



Nationalism in China: The Xuanzang Temple Incident in Nanjing

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Abstract. In July 2022, a citizen of Nanjing exposed the memorial tablet of Japanese war criminals enshrined in Xuanzang temple, which caused an great uproar on the Internet and offline. The government and the police responded quickly to the matter, dealt with the temple involved and detained Aping Wu. The thesis starts with this event, analyzes development of nationalism in modern China by studying the online and offline behavior of Chinese residents and combine with China's modern history. The final results of the study shows that Chinese nationalism has flourished since the beginning of 21st century because of the Internet. Currently, it is still the mainstream. In a sense, nationalism in China has both merits and disadvantages. It can improve the cohesion of the country to a certain extent. However, because of historical legacy factors, it often leads to the extreme of public opinion.

Keywords: Nationalism · The Nanjing Massacre · Internet Nationalism

1 Introduction

Although there was a debate of hua yi in ancient China, nationalism did not appear until the early 20th century. The traditional world community gradually collapsed under the impact of the West in the late Qing Dynasty. Chinese modern national consciousness gradually awakened in the gunfire. Especially after the Sino Japanese War of 1894–1895, nationalism became an ideological trend, and as a powerful force, it affected all levels of the whole Chinese society. After the revolution of 1911, the Republic of China replaced the Qing Dynasty. Sun Yat Sen and others once believed that the mission of nationalism had been completed, but this was not the case. After Yuan Shikai took over as president of the Republic of China, Japan forced the Chinese government to sign the “21 articles”. This has aroused widespread strong anti Japanese sentiment in China. The government’s compromise made people’s anger peak. China’s diplomatic failure at the Paris peace conference brought national sentiment to another peak. After that, nationalism experienced the baptism of the New Culture Movement. During the Second World War, the awakening national consciousness condensed the chaotic country into a whole to jointly resist the invasion of Japan.

Reviewing the development of nationalism in China from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, it is not difficult to see the difference between

Chinese nationalism and western nationalism. If western nationalism is endogenous for its own reasons, Chinese nationalism can be called exogenous. No matter how contrary the Chinese nationalists position are, whether they are to maintain tradition or advocate westernization, the fundamental idea is to resist foreign aggression and build an independent and unified nation [1]. Although the establishment of the people's Republic of China in 1949 marked the completion of the nationalism's mission, it did not withdraw from the historical stage. It is still active in the 21st century and dominates people's thoughts. A recent incident can prove its existence. This paper aims to analyze the development of nationalism in the 21st century through this event. More specifically, it is to analyze the impact of the emergence of the Internet on it and the reasons why it become extreme. While analyzing its advantages and disadvantages, the author tries to put forward measures to solve the adverse effects of extremes. These bad situations include not only cyber violence against individuals, but also physical conflicts, such as the 9.15 Anti Japanese provocation and trouble making case in Xi'an in 2012. On September 15, 2012, affected by the Diaoyu Island incident, many young people took to the streets of Xi'an to protest. They targeted the owners of Japanese cars. Cai Yang was one of them. He and his companion stole the U-shaped lock of the roadside motorcycle and smashed Li Jianli seriously (Li's car was made in Japan). The latter saved his life after rescue, but inevitably became a vegetable. This tragedy caused a great stir at that time. At present, when netizens discuss nationalism, many people still mention it. It is certain that this incident would not be the last tragedy. Therefore, it is very important to solve the disadvantages brought by nationalism. However, the measures to solve the drawbacks of nationalism are not the important point of the article. This article focuses on analyzing the Xuanzang Temple incident and the two factors that led to the rise of nationalism.

2 Xuanzang Temple Incident

On December 18, 2017, Aping Wu went to Xuanzang temple to ask for memorial tablets, and filled in the registration form with the names of six people, "Ishigen Matsui, Shoufu Gu, Yi Noda, Junji Tanaka, and Minnie weitlin". The monk on duty did not know that the first five were war criminals of aggression against China because of his low educational background. When asked whether the worshipped person were her friends or relatives, Aping Wu lied that they were her friends.

On February 26, 2022, a tourist visiting Xuanzang Temple accidentally found the memorial tablet dedicated to the Japanese war criminals invading China in the temple, and immediately took photos, which were blocked by monks. On July 21, he posted photos on social platforms. When this incident was exposed, it attracted a lot of social attention and public opinion was in an uproar. The police quickly intervened in the investigation and detained Aping Wu. On July 24, in order to quell public anger, the police announced the investigation results of the matter in a timely manner. The investigation report shows that Wu aping's worship of the memorial tablet of Japanese war criminals is a personal act, and she had not been instigated or colluded with others. According to Aping Wu's confession, after she came to Nanjing, she learned about the atrocities of the Japanese invaders. As a result, she had a psychological shadow. At the same time, she learned

that Ms. Hua Qun (Minnie weitlin), who committed suicide because of the stimulation of the war. Aping Wu wanted to help her free herself through enshrine and worship. Her misconceptions about Buddhist causal interpretation theory prompted her to do thing that hurt national feelings. Most netizens are not satisfied with the findings of investigation. Some people still believe that Aping Wu is a spy bought by the Japanese. And others refuse to forgive her. They vented violence online and published her personal information.

3 Analysis of Aping Wu

The author agrees with the official explanation. Aping Wu is not a spy sent by Japan. The Japanese Ministry of foreign affairs would not have taken so much trouble to place the memorial tablets of war criminals in a small temple in China. The author believes that the reason why Aping Wu did this is that her definition of community is different from that of most Chinese people. This involves the difference between the religious community and the national community. Apart from depression and other factors, Wu Aiping is a Han person deeply influenced by Buddhism. From this incident, she may care more about her religion than her nationality. In the *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Anderson wrote: Few things are more impressive than the vast territorial stretch of the Ummah Islam from Morocco to the Sulu Archipelago, of Christendom from Paraguay to Japan, and of the Buddhist world from Sir Lanka to the Korean peninsula... Yet such classical communities linked by sacred languages had a character distinct from the imagined communities of modern nations. For religious people, the enemy is a heretic or atheist. For people who care about their own nation, the enemy refers to people of other nationalities. The two have different concepts of the enemy. Wu Aiping did this for religious reasons. In Buddhist thought, they pay attention to cause and effect samsara. She can help the Japanese war criminals by offering them memorial tablets to help them “solve their grievances and get rid of suffering”. This is in contradiction with the secular world. Although Buddhism is very popular in China, most people are atheists. As a result, in the view of most netizens, the reason why Wu Aiping did this is absurd.

4 Historical Legacy Factors

On September 1st, 1939, Germany stroke Poland. This event marked the beginning of the Second World War. However, in the Asian battlefield, the war began as early as 1931. On September 18, Japan launched the war of aggression against China and forcibly occupied Manchuria. In the next few years, they slowly encroached on Chinese territory until 1937. On July 7th, 1937, Japan launched a full-scale war of aggression against China. Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai fell one after another. In December of the same year, Nanjing fell into Japanese hands. When the Japanese army entered Nanjing, they began a cruel Carnival rarely seen in world history. In addition to the surrendered Chinese soldiers, they also slaughtered countless Nanjing residents wantonly. In a short period of six weeks, Nanjing, which was once very prosperous, was in ruins, with corpses everywhere. Years later experts at the International Military Tribunal of the Far East (IMTFE) estimated

that more than 260,000 noncombatants died at the hands of Japanese soldiers at Nanking in late 1937 and early 1938, though some experts have placed the figure at well over 350,000 [2].

The Nanjing Massacre is a scar in almost every Chinese heart. Especially for Nanjing residents, they cannot forget their deep blood feud with Japan, even if it has been nearly a century. The long-term distortion of the historical facts of the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese right-wing elements also exacerbated the anger of the Chinese people against Japan. As a result, it is not difficult to explain why the Chinese are so sensitive about the Xuanzang Temple incident. However, in addition to this factor, what else caused the Chinese people to become irrational after this incident was exposed? The author believes that this factor should be the popular mind. A nation is an “imaginary community”. When people care about their national identity, they become a group.

5 Popular Mind

An entire nation, though there may be no visible agglomeration, may become a crowd under the action of certain influences. By analyzing the Xuanzang Temple incident, it is not difficult to realize that anger against Japan has prompted most Chinese people to become a crowd [3]. If the Chinese people’s victory in the war of resistance against Japan more than half a century ago benefited from the advantages of popular mind, the Xuanzang Temple incident reflected its disadvantages. Being in doubt as to what constitutes truth or error, and having, on the other hand, a clear notion of its strength, a crowd is disposed to give authoritative effect to its inspirations as it is intolerant. An individual may accept contradiction and discussion; a crowd will never do so [4]. Therefore, it is not difficult to explain why many people stubbornly believe that Aping Wu is a spy bought by Japan. On the other hand, group feelings are very simple and exaggerated. Combined with the theory of group impulsivity, it can explain why the Xuanzang Temple incident caused so much attention and why someone committed online violence against Aping Wu. In a word, popular mind is one of the factors why nationalism tends to be extreme.

6 Internet

The network appeared in the second half of the 20th century. In the following decades, it has developed rapidly and profoundly changed the world. It is an opportunity for nationalism to spread. In Benedict Anderson’s theory, nation is an imaginary community. The reason why a nation is an imaginary community is that the people living in this community actually don’t know everyone else, but create a common experience through the media and other tools to maintain a bond created by people through imagination. In the book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, he pointed out that printing played a major role in the origin and spread of nationalism in western countries. The network, as a technological innovation, is equivalent to the 2.0 version of printing. At the same time, the rise of network culture has also induced public enthusiasm for political. As a result, the network has promoted the spread of nationalism to a certain extent, and also created the rise of internet nationalism.

7 Conclusion

In the 21st century, the Xuanzang Temple incident is not the only thing that embodies nationalism in China. Before that, there were the Diaoyu Island incident, the event of the boycott of star visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, and so on. The Xuanzang Temple reflects the fact that nationalism did not withdraw from the stage of history as some people expected. On the contrary, it still influences the thoughts and behaviors of many Chinese people. Moreover, because of the emergence of the network, its diffusion is more rapid. As for the reason why it often become extreme, the author puts forward two factors as conjectures and demonstrates them, which may have logical deficiencies. The first is the history, and the second is popular mind. The former would affect the latter in some ways [5]. As for how to avoid the disadvantages brought by the extreme nationalism, the author thinks that individuals should cultivate critical thinking. As far as the government is concerned, it should try to publicize to the public the lessons learned from history, rather than tit for tat. It should also play a good regulatory role. When there is bullying on the Internet, the government should act in time and curb it. The author believes that these suggestions are still insufficient to a certain extent, and there may be relatively large obstacles in practice. There are still some deficiencies in the research of this article. The author is not sure if the government practices such measures, it will cause people's rebellious psychology. At the same time, the author does not mention the differences between patriotism and nationalism in the article. And since the beginning of the Covid-19, the economic contradictions of various countries have worsened and the gap between the rich and the poor has widened [6]. At the same time, conflicts between China and foreign countries are increasing. On Chinese websites, some people often make unreasonable remarks (insults against the United States and other countries), but it is difficult to tell what their purpose is, hatred between nations or hatred for capital? In this case, the author is unable to determine whether the Chinese people prefer nationalism or socialism. Therefore, it is hard for the author to give a general development trend of nationalism. In short, the future of nationalism is uncertain. If it goes to extremes, it is bound to bring some unbearable losses.

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