websites, specifically on The Diplomat website, the links to official articles on Xinhua News and People's Daily were available. Those two articles are exactly the same, published only a minute after one another. The People's Daily website refers to the Xinhua News, and the China Daily article is not the exact same one, however it is very similar and shares the same information, so there is a possibility of other official media websites also shared the same report. All of them neutrally state the fact of the incident and briefly introduce Abe Shinzo and who he was.

For comparison, there are the official, first reports, Xinhua News article and People's Daily article.

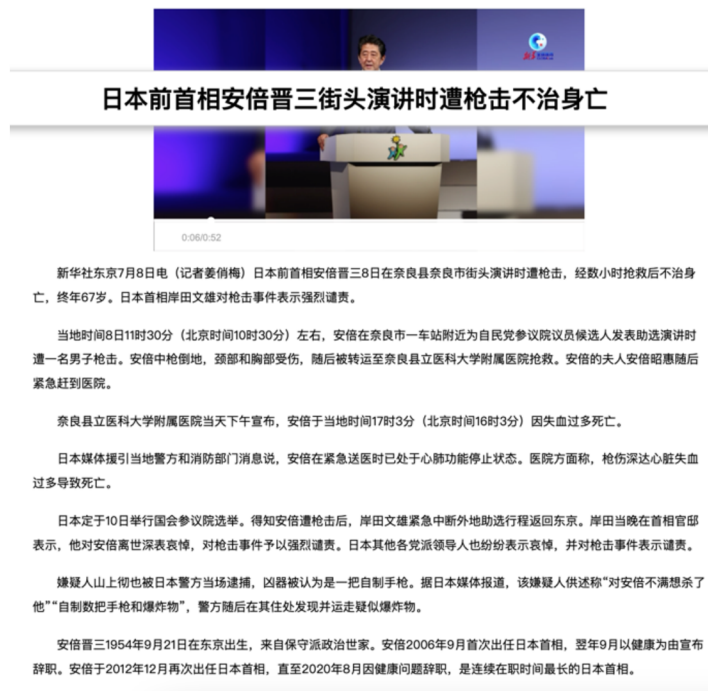


Figure 1: Xinhua News article

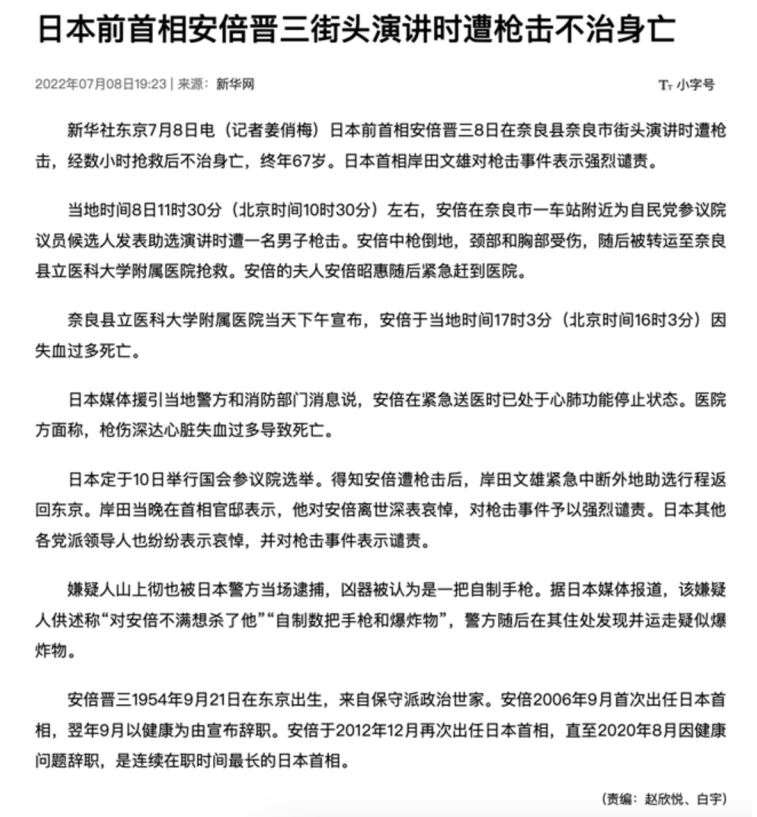


Figure 2: People's Daily article

China Daily reported on the initial response of Zhao Lijian, the deputy director of Ministry of foreign affairs, expressing condolences to Abe Shinzo's family. (Tiezzi 2022) Later, when Zhao was asked during a daily press conference about the reactions on social media, he responded by saying that he would not comment on the remarks posted online.



Figure 3: China Daily, Zhao Lijian's response

Global Times, a tabloid newspaper, flagship to People's Daily, wrote a controversial commentary: "Japanese right-wing forces may use this incident to push forward the trend of conservative transformation in Japanese politics." This article in state-owned newspaper not only mentions the positive sides of Abe's politics, but it also mentions the negatives unlike the official reports. The official reaction of China was careful and sympathetic, focusing on how Abe contributed to the growth and improvements of China-Japan relations. On the other hand, this topic was trending heavily on Chinese social media platforms with various views on the incident, more in line with the Global Times article (Ping 2021). Some other tabloid news outlets posted about the incident on Chinese social media platforms, however, when searching for comments, most of the accounts filtered the comments, leaving only a few positive ones online, or closed their comment section and banned people from commenting at all.

2.2. Abe Shinzo's Death on Social Media

2.2.1. Hatred towards Japan and Japanese people

Feelings of Chinese people towards Japan and Japanese people are exceptionally strong and with the state anti-Japanese propaganda, it plays a massive role in their reaction. According to

most studies, for example Waldron 1996 and Mitter 2000², the negative propaganda towards Japan is dangerous, double-edged sword, that strengthens Party legitimacy. There was also time of restrained approach toward Japanese wartime atrocities in the hope of building better, stronger relationship with Japan. Chiang Kai-shek and later Zhou Enlai both tried to enlighten the situation and wanted to shed light on thousands of years of friendship and not the last decades. In the 1972 normalization of relations started several years of discussion, where Japanese wartime actions were suppressed as “harmful to the Sino-Japanese friendship” to encourage proud Chinese national image at home. However, in the early 1980’s Chinese leaders started to be anxious over Japan’s expanding military capacity, military alliance with the US and fast growth in wealth. Also, a dispute over Japan’s Taiwan policy emerged. Thus, in the 1980’s the images of Chinese wartime suffering soon appeared in textbooks, museums, state-sponsored movies, and dramas. In 1990’s, the State Education Commission ordered schools to teach to “remember historical lessons, and not to forget imperialist invasion and Chinese people’s heroic resistance.” The public was reminded of past humiliation by foreign invaders, and it was meant to be primarily a motivational device (Reilly 2011: 468-450).

Several comments expressed the hatred of Chinese nationalists towards Japanese people and Japan in general. These expressions of hatred were closely bound to historical events. One thing that was very common in these types of comments and posts was the label for Japanese people. The term 小日本 is a derogatory term for a Japanese person and is used frequently. Other term that appeared multiple times, the full phrase being 日本鬼子 – this abusive term is a wartime term insult for Japanese meaning “Japanese devil”.



Figure 4: Anti-Japan comment 1

² Waldron, A. China’s New Remembering of World War II: The Case of Zhang Zizhong, *Modern Asian Studies*. 1996.
Mitter, R. Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Nationalism, History and Memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987–1997, *The China Quarterly*. 2000

“The Japanese must pay with blood, conquer the Japanese” The idiom “血债血偿” meaning “a debt of blood must be paid in blood” or “blood calls for blood” is again closely bound to history and the deaths of Chinese people caused by Japanese invaders. By the amounts of likes, we can see that people agree with these kinds of statements.



Figure 5: Anti-Japan comment 2

This radical comment from a netizen on WeChat is the prime example of cybernationalistic post, referring to history. “In the name of 35 million Chinese people massacred by the Japanese I thank this hero!” This netizen views Abe’s death as a “reparation” for what Japanese did to Chinese people. From the necropolitical standpoint, he justifies Abe’s assassination by the deaths of Chinese, as if Abe himself was responsible. His death is probably viewed as necessary in this case, weaken, taking power from Japan’s politics.

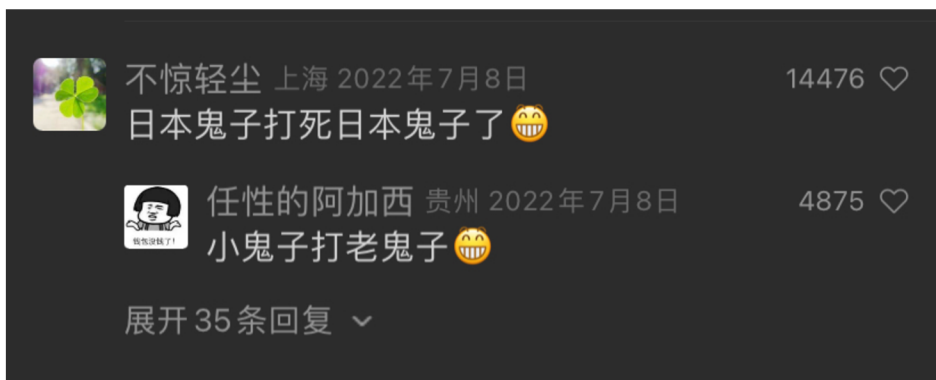


Figure 6: Anti-Japan comment 3

“Japanese devil killed Japanese devil” with a reply of “Young Japanese devil kills old Japanese devil” both with a laughing emoji at the end. These spiteful comments were everywhere around the Internet, making fun of the situation and discrediting the death of a person, just because he was Japanese.

2.2.2. History

One of the key factors of the hatred towards Abe Shinzo is the history of Sino-Japanese relations. Abe’s infamous visits to the Yasukuni Shrine was a huge addition to reason for Chinese nationalists to hate him. The Chinese view this as symbol and celebration of Japanese war criminals. Closely bound to this is Abe’s grandfather Kishi Nobosuke. From 1937 to 1940,

Kishi was de-facto a head of Manchukuo's industrial economy. Four million Chinese people were forced labor for the industrialization of Manchukuo and more than 40% died during this operation. He pushed his hardline stance on Japanese racial superiority on the Chinese laborers. After 1945 when Japan surrendered, he was arrested and classified as a "Class-A" war criminal and sent to prison. He was then released, essentially because of his anti-communist stance, and then went on to becoming a Prime minister of Japan and he refused to apologize for the Japanese crimes towards China (Schölander 2022). Abe Shinzo also refused to apologize for his grandfather's war crimes, and it may seem as that he agrees with what happened. Abe was also photographed posing in a jet plane numbered 731. In Chinese people, this number evokes the Imperial 731-unit, notorious medical research unit based in Harbin, that performed lethal experiments on alive humans during World War II (Kim 2013).

Without enemies, people struggle to keep themselves going through life alone. Whether these enemies really exist or not matters little. It is enough to create them, find them and bring them into the light. Now, this effort became increasingly troublesome with the confidence, that the most ferocious and the most intrepid enemies had laid themselves into the deepest pores of the nation, destroying the nation's most prolific promises from within. How, then we separate the nations they come from without harming them completely? Searches, controls, emergency law, the loss of nationality; everything is put effect, so that we can deal with the even-harder blows they struck. These blows do not necessarily need to land on the root of the evil and its authors, but on those who merely resemble them. By demanding the death of those who merely resemble the evil, who are not on our side, is the risk of producing all the tragedies of humanity driven by hatred. Those enemies, with whom it is not possible to make any agreement, or it is simply not desirable to make one, generally appear as caricatures, clichés and we often stereotype them. All this grant them symbolic sort of presence, which only serves the purpose to confirm the type of threat they bring to bear on us. With our imaginations caused by hatred do not stop to feed on obsession about the real identity of the enemy. So, who is the real enemy? A nation, religion, a person, or an idea? (Mbembe 2019: 53).

From the nationalistic standpoint, Abe was Chinese enemy. The nature of Chinese nationalism combined with the necropolitical desire for an enemy made out Abe's death to be deprived of symbolism, of sympathy. For research purposes, I searched for the indifferent comments of netizens, that were happy to see him dead, or in some cases, view his death as necessary evil. In many of these comments, we can see references to history. In some of them, we can see that netizens view his death as karmic, for whatever he stood for in the events of history.



Figure 7: History comment 1

This netizen said: “Never forget national humiliation, remember history.” “勿忘国耻” directly refers to Mukden railway incident of 18th September 1931 and following invasion of Manchuria. It serves the purpose to remind other netizens that because of the Japanese invasion, Abe’s death is justified.

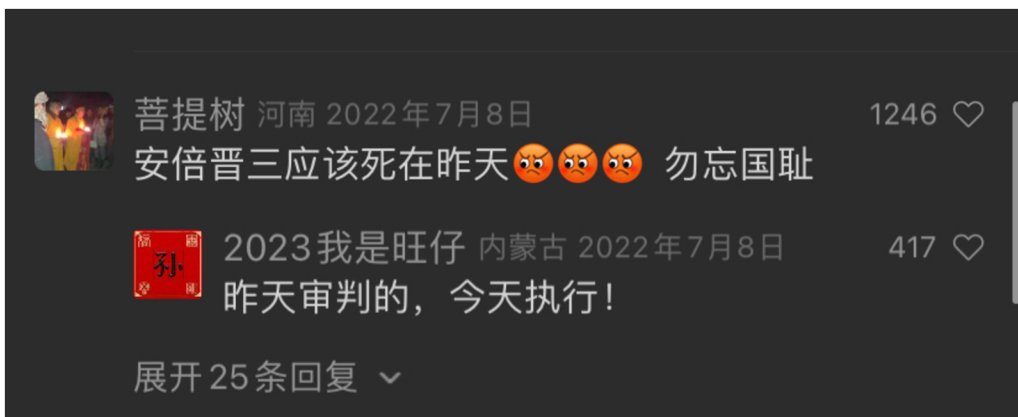


Figure 8: History comment 2

“Abe Shinzo should have died yesterday, never forget national humiliation” with a reply “what was judged yesterday, was executed today!” Here it refers again to the Mukden railway incident that led to sequence of incidents. Abe was shot on the 8th of July 2022, and on the 7th of July 1937 the Marco Polo bridge incident happened, regarded as the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War. For some netizens this was somewhat karmic death for Abe, because of what the Japanese did to the Chinese during the World War II. A lot of other netizens think the date of Abe’s death is symbolic.

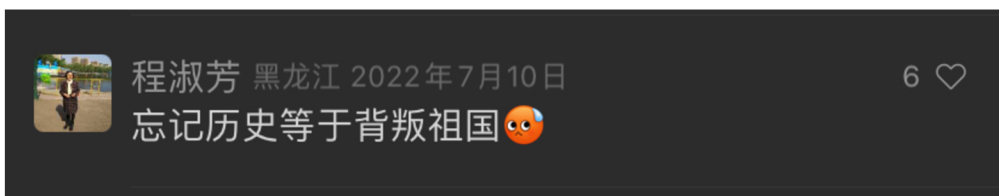


Figure 9: History comment 3

“Forgetting history equals to betraying motherland.” This very patriotic WeChat comment was the essence of all the other nationalistic comments. Chinese people should not completely forget what Japan did to China, because forgetting Japan would be equal to not being a patriot.

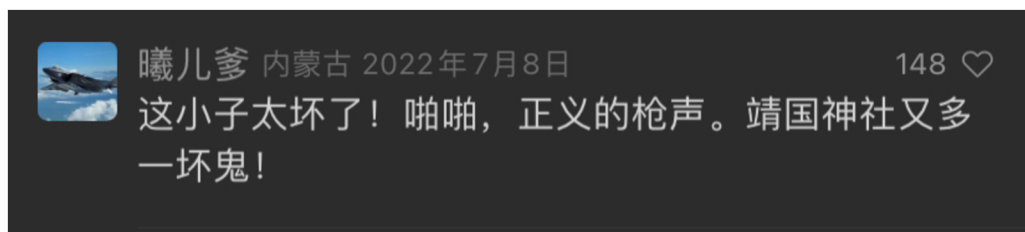


Figure 10: History comment 4

This comment shows that Chinese people really despise Yasukuni Shrine and what the place stands for. “This bloke is too bad! Bang, bang, gunshot of justice. Yasukuni Shrine has another villain!” The part of history Yasukuni Shrine represents will never be forgotten and Abe himself visited, so now he will reside there forever.

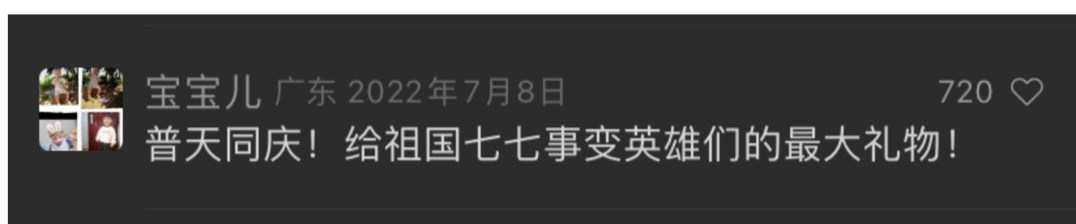


Figure 11: History comment 5

“Everybody celebrates together! The greatest gift to the motherland’s heroes of the 7th of July incident!” There were a huge number of comments about the start of the Japanese invasion and this one particularly says that Abe’s death is a gift to those, who suffered during this period of time. It is understandable, however Abe himself was not directly responsible, and it is evident that it does not matter. Chinese netizens think that Abe directly or indirectly supported the terrors of war and therefore his death is a gift.

2.2.3. The Taiwan affairs

The next reason mentioned in the comments was about what Abe said about Taiwan. After his resignation, he became close with secessionist Taiwan authorities, made many provocative remarks about Taiwan, taking it as far as calling the United States to make a solid decision on whether it would defend Taiwan in the face of a Chinese military operation. In 2021, he argued: “A Taiwan emergency is a Japanese emergency, and therefore an emergency for the Japan-U.S. alliance.” He also wrote in *The Los Angeles Times* that the U.S. policy of strategic ambiguity toward Taiwan was “fostering instability in the Indo-Pacific region” and called for the United States “to make clear that it will defend Taiwan against any attempted Chinese invasion” (Sacks 2022).

During my research I came across a video on WeChat about Taiwan setting up a bronze statue for Abe Shinzo and the local people went there to protest. A man protestor with a

catchphrase: “日本人的鬼，滚回日本去!” “Ghosts of Japanese people, go back to Japan!”

Comments under this video are reflecting the protestors and supporting them.

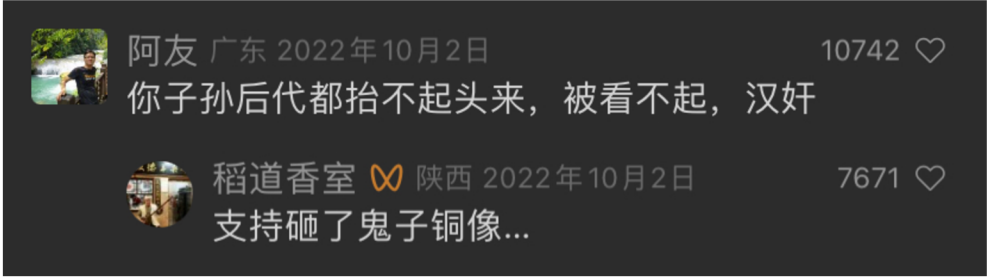


Figure 12: Taiwan comment 1

This was the most liked comment under the video of a statue of Abe Shinzo said: “Your descendants will not be able to lift their heads up, be looked down upon, traitor” and followed with a reply saying: “Support smashing the bronze statue of the devil..” using the term 鬼子.

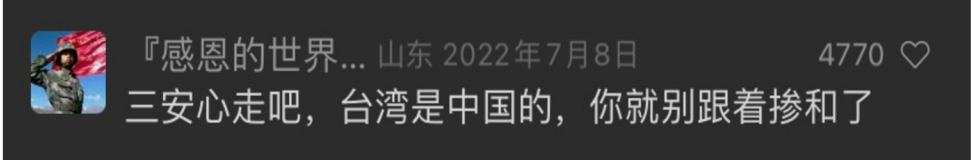


Figure 13: Taiwan comment 2

“San, go in peace, Taiwan belongs to China, do not get involved with it.” (三 being abbreviation to 安倍晋三) In these comments we can see how much the nationalists care about Taiwan and it being part of China. Since Abe was a strong advocate for the USA and Japan taking action towards China if China would invade Taiwan, it is one more reason for patriots to resent him.

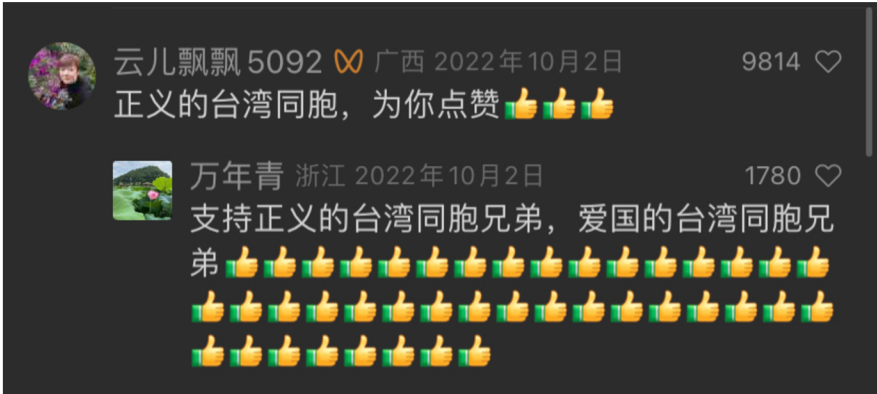


Figure 14: Taiwan comment 3

This commenter said: “Righteous Taiwanese compatriots, I like for you (meaning the post)” with a respond to it saying: “Taiwanese compatriots who support justice, patriotic Taiwanese compatriots.” There were a lot more replies with the same phrases, the same opinion, of nationalists. This comment section clearly shows the dislike towards Abe and his politics towards Taiwan.

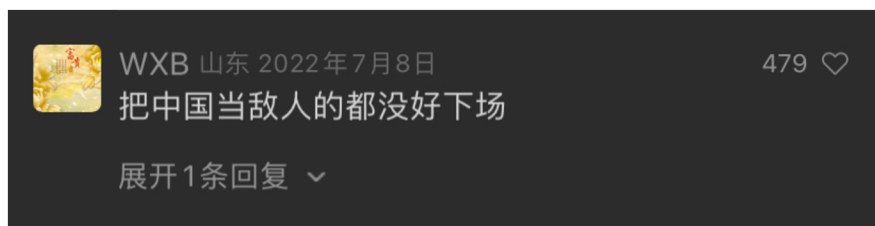


Figure 15: Taiwan comment 4

Other types of patriotic comments carry similar traits as this one. “Anyone who treats China as an enemy won’t end good.” Stating that treating China badly or criticize China will not go without a punishment, in Abe’s case, death.

2.2.4. Praising the killer

As Mbembe’s study reveals, everything appears as if being denied an enemy creates a deep narcissistic wound in ourselves. To be deprived of an enemy, or not live through any bloody acts instigated by those who hate us and our way of life, means being deprived of the hatred that permit us to give in a free rein to many kinds of otherwise forbidden desires. It means to be deprived of that demon. Without him all is not permitted, the times seems to be vigorously calling for an absolute, unbridling, and generalized impulsiveness. It also means being frustrated by our compulsion to be afraid, by our capacity to demonize the kind of satisfaction we feel when a supposed enemy is shot dead, even better when captured alive and being subjected to endless interrogations or tortured (Mbembe 2019: 48).

A lot of the comments also praise the killer, Yamagami Tetsuya 41-year-old Japanese man, that shot Abe with a home-made gun. In this case, we can also see netizen’s remarks on Japan’s strict gun policy. Yamagami destroyed the one necropolitics call an enemy. By the principle of desire for an extermination, the nationalist commenters are happy to see the one they called an enemy dead, praise the killer for getting rid of one problem. Seeing someone that they do not agree with suffer, brought them joy.

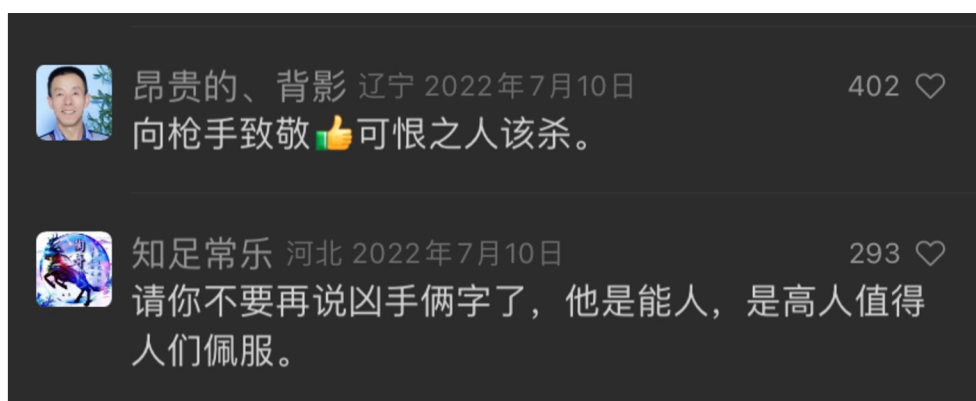


Figure 16: Praise of the killer comment 1

Those two comments were under each other and both of them are praising Yamagami. The first one saying: “Salute to the shooter, hateful people deserve to be killed.” It seems as this commenter feels like it is their right to decide who should live and who should die, like the shooter did his service to the world. The second one says: “Please do not say the word “murderer” anymore, he is a capable person, he is a master worthy of people’s admiration.” Implying that Yamagami is not praised enough for what he did and that more people should be glad he committed this act of violence.



Figure 17: Praise of the killer comment 2

多行不义必自毙 – is a idiom that sands for “he who is unrighteous is doomed to destruction”, “persisting in evil brings about self-destruction”. They are also moving to the next level saying, the next target should be Joe Biden, President of the United States. In the most liked reply, we can see admiration for the shooter stating: “I adore this shooter, hero.”

Other type of praise and support for the shooter and his actions were netizens saying he is innocent and nothing wrong was done, that the shooter is their hero. Or even netizens commenting on the shooter’s good looks.



Figure 18: Praise of the killer comment 3



Figure 19: Praise of the killer comment 4

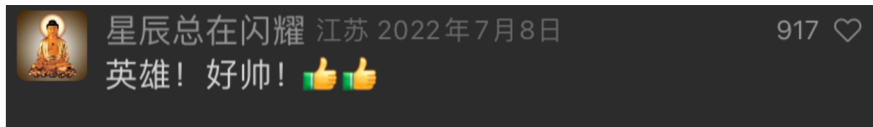


Figure 20: Praise of the killer comment 5

2.2.5. “humorous” and celebratory comments

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, pop activism is a big part of cyber culture and enables resentful citizens to not only to connect with one another, but it also serves to netizen’s pursuit of fun. While searching for nationalistic, racist, or patriotic comments, there often were comments, that were enlightening the situation, meant to be funny or celebratory comments.

Many comments mention food or alcohol to celebrate. These comments are short and go straight to the point of celebrating by drinking alcohol and having feast.

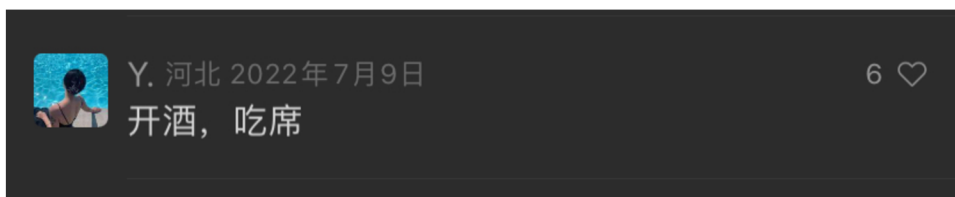


Figure 21: Celebratory comment 1

“drink, feast”

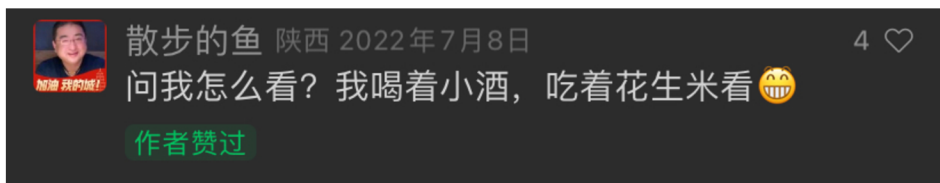


Figure 22: Celebratory comment 2

“Ask me how I watched? I drank some wine and ate peanuts while watching.” (This was a reaction to a post asking netizens what they were doing while watching the news about Abe’s death).



Figure 23: Celebratory comment 3

“Waiter, bring another case of beer”



Figure 24: Celebratory comment 4

“serve food, drink and start to feast”

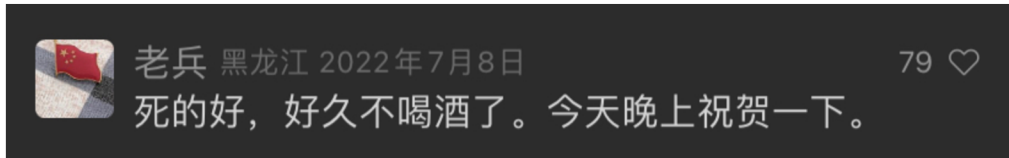


Figure 25: Celebratory comment 5

“Well done, haven't had a drink in a while. Congratulations tonight.”

Other netizens simply say it is a good day and should be celebrated.

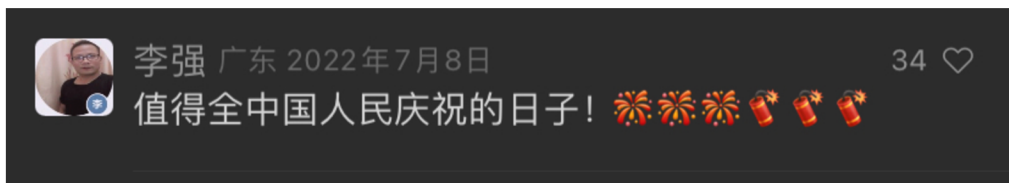


Figure 26: Celebratory comment 6

“It is a day worthy of celebration by all Chinese people!”

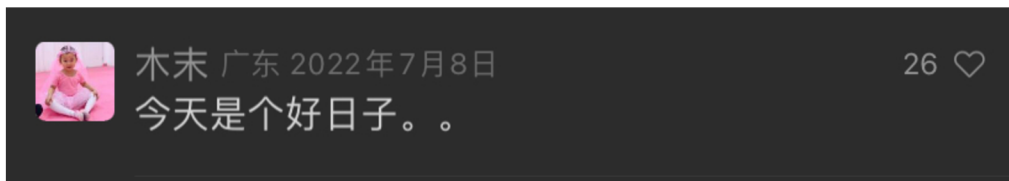


Figure 27: Celebratory comment 7



Figure 28: Celebratory comment 8

“Today is a good day.”



Figure 30: Celebration in a club



Figure 29: Celebration in a club

In this infamous video³ of a netizen on WeChat, there is a DJ playing EDM music with a photomontage of Abe's edited pictures and celebratory idioms. 普天同庆 – an idiom that stands for “the whole world or nation rejoices” meaning general jubilation. 欢天喜地 – „with boundless joy” meaning delighted, in high spirits. This video is no longer uploaded to WeChat. The netizen's username was found, and the account is still active, but the video is not on his page anymore. However, it can be seen in this video, that this particular club allowed the DJs to make photomontage, project it on screen and party.

³ TonyMa888, 2022, *Chinese Celebrate Shinzo Abe's Death (at club)*, Youtube video. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYRLfHzjmCw>

2.2.6. Messages of Sympathy

During my research, there frequently were posts from media outlets with large number of likes, but a few comments, restricted comment section or disabled comment section. Nevertheless, most of somewhat official news outlets closed their comment sections. The few comments that were, probably approved to be posted by the media accounts, were condoling. However, most of the gentle comments were to criticize other netizens for not having empathy, denounce their stance on the incident or lack of respect to death.



Figure 31: Sympathizing comment 1

“May the deceased rest in peace” was the most repeated comment, nonetheless still difficult to find and not common at all.

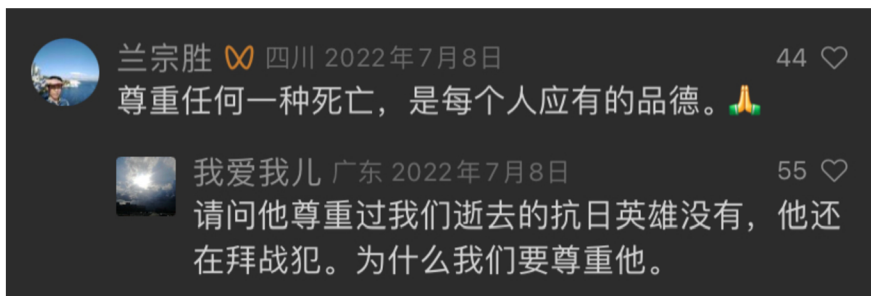


Figure 32: Sympathizing comment 2

Whenever condoling comment or netizen criticizing other lack of respect to death was uploaded, instantly somebody replied with nationalistic remark. “Respect for any kind of death is a moral character everyone should have.” condemning the brutality of some netizens. The reply saying: “May I ask if he has respected our dead anti-Japanese heroes, he is still worshipping war criminals. Why should we respect him.”, even had more likes than the original comment.

2.2.7. Memes

Having an enemy at one’s disposal, ideally in a spectacular fashion, has become a mandatory stage in the constitution of the subject and it’s becoming a symbolic order of our times. The long parade of the condemned through the streets prior the execution, the parade of body parts, and the display of a severed head mounted on a pike - a standard practice of popular violence in the medieval times. Terror was (and in some instances still is) constructed as an almost

necessary part of politics. Because of these practices, an absolute transparency was claimed to exist between the people and the state (Mbembe 2019: 73).

In today's world, we can finally display, parade ourselves, we can finally become our own scene, in this age of endless self-curation and exhibition, we can finally draw our portrait. Already in the making, a new kind of human being entangled with technologies, with new objects is therefore being constituted through and withing digital technologies and new media forms. This new system has serious implications for traditional understanding of reason, freedom, and politics. The new human being will be accounted for and within digital technologies and computational media. The computational age is overpowered by the idea that everyone has a clean slate (Mbembe 2019: 114).

All the researched posts and videos on WeChat had the same picture of shot Abe lying on the ground and a clip of the actual shooting. Netizens in the comments were pleased to see these pictures. In medieval times, parading body parts was common and now it is considered barbaric, but showing uncensored pictures and videos on the Internet nowadays is acceptable? Before Abe was officially declared dead, netizens also commented on the videos and photos of the attack asking if it was real, that they would be so happy if it was, implying that they watched it happen and were not disgusted, rather glad to see Abe shot. Also, some netizen's created memes vilifying the shooting and they also prove my theory of connection between medieval parading of body parts and creating these kinds of memes.

Both of those memes mock Abe being shot and were uploaded to a collage of memes on WeChat.



Figure 33: Meme 1



Figure 34: Meme 2

3. Findings

During my research I encountered countless comments by nationalistic netizens expressing their opinion online. “The new human being” described by necropolitics is already there to be seen. Even though the netizen’s profile picture and nickname are public, nobody, except maybe their friends, know who these people are behind the screen. Anonymity is a great medium for expressing terrible, vile, and sometimes horrifying opinions. Though digital footprint is real, these netizens have nothing to worry about, they can simply delete the statements they made and keep their clean slates.

As mentioned in theoretical part of my thesis, the Internet opinion does not necessarily reflect the public’s opinion. The Chinese government did not censor this topic much despite strict censorship. It is almost a year later and there are still a lot of bitter and sometimes disgusting comments still up. Even though the official state media did not extensively cover the topic of Abe’s death and majority of official reports were objective, emotionless and unbiased, the lack of censorship implies, that their opinions could be similar to netizen’s. Also, the video of celebration in a nightclub suggests, that the wider public may have the same opinion, since it did not take place online, but in a real nightclub.

It may seem that netizens do not view Abe’s death as a sad death, they do not feel remorse. They justify his death by the terrors Japan did to China in the past and view it as a retribution, revenge. Because of history, they do not have any respect for his death and whoever mentioned the lack of respect, many more netizens came to criticize this person and blame them for not

being patriots. His death became an object of celebration, karmic punishment for Japan. This kind of reaction creates the impression that Abe's life was only worth after he died. The most used argument was the Marco Polo Bridge Incident on the 7th of July and the date of attack on Abe being 8th of July. The date also feeds the argument of his death being karmic.

However, the same people that use derogatory language when speaking about Japanese people, call the shooter hero, praise him. Nonetheless he is still Japanese, it may seem as he is one of them, because they have the same enemy. The idea of war against terror, the right for cruelty. My research exhibits that patriotic netizen's thought was universal. Abe's death is deserved and should not be mourned by the Chinese. Continuing this fantasy, this incident draw one more "evil" from Japan, the fantasy of extermination. The shooter had a right to kill Abe and this act of violence should be celebrated.

Netizen's reactions online, mean, derogatory, comical, or satirical can be attributed to the Chinese patriotic education. After the 1989 protests, compulsory patriotic education curriculum was spread in 1994. Including the concept of "hundred years of humiliation" from the 19th to 20th century of China being "bullied" by Western forces. Also, with propaganda being all around, Chinese people are submitted to these opinions (Kuang 2021). Thus, these overly patriotic, nationalistic opinions are rooted in racism, xenophobia mixed with the results of past humiliation. With these tools in place, it might be easy for one to think they have the right to kill, or in this instance, the shooter had the right to do it.

4. Conclusion

This bachelor's thesis discusses how and why Chinese media and its netizen's reacted to the assassination of Abe Shinzo. I chose this topic because of how little attention and media coverage the netizen's reaction got. Intrigued by the Chinese netizen's reaction and the urge to appreciate further information on reasons for the reaction and the case itself. Topics of necropolitics and cybernationalism appealed to me before and I thought those two topics could be closely related in the case of Abe's assassination.

Theoretical part of this thesis introduces the reader to topics of necropolitics, Chinese nationalism, Chinese cybernationalism, netizens, pop activism related to the thesis topic and Sino-Japanese relation under Abe Shinzo to induce into the first issue. The analytical part then shows official media reaction and netizen's reaction on social media, then describes the issue and analyzes sample comments.

Main aim of the thesis was to detect why was the netizen's reaction to Abe's death so vicious and, in some cases, immoral and what is a role of cybernationalism with the incorporation of

necropolitics. This goal was accomplished by searching and then analyzing netizen's comments and obtaining information about Chinese history and stance of Chinese netizens towards Japanese people and Japan. The most common reason for resentment towards Abe was the historical aspect. Chinese patriotic education resulted in disfavor or hatred even towards Japan and netizens mostly argue with never forgetting history and how Japan, and other Western powers treated China in "hundred years of humiliation", connected to the historical aspect is how vocal was Abe about Taiwan. Chinese nationalism, thus Chinese cybernationalism are affected and molded by what is seen as humiliation. How netizens praised the killer and wished him to be freed is bound to the concept of necropolitical power and enmity. By the definition, Abe is seen by netizens as an enemy and was assassinated in great fashion in front of them. Great number of articles had this corpse as a cover photo and was heavily commented on, the sight of Abe Shinzo's dead body made many netizens happy and celebratory. Any condoling and sympathizing comments were criticized and condemned.

The uproar in Chinese netizen's caused by Abe's death on social media may not reflect the public opinion or opinion of state officials, however, the state did not say much about the comments made online and did not censor them completely, if not censor them at all. Searching through hundreds of appalling comments, videos, articles and real-life situations finding much more of consistent, hateful ones those sympathetic ones, argues, that the opinion of wider public may be the same and it is not only netizen's fantasy.

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