

Origins of the April 2005 Anti-Japanese Protests in the People's Republic of China
中华人民共和国 在二零零五年四月抗议日本运动的起源

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Abstract (摘要)

In the month of April 2005, the streets of major cities in the People's Republic of China erupted in popular demonstrations of anti-Japanese sentiment.¹ The protests began on Saturday 9 April in Beijing where organized crowds estimated greater than 10,000 strong vandalized Japanese businesses, banks, and restaurants,² and attempted to storm the residential compound of the Japanese Ambassador.³ The following weekend on 16 April in the nation's commercial capital Shanghai, paramilitary police stood by as an estimated 20,000 protesters overturned Japanese cars, and damaged Japanese shops and restaurants. Demonstrators gathered outside the Japanese Consulate in Shanghai, stoned the building and burned the Japanese flag in the streets outside⁴ chanting "Japanese invaders must die."⁵ Other anti-Japanese demonstrations were held in dozens of cities throughout the PRC in this same time period, though some are better described simply as riots, rather than manifestations of public sentiment.

State-controlled media impelled the people's fury with subjective reports of Japanese offenses in both the present and distant past. In a confusing fog of both facts and fabrication, assertions were made that the Japanese simply *never apologized* for wartime atrocities, are now actively revising accounts of their violent history of aggression against the Chinese people, are seeking permanent membership status in the United Nations Security Council, and are remilitarizing as a threat to Chinese national security. In China's "decentralized... neoauthoritarian developmental autocracy,"⁶ where inequitable development has hardly changed the lives of large portions of the population from those of their ancestors, this renewed *rally around the flag effect* behind the Chinese Communist Party has served to divert some of the people's discontent away from the collusive and corrupt misdeeds pervasive among their unelected leadership toward a century-old foreign enemy. However the exact extent to which the Party strategically used anti-Japanese nationalism to strengthen the Party's own legitimacy, and to what extent the Party was itself motivated by nationalist passions of the Chinese people, will most likely never be known. While in the end, the CCP reluctantly called upon the People's Armed Police to halt the protests so as not to severely destabilize the nation or its economic ties with Japan, evidence suggests that the CCP rekindled the sixty-year-old fires of anti-Japanese sentiment and ignited the dangerous flames of xenophobic nationalism in an effort to bolster the Party's own legitimacy, further ensuring its highest priority of regime security.

A History of Japanese Aggression (日本侵略历史)

Across the vast land of China, with its plethora of languages, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds, there is a commonly shared hatred of Japan that clearly serves to unite them as a people. In the minds of the Chinese, the unambiguous central reasoning for this is the sixty-year-history of invasion, colonization, murder, and rape of the Chinese people by the Japanese. This period of Japanese aggression dates back to the First Sino-Japanese War that began in August 1894 after expansionist Japanese forces invaded Korea, historically a tributary state to China in the Sinocentric system. In November the Japanese captured the Chinese port city of Lǚshùnkǒu (旅顺口), called Port Arthur by British Colonizers. The Japanese brutally massacred thousands of innocent Chinese civilian inhabitants including women and children. The conflict ended with the humiliating Treaty of Shimonoseki signed in April of 1895 whereby China sanctioned Japanese control of Korea and ceded parts of Eastern Manchuria as well as the island of Taiwan to Japan.⁷

Unsatisfied by the successful expansion in the late nineteenth century, Japan continued its military buildup planning a steady annexation of territory belonging to neighboring Asian states. On 18 September 1931, there was a bombing (conceivably a false flag operation staged by the Japanese) of a Japanese Railway at Liutiao Lake (柳条湖). The Japanese Imperial Army subsequently used the incident as a justification for invasion and occupation of the Chinese territory of Manchuria. In October 1937, after another Chinese defeat at the battle of Lugou Bridge (卢沟桥) that marked the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Japanese forces invaded and occupied Shanghai.⁸

The Japanese Imperial Army moved to capture the then Chinese capital city Nanjing. In what Western historians remember as the “Rape of Nanking” (南京大屠杀) the Japanese slaughtered as many as hundreds of thousands of Chinese men, women, and even children by any inexplicably torturous means.⁹ The Japanese decapitated people, nailed them to trees, and threw babies into the air catching them with their bayonets. The Japanese soldiers proceeded to publicly rape as many as 80,000 Chinese women.¹⁰ Tens of thousands of these women, ranging in ages as young as seven years through the elderly, were mutilated and murdered after their rapes; while others were taken into captivity to service the Japanese army as “comfort women.”¹¹ The war developed into the wider combat of World War Two when the US entered the war after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, which led to the eventual Japanese Surrender in

1945. In all, Chinese deaths during the Second Sino-Japanese War are estimated to have been at least nineteen million, though other estimates put the number much higher.¹²

Japanese Revision of History (日本の历史修改)

However distant the memories of the Second Sino-Japanese War may seem, they noticeably resurfaced in Chinese media and public discourse sixty years after the Japanese surrender and were manifested in the form anti-Japanese demonstrations. On 5 April only four days prior to the first round of major protests in Beijing, Chinese state-owned news media reported the Japanese Ministry of Education's Textbook Authorization and Research Council approved a public school history textbook the *New History Textbook* (新しい歴史教科書 / Atarashii Rekishi Kyokasho) published by right wing revisionist historians in 2001.¹³ The PRC publicly expressed indignation,¹⁴ and Qiao Zonghuai of the Chinese Foreign Ministry summoned the Japanese Ambassador stating, "the textbook issue largely determines whether Japan can appropriately treat its militaristic history of aggression and instill in its young citizens a right perception of that history."¹⁵

In Japan there is a movement to reestablish Japanese national pride and to this end, many rightwing revisionist historians publish research that attempts to downplay or justify the brutality committed by Japanese during the last two centuries. Published historical revisions by groups such as the *Japan Conference* (日本会議 / Nippon Kaigi), one of the largest nationalist organizations in Japan,¹⁶ are bringing the memories of the Second Sino-Japanese War to the forefront of popular and political debate. The Japanese government has increasingly authorized the revision of some public school textbooks that downplay or omit mention of some of the more violent aspects of Japanese history especially history pertaining to the Japanese role in the Second World War.¹⁷ One example of such historical revision is the disagreement over the exact number of people who lost their lives in the Rape of Nanjing; a number that Chinese historians estimate to be higher than 300,000.¹⁸ This figure is disputed by some modern Japanese revisionist historians who put the number possibly as low as 45,000.¹⁹ Chinese media reports, which highlighted similar attempts to downplay the atrocities committed by the Japanese upon the Chinese people during the Second Sino-Japanese War, served to further fuel the anger and odium of the Chinese people. However, it should be noted that the People's Republic produces and publishes textbooks that are intentionally full of omissions and blatant distortions of

historical facts, while the most acute example of Japanese textbooks that omit some shameful aspects of the Japanese history are used in less than one percent of Japanese schools.²⁰

Japanese Bid to Enter the P5 (日本渴望进入联合国会员国)

Another headline frequently broadcast by Chinese media that contributed to the people's outrage was Japan's bid for permanent membership to the United Nations most influential organ, the Security Council. Many argue that Japan's qualifications for permanent membership to the United Nations Security Council are clear. What Japan may appear to lack in size, it makes up for in globally dominating financial and industrial might. Japan's national GDP is the second largest in the world and its economy measures almost half of the GNI of the United States. Japan is also accordingly the second largest contributor to the United Nations annual budget; and, unlike Washington, Tokyo typically pays both the assessed and voluntary contributions promptly.

Asia sustains more than two-thirds of the world's population, but only one out of the five current permanent members of the UN Security Council is Asian. In order to resolve this disparity, among many other concerns, Japan is proposed by many to be the most logical candidate to be given permanent membership in the UN Security Council. In reality, this is not a recent development. The Japanese government's first effort towards memberships occurred in 1969 when Foreign Minister Kiichi Aichi made a bid to the UN, but failed to win support of the international community. On 21 September 2004, the G4 nations (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan) issued a mutual declaration supporting each other's claim to permanent membership status on the UN Security Council. Current P5 members France and the United Kingdom supported their bid.

Many studying the Japanese government's attempt to gain a permanent seat in the Security Council believe that Tokyo is not seeking to control world or Asian affairs as some have claimed, but more toward seeking the impressive status symbol that such position affords.²¹ If Japan were to be given permanent membership on the United Nations Security Council, this would not only be a great diplomatic trophy for China's old enemy, but would erode both the significance of the Chinese veto power and its status as the only Asian nation with the coveted permanent member status. Japan having an equal position with the PRC in the UN P5 would also perhaps subconsciously conflict with the ancient Sinocentric perspective of Asian affairs of state.

The Chinese government in her role as a veto-wielding member of the P5 does not need to fear the possibility of Japanese P5 membership; however the PRC needs only to veto any such reform proposition. Therefore, the issue is likely not an actual apprehension on the CCP's part, but rather being used as a propaganda tool to incite public protest. In fact, even at the height of the protests, the Party-controlled news media fueled the fires of anti-Japanese sentiment as Wen Jiabao reminded the Chinese people of Japan's prior bid for permanent membership to the UN Security Council and of Japanese "distortion of history and whitewashing of its wartime atrocities."²² This on April 12th 2005, following a weekend of anti-Japanese demonstrations in Beijing, and only days before the fiercest of anti-Japanese protests were to be conducted nationwide. Chinese Premier Wen told Japan to "face up to history" and again reminded the Chinese people of their "tremendous suffering" during the Second World War at the hands of the Japanese. Wen said, "Only a country that respects history, takes responsibility for its past, and wins over the trust of the people of Asia and the world at large can take greater responsibility in the international community."²³

Japan Apologizes (日本の道歉)

However, such inflammatory comments were not new from the Party's highest leadership. Zhu Rongji, predecessor to Premier Wen Jiabao, in October 2000 stated "Japan has never apologized to the Chinese people..." which is one of the most blatantly false CCP propaganda accusations about Japan.²⁴ Even though utterly mendacious, this notion that Japan had never apologized was perpetuated across China. In reality, Japan has apologized. In the past sixty years since the Japanese defeat and surrender, a variety of entities in the Japanese leadership have clearly apologized dozens of times to their Asian neighbors for the undeniable atrocities committed in the Second Sino-Japanese War.²⁵

In September 1972, when China normalized diplomatic relations with Japan, the following statement of apology was released in a joint communiqué from the two governments: "Japan is keenly conscious of its responsibility for the serious damage inflicted in the past on the Chinese people through war and deeply regrets it."²⁶ In October of 1992 Emperor Akihito, the son of Emperor Hirohito who reigned during the Second Sino-Japanese War, visited Beijing and the Chinese president. Emperor Akihito said, "In the long history of relationship between our

two countries, there was an unfortunate period in which my country inflicted great sufferings on the people of China. I deeply deplore this.”²⁷

In August of 1995 Japanese Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi made the following public apology to commemorate the anniversary of the war’s end:

During a certain period in the not too distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensure the Japanese people in a fateful crisis and, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian countries.... In the hope that no such mistakes be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humanity, these irrefutable facts of history and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology.²⁸

Prime Minister Murayama articulated his “remorse” (反省 / *hansei*) and gave a “heartfelt apology” (心からのお詫び / *kokoro kara no owabi*) for Japan’s invasion, colonization, and violent atrocities committed during the war. Some though have criticized the Prime Minister’s apology arguing that the Japanese characters employed were (お詫び / *owabi*) contending that this is a lighter form of apology, not (謝罪 / *shazai*), a less colloquial and more “formal, legal, and sinofied” admission of guilt. Nevertheless, even though theoretically equivalent in meaning, by using the characters (お詫び / *owabi*), the apology does “feel” more “intimate and heartfelt”.²⁹ There are furthermore issues of how these characters would be translated from Japanese into Chinese and Korean, all of which are questions of semantics and seem to be attempts at undermining the validity and sincerity of the Prime Minister’s apology.³⁰

On 22 April 2005, following two weeks of violent anti-Japanese protests in China, then current Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi once again clearly expressed Japan’s apologies for wartime atrocities.

“In the past, Japan, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. Japan squarely faces these facts of history in a spirit of humility. And with feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology always engraved in mind, Japan has resolutely maintained, consistently since the end of World War II, never turning into a military power but an economic power, its principle of resolving all matters by peaceful means, without recourse to use of force.”³¹

Though for the Chinese, the type of apology required to resolve the situation depends entirely upon the status of the concerned parties relative to one another. The apology required for

an offense committed by a lesser party towards a higher would be much greater than if the two parties were relative equals.³² While China no longer overtly attests its superiority over other nations, there may still be overtones of Sinocentrism in the modern construct of Chinese self-identity. Nonetheless, “face” (面子) is absolutely a zero-sum game. Any loss of face on the part of Japan is a proportional increase of face for the PRC. It may be in an effort to achieve this relative diplomatic advantage that Chinese diplomats seem to take every opportunity to remind Japan, and more importantly the world, of the evermore distant historical transgressions of the Japanese.³³

Another common Chinese argument is that apologies from Japanese leaders are not valid unless they are followed by corresponding action. Though such comments appear to ignore the over 32 billion US dollars (249,731,200,000 yuan) Japan has given to China in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA) some of which does not require repayment. Specifically 26,324,147,202 US dollars (3.1331 trillion yen) in low interest loan aid, 1,224,164,006 US dollars (145.7 billion yen) in grant aid, and 1,214,921,861 US dollars (144.6 billion yen) in technical cooperation.³⁴

Yasukuni Shrine (靖国神社)

Chinese media chooses to point out that former Prime Minister Koizumi regularly visited the Yasukuni Shrine (靖国神社) in Tokyo to honor all soldiers who fought in the name of the emperor, including some Japanese prisoners of war who were executed for having committed crimes of war against China and other nations. Some in Chinese media argue that these shrine visits signify that apologies are not sincere and that these visits serve to intentionally enrage the Chinese people. In spite of Chinese demands, Prime Minister Koizumi refused to stop visiting the Yasukuni shrine because it is a deeply rooted Japanese imperial tradition to visit this shrine to honor those who served the emperor. The Foreign Ministry of Japan stated that shrine visits are not a justification of Japan’s past, but a renunciation of future war and determination for peace.³⁵ In fact, even the name of the Yasukuni Shrine, designated by Emperor Meiji in 1879, is best translated as the “peaceful national shrine”, the character 靖 (Yasu) meaning “peaceful”.³⁶

On 20 December 2006 curators at the war museum located at the Yasukuni Shrine publicly announced plans to rewrite exhibition labels to offer a more neutral perspective on

wartime events. These revisions undoubtedly are in direct response to international criticism of the shrine that still stands today at the very center of this divergence with the PRC.

The former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who took office on September 26 2006 resigned less than one year later, never indicated whether he planned to continue the tradition of Koizumi's annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine while serving as Prime Minister.³⁷ Prime Minister Abe actually made his first overseas trip on 9 October to Beijing instead of Washington as is customary. This move clearly signifies his aspiration to strengthen and ameliorate diplomatic relations with the PRC.³⁸

Chinese Government Response to Protests (中国政府的反应)

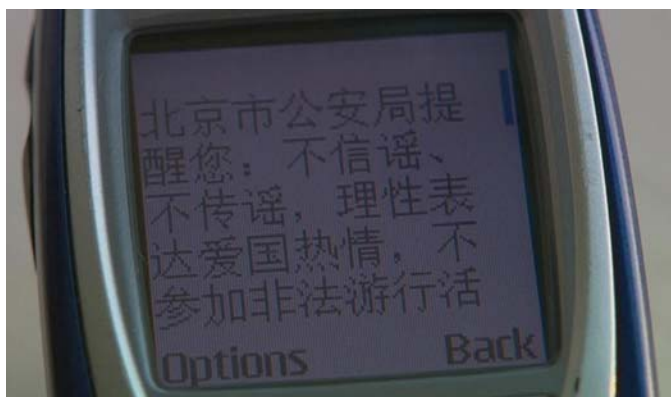
Public media misinterpretations of Japanese intentions and distortions of the reality of Sino-Japanese relations are perhaps examples of how the Chinese government may not only tolerated the waves of anti-Japanese protests across China, but fueled and perpetuated them. The CCP conceivably seized this opportunity to exploit the traditionally xenophobic nature of Chinese people and their innate distrust of Japan based on historical aggression. While the CCP was busy stirring up anti-Japanese sentiment at home, and sweeping the country with jingoistic vehemence, they also turned their back on Sino-Japanese diplomacy for several hours by not allowing the Japanese to contact Chinese Foreign Ministry by phone.³⁹ In a country where public demonstrations are hardly ever authorized—on this occasion, protesters marched to the consulate under police escort.⁴⁰ The Japanese government accused PRC officials of not doing enough to prevent the protests.⁴¹ In fact Beijing city buses were used by the municipal government to ferry students to and from universities and the Japanese Embassy.⁴²

Across the country, television news channels, talk shows, and newspapers further fed the rage of the people with often exaggerated and subjective news reports. In the People's Republic of China, all media is censored and directed nationwide by central CCP authorities. Some subjects are forbidden while others encouraged. There are government officials on local and national levels responsible for the coordination and compliance of local media to national CCP coordination.⁴³ I question how a government that maintains complete control of all media broadcasts in the country and blocks the people's access to foreign sources of information can call such protests "totally spontaneous"?⁴⁴ The *New York Times* reported that the CCP was in fact "pushing and scripting the Japan protests" and "fueled domestic rage with virulent anti-

Japanese propaganda.”⁴⁵ Despite all of China’s internal problems, there have not been popular demonstrations of this magnitude tolerated in China since the 1999 Belgrade Embassy incident.

In China, government Internet censorship is obvious. It is common knowledge to Internet users, especially students, that the World Wide Web they access is very different from the rest of the world. However, in this instance, the elusive Chinese Internet censors were allowing unusually broad freedoms in discussing the Japanese issue. This was, in essence, an additional government stamp of approval on anti-Japanese rhetoric. The Internet became flooded with Chinese Web sites, blogs, and chatting calling for hostility towards Japan.⁴⁶

If left unchecked, anti-Japanese sentiment also could have serious negative consequences for the CCP and for China’s already extensive economic ties with Japan, the PRC’s largest overall trade partner and second largest foreign investor.⁴⁷ If the Chinese people believe that the CCP is not doing enough to confront Japan, it could result in questions of CCP legitimacy.



Perhaps for concerns such as these, by 14 April Chinese police were encouraging calm and discouraging participation in illegal protests.⁴⁸ It appears that the CCP sought a balance between promoting and controlling the demonstrations. Beijing and Shanghai police took advantage of the government’s majority ownership of the telecommunication industry and sent a text-message to all mobile phones in the city asking residents to “show their love for their country in a law-abiding way.”⁴⁹ By the first week of May, the Chinese government had clearly expressed its intention to block any more anti-Japanese protests; and municipal governments stopped issuing demonstration permits and riot police were posted around the Japanese Embassy and Consulates.⁵⁰

Conclusion (结论)

The early part of the twenty-first century may prove to be a key turning point in Chinese history marked by continued drastic rapid economic and social change.⁵¹ For China and the Chinese Communist Party to survive this difficult period of transition, the CCP believes it must try to promote a strong sense of national patriotism to unite the Chinese people behind the CCP to keep the developmental autocratic system stable. Now more than a half century after the last armed conflict with Japan, efforts to revive anti-Japanese sentiment may be viewed as attempts by CCP leadership to divert the people's discontent with internal Chinese problems to an entity outside the Chinese mainland. There is no candidate better than Japan to be the target of Chinese nationalism. The CCP's highest priority is not economic development, but regime security.⁵² However, it could better serve the long-term interests of the Chinese people to more fully embrace relations with Japan and pursue further economic integration not unlike the example of France and Germany following their similar relationship during the first and second German invasions and occupations of France.

To a certain degree, it was on the grounds of "anti-Japanese peasant nationalism" that the Chinese Communist Party initially won over the support of the largest population on earth, and the Party has since continued to base a large part of its legitimacy on such claims.⁵³ The exact extent to which the Party strategically used anti-Japanese nationalism to strengthen the Party's own legitimacy and to what extent the Party was itself motivated by nationalist passions of the Chinese people will most likely never be known.⁵⁴ What is unmistakably clear today in the People's Republic of China however is that Communist Party alone still wields absolute control over the military, media, and all avenues for public discourse and it remains apparent that the absolute highest priority for the Chinese Communist Party is regime security.⁵⁵ The key to the CCP's survival may in fact lie in its ability to sustain the economic development that placates the Chinese masses. However, believing that seizing an opportunity to encourage anti-foreign demonstrations would serve to divert the Chinese people's discontent away from the collusion and graft of their unelected leadership toward a foreign enemy, the CCP rekindled anti-Japanese sentiment and ignited the dangerous flames of xenophobic nationalism in an effort to bolster the Party's own legitimacy.

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