

China's Online Popular Nationalistic Discourse in the 2010s: From the London Olympics to the Rio Olympics

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Introduction

Online nationalism in China is a new form of China's popular nationalism and nationalistic discourse in the twenty first century. It is a product of combination of patriotic education (*Ai Guo Zhu Yi Jiao Yu*) since 1989, international affairs that appear to "attack" China's sovereignty, and the introduction of Internet media that fundamentally changed the media environment in China. The size of online population rose nearly 180 times in eight years. According to the China Internet Network Information Center, China's online population jumped from 620,000 in October 1997 to 22.5 million at the end of 2000 to 111 million at the end of 2005.¹ Although China is known as a country of tight censorship, nationalistic online discussion and discourse appear to create a new space of forum for China's online population.

With facing such new socio-political developments, media scholars have turned their eyes on online media, and examined how online media have changed people's opinion and attitude towards international and domestic affairs and how it has effected on China's government and its policies. Some argue that online discourse plays the role of "watch-dog". Rong Zhang (2017) defines online discussions in China in the term of "collective journalism", which can contribute to an online public sphere, while Ya-Wen Lei (2017) claims that the popularization of the Internet contributed to a rise of public opinion and even the emergence of public sphere. Others emphasize "technological empowerment" or "internet empowerment" that opens the way to create online public sphere or online civil society (Zheng, 2008; Yang, 2009). There are scholars who even contend that online anger challenges China's official propaganda and changes its foreign policy (Gries, 2004, 2005; Shen & Breslin, 2010).

This line of argument, however, is based on two arguable assumptions. First, it is assumed that online media is the way to lead liberal ideas and democracy (Gries, 2005; Reilly, 2010; Liu, 2010). This assumption overlooks the fact of how tight

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censorship the China's government applies. It is naïve to think that freedom of speech is fully protected in China's online sphere. Second, it is assumed that there is dichotomous relation between state-owned media and online media or between official propaganda and online popular nationalistic sentiment (Guo, Cheong, & Chen, 2007). This is too simplistic picture to understand complex and complicated media environment in China. It is almost impossible to draw the clear line between state-owned media and media discourse and those of online. Rather, it is realistic to assume that those two have been intertwined.

Given the above, the main purpose of the current study is to explore what kind of media discourse have been emerged and how they have worked in the particular context of China.

Research Purpose and Methodology

Unlike the above-mentioned existing literature, I take the position that does not distinguish online popular nationalistic discourse from China's official nationalism discourse. Instead, I argue that China's online popular nationalistic discourse is complex and fluid, and is the subject easily converged to official nationalism. This idea is inspired by Yamamoto Nobuto's description of China's popular nationalism back in 2006, saying that "China's popular nationalism should rather to be considered as something burst out and diminish suddenly, than anything intrinsic or constant" (Yamamoto, 2006: 178). Online nationalistic discourse emerges all of a sudden if something attracts people's attention, and then after a while it is gone without any clear accomplishment and as if there was nothing particular happened. This is a common tendency and practice in the democratic media environment. However, in a highly controlled media environment like in the case of China, the story has an additional aspect. It should be taken into consideration of the fact that even online nationalistic discourse is under surveillance. If online popular voices criticize the ways in which state-owned media, then such voices will be contained. On the other hand, there is a possibility that the government allows to use particular terms and discourses online without any visible and particular guidelines to the citizen. Online users unintentionally rely on this kind of "expendable" languages. As far as you use such expendable languages, then you can "freely" discuss their nationalistic sentiments online. This is what I call "converged" online discourse.

In the 2010s, converged online discourse has become noticeable. It is obvious that the diffusion rate of internet boosted conspired to a series of policy aiming at manipulation of online posts. Such policies do not only contain censorship, but also include the ones for the sake of "leading" online public opinion and to rehabilitate official media's online influence. Under such condition, China's online nationalistic discourse hardly showed any difference with official nationalism on state-oriented mainstream media. I argue that the online popular sites with full of nationalistic discourse make it possible for the China's government to converge between online

and official discourses.

In this paper, therefore, I attempt to unfold the fact that online popular nationalism in the 2010s easily converges to official nationalism under the repressive media policy, and such nationalistic discourse in turn enhances the efficiency of Chinese Communist Party's (hereafter, CCP) information control policy. Online nationalistic discourse in China is far from any liberal and democratic activism, but rather has self-legitimizing expendable nature.

To examine my hypothesis above, I take online nationalistic discourse of the Olympics into my analysis. Since the Olympics are described as "a regularly recurring celebration of a coherent set of values, beliefs, and symbols" (Rothenbuhler, 1988: 64), it is good example for time series analysis. In addition, the three games so far in the 2010s—the 2012 London Summer Olympics, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, and the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics—are coincident with the alteration of China's media environment. After the change in political administrations in spring of 2013, China launched "media convergence" policy in 2014 and "internet+" policy in 2015, both are believed as enormously changed the dynamism between cyberspace and official media. To analyze how the online nationalistic discourse has changed to sharing more characteristic with official nationalism on state-oriented mainstream media, I use "hot ranking (*Re Men*)" Weibo posts on Sina Weibo as objects of discourse analysis, and compare them with news coverage of *People's Daily* as well as the other official media discourse.

Literature Review

Sports Nationalism

Andrew Billings (2008: 12) contends that the three main issues of the Olympics—nationalism, gender and ethnic portrayals. Historically the Olympics have been a channel for the construction and display of nationalism (Billings, 2008: 90). In international sports competition such as the Olympics, the victory calls media coverage in a style of fever heat. It is suggested "no other social institution can visualize nationalism as much as sports events" (Tosa, 2015: 1). When considering nationalism in sports events, some scholars tend to interpret it as alternative goods of war, while other scholars regard it as proportional to modern civilization. According to Tosa Masaki, "these two facets of sports nationalism are complementary to each other, rather than mutually exclusive" (Tosa, 2015: 5).

It is true that, on the one hand, mega-events like the 20th century Olympics have contributed to uniting the nation; on the other hand, they have assisted state propaganda and/or imbue them with an ultra-competitive nationalism. For instance, the 1964 Tokyo Olympics were seen as an opportunity to appeal Japan's post-war reconstruction and promote Japan's new image as a peace loving country. Thus, it mobilized every possible domestic force to create what turned out to be a "dreamy

era” in Japanese national memory (Ozawa, 2016: 268). Yet, as the later example, the 1936 Berlin Olympics were the first to be radio broadcast to the world, and its presentation to an international audience also transformed it into a propaganda event (Roche, 2003: 166). Within the context of the Cold War, the tension between the U. S. and the USSR was prevalent throughout the reporting on the Olympics. The 1980 Moscow Olympics experienced a boycott from more than 50 countries. At the 1980 Olympics, the US Men’s ice hockey team’s semifinal win against the USSR was celebrated as the “Miracle on Ice”. The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics also faced a counter boycott from the Soviet Union, East Germany, and other countries (Billings, 2008: 2-4).

Victor Cha (Cha, 2009: 23) indicates that sports are more “political in Asia more than elsewhere in the world”. In the East Asian context, history, sports and politics tend to be mixed or intertwined. The Olympics are more than just games, and this is “especially true for China” (Billings, 2009: 5). For China, the nationalistic emotion elicited by the Olympics have evolved over several phases. Up until the 1976 Innsbruck Winter Olympics, the title of the “Republic of China” was used by KMT Taiwan. Since Mainland China only started participating in the Olympics in 1980, the title of China was used for the PRC, which was associated with Chinese nationalistic emotions regarding anti-Taiwanese separatism. Moreover, although faced with criticism of the athletes’ drug abuse under an authoritarian system, both the Chinese people and Chinese athletes showed their desire for more gold medals, which was rooted in China’s competitive nationalism. Furthermore, owning the Olympics in Beijing prompted national pride, especially in contrast to the narrative of unowned Chinese team during the colony period of the 1930s and the 1940s.

In the 1990s, China’s failed bid for the 2000 Olympics caused massive domestic disappointment. Beijing had led in all voting rounds, but lost to Sydney in the final round. This failure “cannot but instill an aura of victimization and international conspiracy within the expectant nation” (Tok, 2010: 32). Following the failed bid for the 2000 Olympics, the 2008 Beijing Olympics “had come to hold special significance of national pride in eyes of the Chinese population” (King, 2010: 172). But after the Tibetan riots in March 2008 and the torch relay protests in London and Paris, counter demonstrations in support of Beijing were held in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and Belgium by overseas Chinese (King, 2010: 172). These European-based protests quickly developed into popular nationalistic sentiment in China, forming boycott movement against French products such as Carrefour and Louis Vuitton mobilized on Chinese BBS (King, 2010: 174). In response to these boycotts, several European and world leaders declared their non-attendance of the opening ceremony of the Beijing games. On the other hand, the protection of torch relay in Nagano Japan by overseas Chinese students were also reported within the frame of the heated sentiment of China’s nationalism, thus rise to another wave of antipathy toward China in Japan (Lin,

2009).

These events, constructed a conception for the Chinese, that “regardless of how much China strives to become a constructive player in the world, ‘many in the West will never accept that, and will seek to humiliate them’” as Kenneth Lieberthal suggests (Bajoria, 2008).

Nationalism is considered to be a pillar of CCP’s legitimacy, and during the Olympics games, there has always been a concentrated expression of nationalism discourse. On the other hand, Sina Weibo, an online microblog service which is China’s comparable version of Twitter, especially played a role of surveillance over abuse of power during the beginning years of the 2010s. Therefore, during the 2012 London Games, online public discourse indeed bore the aspect of an alternative media discourses. However, after the CCP launched a series of policies aimed at controlling online opinion from 2013, Weibo’s role of serving an alternative source of information was obviously weakened during the Sochi winter games. Hence, under the influence of the “media convergence” policy and “Internet+” policy, online nationalistic discourse approached that of the official nationalistic discourse during the 2016 Rio games.

China’s Nationalism: Official Nationalism and So-Called Empowering Nationalism

After China’s economic reform and the Tiananmen crisis during the 1980s, the CCP rediscovered nationalism as the basis of its legitimacy. Since the birth of the People’s Republic of China, the narrative of “defeating the Japanese and saving the nation” had been the “legacy at the heart of Chinese Communist claims to [its] nationalist legitimacy” for almost seven decades (Gries, 2004: 69). But during the Mao period, the “War of Resistance” was a “chosen glory”, and China’s self-image was that of “victor” (Gries, 2004: 70). It was after the weakening of socialist ideology that a national history of “a hundred years of humiliation” and nationalism as victims were rediscovered (Gries, 2004, 2005).

Eto Naoko (2015) divides the changes in China’s official nationalism into five periods. The first period is from 1949 to the end of the 1970s. During these years, China’s official nationalism was a mixture of ethno-nationalism and socialist ideology. The second period stems from the early 1980s up until 1989, when the CCP prioritized economic development, thus provoking individualism in China. Deng Xiaoping even defined economic behavior contributing to the nation’s modernization as “patriotic”. Official nationalism in the 1980s consisted of the mobilization of economic development and the cohesion of the nation. The third period was from the 1990s to the millennium. Faced with the end of the Cold War and the back down of socialist ideology, the CCP launched patriotic education in August 1994. This decade showed aspirations toward the developed Western world coexisted with anti-Western sentiment. The fourth period was from the 2000s

through 2012, when online nationalism rose and several anti-Japanese popular protests erupted. According to Eto, the CCP has struggled with disruptive and disorderly nature popular nationalism since then. The political rhetoric of “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” and “harmonious world” were used to facilitate rational actions on the part of the Chinese people. To construct a more powerful and wealthier nation has been the key concept of China’s official nationalism starting from 2000. The latest period began starting with the regime change in 2012. Xi Jinping proposed the idea of “China’s dream” and emphasized “China’s original development process based on its national identity (*Min Zu Jing Shen*) and economic aspirations” (Eto, 2015: 71).

Many studies focusing on China’s online nationalism have taken examples from the fourth period according to the Eto’s suggestion. As the Internet began to serve a new information environment in 2000, many China watchers have been eager to consider online activities as favorable examples of an empowered civil society. Within this context, scholars have inclined to examine online nationalism as a tool of resistance against the authoritarian government.

The 2003 anti-Japanese Bullet Train incident is one of the most mentioned examples. China’s Government planned a Beijing-Shanghai high speed railway construction in 2002, the possibility of Japan winning the bid was quite high at that time. However, after the Japan’s Economic News and other Japanese newspapers reported China’s High possibility of selecting Japan’s Bullet Train Shinkansen technology, Chinese nationalists gathered 90000 anti-Japan e-signatures and publicly submitted their petition to the Ministry of Railways in Beijing in July 2003. Even though China government shut down such signature website soon, the Japanese (at the time) Minister of Transportation Chigage Ogi found her appointment with China’s Prime Minister Wen Jiabao had been cancelled. This case was interpreted as a case of “bottom-up popular pressures are increasingly threatening the party’s nationalist legitimacy” by Peter Geris (2005: 256). The online nationalists claimed that allowing Japan’s railway technology to penetrate China meant opening China up to a “reinvading”, drawing parallels with the Manchurian railroad Japan built and used in its invasion of China (Reilly, 2010). However, even though the anti-Japanese nationalism was criticized as irrational and destructive for China’s own interests by the editorial board of the People’s Daily, Ma Licheng, such online claims remained to threaten the legitimacy of the CCP’s official nationalist rhetoric as a victim of WWII. In this sense, it can be concluded that China’s “negotiating stance, and policy decisions more closely correlate with trends in public pressure” (Reilly, 2010: 61).

As for the case of anti-Japanese protest in 2005 against Japan’s bid for UN Security Council membership, it has also been discussed as a case of “struggle over meaning with regard to the state repression over the protest” (Liu, 2009: 79). In the first days of the protests, CCTV did not cover the very first protest that took place in Shenzhen, while the People’s Daily and Xinhua News Agency appealed to the public

to consider social stability and harmony as well. But the online mobilization of the protests opposed the government's stance, and fiercely criticized such state-run media. Hence, Liu advocated the opinion that "state-over-society view on contemporary Chinese nationalism cannot properly grasp the reality [...] The public opinions on the Internet can never be effectively silenced and suppressed by the regime" and defined internet nationalist activism as a "bottom-up, grassroots-oriented, and counter-hegemonic cultural practice cutting across the matrix of power and empowering civil disobedience" (Liu, 2009: 84, 85).

Three Elements of China's Nationalistic Discourse

By reviewing the literature above, I have categorized three consistent elements in China's nationalistic discourse. The first one is the accentuation on the "glory of the nation". This includes narratives of being the victor of WWII during the Mao's era, statements about wealthy modernized life during Deng's era, China's identity as a great economic power after 2008, and Xi's emphasis on China's original development process. When popular nationalistic discourse cites the culture and especially the economic glory of China, it is equivalent to affirming the developmental dictatorship model of China's political system. Thus, popular online nationalistic discourse can converge with official nationalistic discourse when it conspicuously takes note of China's economic development.

The second element is anti-Western sentiment. This includes the history of the century of humiliation, self-identity of victims, and anti-Japanese sentiment. This is the root of CCP's authoritative legitimacy. Since China came out with the rhetoric of a "peaceful rise" during the Hu's administration, it has shown a positive attitude towards international cooperation in foreign affairs, with anti-Western sentiments in its nationalistic discourse seeming to decrease. But at the same time, both official media and commercial media can still domestically inflame popular nationalistic sentiment by presenting China as the victim (Aoyama, 2010).

The third element is solidarity between compatriots, which is seldom discussed in literature about China's nationalism. Such sympathy and solidarity based on brotherhood has mainly been discussed in liberal nationalism. In this context, nationalism is the foundation for nation building and the construction of a democratic political system. The CCP's proclamation of "the civil right to participation in government" (Zhao, 2004: 20) in its early stages is suggested to be a form of liberal nationalism.

In the following sections, I argue that China's online nationalistic discourse is a fluid mixture of the three elements, that can easily converge with the official nationalistic discourse when media controlling policies are applied. Furthermore, I assume that even the online nationalistic discourse that conflicts with that of official media can be considered as a survival strategy of self-legitimization under an authoritarian regime.

London Summer Olympics

Media Environment in 2012

In 2010 Sina Weibo began its service, making it possible for ordinary people to engage in information dissemination, which notably impacted China's media environment. Subsequently, the theory of "two (divided) public spheres" was frequently mentioned by both communication academics and mainstream media editors. State-oriented mainstream media was considered to be a "propaganda sphere" rather than a "public sphere", as mainstream media discourse was more like the promotion of ideological boasts (Liu, 2013). On the other hand, Weibo online discourse focused on the abuse of political power, surveillance over the iniquitous acts of the government, and provided an "online public sphere" for critical discourse. Thus, during the first years of the 2010s, the state-oriented mainstream media and Weibo were in conflict with each other, seeming to be like "water and fire" (Chen, 2012). Then, the chief editor of the People's Daily Online (people.cn), Liao Hong, also admitted the "government's decisions and policy are frequently commented on by the online population with bile, and the mainstream media's authority has been extremely weakened" (People's Daily Online, July 29, 2011).

In such a media environment, the London Olympics witnessed plenty of cases in which the Weibo discourse conflicted with the mainstream media discourse. It is notable that the two types of discourse were sharply hostile to each other. In some cases, they both claimed themselves to be "nationalist". On the other hand, such a rift in the discourse between two kinds of media platforms could also be temporarily healed by nationalism.

Media Discourse Conflict during the London Olympics

As Jiayang Fan (2016) points out, the "Chinese government [...] has made no secret of its desire to promote China's supremacy on the world's most conspicuous athletic stage, the Olympics are closer to a gladiatorial contest than a sporting event". However, the gold medal supremacism in China has been faced with harsh online criticism since the London games. Most of such online criticism were reactions against the supremacy of the state, but identified with the athletes in the spirit of brotherhood emphasizing solidarity with them. With this meaning, even though much online discourse during this time quarreled with the national mainstream media, they still tended to take these self-assertions as nationalistic.

On the night of July 28, 2012, Beijing time, 10-meter air rifle shooter Yi Siling won the first gold medal through whole games of the London Olympics. The People's Daily published five articles about Yi on three different pages of its July 29th newspaper. On the other hand, another female shooter Yu Dan who had won a bronze medal in the same game didn't get even a single word of coverage in the

People's Daily. The journalist's cold reception toward Yu was satirically criticized on Weibo. Weibo posts like the one below was re-tweeted and enjoyed a wide range of distribution (by @Mou S Shi Wo).

In the interview after the game, all of the journalists seemed to forget about the bronze medalist, Yu Dan. This warm and peaceful young female shooter cleverly left in silence. You made every effort as well, for the fragile vanity of this state. You are brilliant as the champion in our hearts.

Similarly, the Weibo discourse cynically criticized the national news agency Xinhua's editorial article about the badminton women's doubles pair, Wang Xiaoli and Yu Yang. Wang and Yu, alongside two other pairs from South Korea and one other pair from Indonesia, had been disqualified from the London competition because they had made a series of basic errors in the July 29th match and were "accused of wanting to lose, in attempt to manipulate the draw for the knockout stage" (BBC, August 1, 2012).

In response to BWF's (Badminton World Federation) accusation of "conducting oneself in a manner that is clearly abusive or detrimental to the sport", China's badminton chief Liu Fengyan showed respect for the BWF's decision. In the interview by Xinhua News agency, Liu said "they actually violated the ethic of professional athletes and the spirit of Olympics. They hurt the hearts of their sport fans, and also hurt the image of the Chinese athlete. They should be harshly blamed" (Xinhua Net, August 2, 2012). The People's Daily also published an article expressed "fully respect the decision of punishment" (People's Daily, August 2, 2012).

Moreover, another two editorial articles on Xinhua Net draw condemnation from Weibo. The first article titled "Chasing Fame but Abandoning the Spirit of the Sport, It Should Not Be Allowed" (Xinhua Net, August 1, 2012) claimed Wang and Yu had "offended the spirit of sportsmanship and hurt their fans, so they certainly should be criticized". The second article, "Sports Athletes, please keep up with mother country's advancing", stated that "because of your mother country's advances, there are new pressure and challenges drawn down for it. Chinese athletes, are you prepared for the pressure and challenge? On the Olympic stage where to appeal your quality, can you present great power to match that of your mother country? [...] It is not about one or two gold medals, nor about the fame or economic interest of one or two players. It is about the image of a modern, civilized, and responsible great power" (Xinhua Net, August 1, 2012). Such suggestions that Wang and Yu had smeared China's image, roused antipathy on Weibo.

Popular novelist Zhang Jijia's Weibo post claimed the state should protect these two badminton players as its people, and not sacrifice them for the "reputation of the country". His post was re-tweeted more than 45,000 times on Weibo (by @

Zhang Jia Jia).

If athletes are representing themselves, why is the national flag to be raised but not their personal profile photos? Yet, if there is a nation behind the athletes, when it comes to such incidents why do they have to fight unsupported? [...] If they had just obeyed their chief's introduction, why is it only the athlete's right to compete should be disqualified? [...] Motherland, you should embrace your people. [...] I don't mind if I will be called a nationalist for the first time in my life. I do not love the rules of this continent, but I love the black eyes I inherited from our parents. In the Olympic games of 1948, double scull champion Bertie and Dickie intentionally lost to France in the first round to avoid the competition with Denmark in the semi-finals. Then, they got the championship in the final competition. Their actions, were rated by the British as thoughtful athletic actions of adventurous spirit. Their achievement was made into a TV documentary that ran before the 2012 Summer Olympics. This is the attitude a mother country should take. Athletes, please keep up with your mother country. But mother country, please give your athletes a boost.

Summary of the London Olympics

In the cases of the air rifle and badminton competitions, it is obvious that the Weibo discourse emphasized supporting athletes since they are compatriots. Thus, opinion leaders on Weibo could claim to be nationalists, and thus legitimize their antipathy against state-oriented mainstream media.

Hence, at least until the London games, China's sports were developed under a "nation-wide system (*Ju Guo Ti Zhi*)". Although China's government had pushed for reform of the sports system through the 1990s, the reform had stagnated from 2000 in order to prepare for the Olympics. Winning gold medals in competition sports events was highly reliant upon the nationwide system, and the increasing number of gold medals won during summer Olympics decreased the motivation for reform in turn (Bao, 2015). Weibo discourse seemed to be overflowing with individualism by supporting the athletes' actions. However, within the context of the nationwide system, such discourse actually affirmed China's sports policy as a matter of fact, by showing support for the athlete's eagerness to win more medals.

The characteristics of Weibo nationalistic discourse during the London games, were comprised of the nation's glory and the solidarity with compatriots. Even though such discourse conflicted with that of state-oriented mainstream media like the People's Daily or Xinhua News Agency, they were legitimizing the nationwide system in sports policy by supporting Chinese athletes.

Sochi Winter Olympics

Media Environment in 2014

Xi Jinping launched his regime starting in the autumn of 2012. Several events caused alarm and the tightening of media policy in 2013. One example was the 2013 Nanfang Weekly incident. Nanfang Weekly, a famous commercial weekly newspaper based in Guangzhou, used Xi's rhetoric of "Dream of China" in its annual New Year's editorial. The original title Nanfang Weekly used was "Dream of China, Dream of Constitutionalism", but was replaced by propaganda Department of Guangdong province (Xi, 2014). Journalists exposed this replacement on Weibo (Richburg, 2013), which elicited broad social concern about media censorship.

After this incident, in the summer of 2013, Xi made his "8.19 speech" claiming "some intellectuals are using the Internet to spread rumors and to abuse the Party and socialist system. We have to deal with them seriously" (Yamada, 2014: 58-59). Several days later after the "8.19 speech", Weibo opinion leader Xue Manzi was jailed for soliciting prostitutes. Xue's admission to the charges was aired on CCTV's 7 pm News Live (*Xin Wen Lian Bo*) on August 29th (Yamada, 2014: 59). Furthermore, the Supreme People's Procuratorate and Supreme People's Court published a new circular notice that remarked that if a false information is re-tweeted more than 500 times, the original poster of the information would be accused as a penal offense (Yamada, 2014: 60).

Under these media policies, critical discourse on Weibo dramatically decreased, and Weibo's cyberspace rapidly shifted toward tabloidization.

Different Interests of Weibo and Mainstream Media

During the Sochi winter games, Weibo and mainstream media drew a border between "us and them" in different ways. They began using different types of nationalistic discourse, paying less attention to each other, rather than converging with each other. The People's Daily described Russia as "our good neighbor", "our teacher in sports development", and "our old brother in bidding for and engaging in the winter games", showing great support during the Ukrainian crisis. In other words, mainstream media did not draw a border between itself and Russia through a "us or them" distinction. On the other hand, Weibo discourse presented Russia, South Korea, and Japan as "disparate others" in most cases.

Weibo discourse during the Sochi games seldom showed strong sentiment of exclusive nationalism. However, it drew a clear boundary line with Russia, South Korea, and Japan, albeit in an entertainment tone. For the malfunction during the opening ceremony that made the last Olympic ring fail to open up, similar to the chatter Twitter, the Chinese online population on Weibo joked about it as well. Furthermore, even though Twitter and Facebook were blocked by China's Great Fire Wall, there are some specialist mini-bloggers (*Ying Xiao Hao*) who copied joke pictures mimicking the Olympics rings, from the banned oversea SNS (*Wai Wang*) to Weibo. Furthermore, articles titled "Let's look at how the foreign journalists retort

Sochi Olympics” were popular on Weibo as well, with Twitter pictures showing “twin toilet proximity” or unfinished construction reposted to Weibo and receiving plenty of re-tweets. In addition, when it was disclosed that Russian State TV had aired an edited version of the opening ceremony, in which all five Olympics rings had perfectly opened, Weibo simultaneously joined in ridicule of Russia’s “whitewashing” with the Twitter world. People on Weibo enjoyed such way of accessing foreign information and entertainment, as if they were in-group members with all of the Twitter users, but drawing a clear boundary between themselves and Russia.

South Korea was another main object that was described as an extraneous other. In the women’s 500-meter short track speed skating, Chinese skater Li Jianrou won the gold medal to everyone’s surprise. South Korea’s Park Seung-hi topped the semi-final. But Britain’s Elise Christie “skated into Arianna Fontana of Italy during the turn and both collided into the pads” (Olympics Org). Park fell and slid into the padding right after Christie and Fontana, causing Li to trail in an “opening-lap”. As a result, Li luckily won gold, Park won a bronze, while Christie was penalized (Huffpost, February 13, 2014). Regarding this incident, China National Radio’s official Weibo account @China’s Voice published a post like the one below (by @ *Zhong Guo Zhi Sheng*).

[British female athlete apologized but was crazily abused by the Korean online population, so closed down her Twitter helplessly] Because of the clash in the women’s 500-meter short track speed skating in the Sochi Winter Olympics, the Korean skater fell down and failed to gain the gold medal. British athlete Christie who caused this clash posted an apology on her Twitter and Facebook account. But she didn’t expect this to provoke reckless curses from the online Korean population. There were even death threats made towards Christie. At last, Christie deleted her Twitter and Facebook account.

Thus, the Weibo discourse delineating Korea as a rude and overbearing “them” mushroomed (by @ - - *comcn*).

The next Olympics will be hosted by Korea. I highly recommend our athletes bring a placard printed ‘We are just coming for tourism’ with them...Just making an appearance is enough...Otherwise, [if the Korean see us as competition] they will tug on our arms and claw at our shoes. If they cannot push us to fall, they will kick our feet and bellies, and use their ice skate blades on our bodies...It is just so likely to have accidents [when competing against Koreans] ...Do not say the furry bears [Russian] are a warrior race any more. Compared with the Korean short track speed

skating team, the furry bears are actually Barbie dolls and angels, just with muscle.

Furthermore, the news that Samsung did not allow any Apple logos to appear at the Sochi Olympics were also widely spread. Samsung was the official smartphone partner of the 2014 Sochi Olympics (Samsung, 2014), and facilitated the “Samsung Smart Olympic Games Initiative” (Samsung Newsroom, 2014). Posts such as “Why? On the opening ceremony of the 2014 Winter Olympics, athletes had to cover up their Apple’s logo” (by @An Zhuo Wang) or “Samsung said: I do not want to catch any sight of Apple’s logo” (by @Yan Bei Xin Mei Ti) were re-tweeted.

On the other hand, Japan received sarcastically commentary as well. The official Weibo account of Global Times posted a short news article of around 100 Chinese characters (by @Huan Qui Shi Bao).

Japanese Olympic Committee President: English is ‘the language of the enemy’... [cold sweat meme] According to the Japan Times, at the press conference of the Sochi Olympics on the 9th, the 2020 Olympic Games Organizing Committee president and former premier, MORI Yoshiro rejected giving a speech in English. He called English the ‘language of the enemy’. He said that when WWII ended, he was in 2nd grade of elementary school, and English was considered to be the language of the enemy at the time. Giving a speech in English and making mistake would become problems. According to the report, many foreign journalists felt uncomfortable towards this.

But in the normal news story, more context was addressed. “76-year-old Mori spoke in Japanese instead of English while addressing an audience including reporters from foreign countries. [...] ‘You know, in my generation, very few people understood foreign languages,’ Mori said.” (Gallagher, 2014) Such context of the reason for why there was the quote about the “language of the enemy” had been cut off in the Global Times’ post. Such a post provoked more Weibo discourse mocking Japanese English (by @Wang Luo Xin Wen Lian Bo).

[Japanese English is becoming the Achilles heel of the Olympics, their TOFEL score is even lower than that of North Korea] Japanese people do not take pride in fluent English’. The ETS published a report indicating that the Japanese’ average TOEFL score is even lower than North Korean. The Japanese citizens’ English vocabulary are limited to basic words such as ‘Thanks’ or ‘Goodbye’. Because Tokyo is going to host the summer Olympics, Japan intends to push English learning.

As shown in the cases above, Weibo discourse described Russia as an underdeveloped other, South Korea as a rude and reckless other, and described Japan as a backward in a globalized society. However, among such discourse there were still some cases in which Korea and Japan was considered to be members of “us”, with emphasis on the East Asia community. These were fandom conversation based around Japanese figure skater Hanyu Yuzuru, Asada Mao, and South Korean figure skater Kim Yuna.

Although Kim Yuna was presented in Korea as a “national hero” who conquered Japan by defeating Japanese skater ASADA Mao (Koh, 2015), Kim and Asada was described as the “twin beauties of Asia (*Ya Zhou Shuang Shu*)” by Weibo discourse during the Sochi games (by @Tou Tiao Bo Ke).

[The farewell performance by the twin beauties of Asia] Kim Yuna and Asada Mao, this pair of lifetime adversaries both failed to be coroneted in their last women’s singles competition. Maybe this was a resulted expected by no one. The former genius girls are going to kiss goodbye to the unblemished ice. This marks the ending of an era. As the audience, we are so lucky to have witnessed the sparkling era of these Asian twin stars, to have fallen in love with figure skating during this era.

Alongside the twin beauties of women’s figure skating, the Japanese men’s figure skating gold medalist, Hanyu also came under the spotlight on Weibo. The account “@Hanyu Yuzuru’s information channel” appeared on the hot ranking topics of Weibo more than 10 times during February 2014. After his win, this account also emphasized that it had been “Japan’s only gold medal for the Sochi games”, and “also was Asian’s first gold medal for men’s figure skating in the Olympics” (by @Yu Sheng Jie Xian Zi Xun Tai).

In her analysis of the 2002 FIFA World Cup, in which Korea’s final performance was ranked higher than that of Japan, Kamise found out that the more a Japanese person is interested in soccer, the more likely he/she would have a negative impression of Korea. On the other hand, the less a Japanese person is interested in soccer, the more likely he/she would see Korea’s performance as upholding the glory of Asia. She used the concept of “reflection process” (Kamise, 2004: 257) from Tesser’s self-evaluation maintenance theory to explain this phenomenon. When the issue’s self-relativeness is weak, and the performance of others is better than that of oneself, he/she will close the psychological distance with others, thus claiming the glory for his/herself and to raise his/her self-evaluation (Kamise, 2004).

China had never gained any medal in a single figure skating competition at the Olympics. For most Chinese person, women’s single or men’s single figure state is a sporting event with weak self-relevance. In such a context, the Weibo discourse represent Kim from Korea, Asada and Hanyu from Japan as Asian. Therefore,

although these discourses are far from nationalistic at first glance, they are actually psychologically aiming at creating a higher self-evaluation and can be comprehended as another form of anti-Western sentiment.

Summary of the Sochi Olympics

Unlike the period of the London Olympics, Weibo discourse did not show strong antipathy toward anybody. They neither harshly criticized state-oriented media, nor showed any powerful repulsion against any foreign country. There was mocking and teasing everywhere, such as teasing over Russia's recession, teasing about Korean recklessness, teasing about the Japanese's English abilities. But according to Coleman (1995), the perceptions of group members who are subject to common treatment by others is one of the strongest factors strengthening nationalism. Such mocking and teasing are also a form of nationalistic discourse that is made up of the first type of element—glory of the nation.

Furthermore, the boundary between “us and them” became ephemeral. When mocking Korea and Japan, they were an out-group differentiated from us. However, in the case of figure skating, the Korean and Japanese were considered to be in-group members alongside with us as Asian.

All of these characteristics of nationalism in the Sochi games matches with Yamamoto's discussion of the consumable nature of nationalism in China. He indicated this 2006 as follows: “The wavering Chinese national identity composes a ‘market’, where nationalism is ‘consumable’ [...] When a new ‘market’ is formed, a new type of nationalism might appear” (Yamamoto, 2006: 179).

The nationalism discourse during the Sochi games showed some new characteristics. On the one hand, it emphasized China's glory in its economic supremacy and new leading global role, by representing Russia, Korea, and Japan as backward. On the other hand, it heightened Chinese self-evaluation by sharing glory with the Koreans and Japanese as “we Asians”. Such a new variation of anti-Western nationalism came to be what was consumed in this new media environment.

Rio Summer Olympics

Media Environment in 2016

The “media convergence” policy was launched in 2014. Many China observers believe that “media convergence is first and foremost a political strategy” (Wang, 2016). It was raised as a “strategic plan” by President Xi Jinping in August 2014 while Li Keqiang mentioned the concept of “internet plus” in the 2015 government report. In this series of policies, media convergence was expected by the CCP as a project of “guidance from the central government”. China's top-down style of media convergence differs from Denmark scholar Jensen's concept, which indicates the de-embedding of content from its medium format (like reading newspapers on

smartphones or watching TV programs on tablets). Instead, China's "media convergence" policy was mainly aimed at "strengthening the People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, CCTV, and other national media's communication effects" (Beijing Journalists Association, 2016).

The Rio games occurred on the third year after the media convergence policy was launched. Under this policy, the state-oriented mainstream media's official accounts mushroomed on Weibo. The most obvious changes on Weibo during the Rio Olympics was the homogeneity of the discourse. The mainstream media's official accounts played an important role in news publishing, but non-organization bloggers (such as the fan club accounts for Hanyu Yuzuru during the Sochi Olympics) almost disappeared from the hot ranking topics on Weibo.

Media Discourse during Rio Olympics

Among many of the duplicate posts on Weibo's hot ranking list during the Rio games, a very visible post was the world ranking of the Chinese women's volleyball team, initially published by the sports channel of CCTV's official Weibo account, "@CCTV5".

The women's volleyball team is an icon of China's Olympic history. Jenny Lang Ping, who won gold medal at the 1984 Los Angeles game as a player, was one of the most famous former athletes in China. As the head coach of the Chinese women's volleyball team for the 2016 Rio games, she led the team to win its third Olympic gold medal after 2004. According to Xinhua News Agency, China's final game with Serbia for the Olympic title on August 21st gained 70 percent of Chinese families audience rating. Also "China's all-important news program Xinwen Lianbo dedicated seven of its 30 minutes to replay" the women's volleyball game (Ma, 2016).

On August 30th, the sports channel of CCTV posted a news report on Weibo, which is presented below (by @CCTV5).

[Chinese women's volleyball team took a spot in the top newest world ranking] FIVB published the newest world ranking of volleyball teams. Because of its championship at #Rio Olympics#, Chinese women's volleyball rose to the top from third in the world rankings. This is the first time China ranked top in 12 years after September 2004. The U.S. slipped to second place, Brazil descended to fourth, and Serbia ranked as third.

This post was copied, with "via @CCTV5" added at the end of the sentence as the information source, and published by at least 12 other media organizations' official Weibo accounts². Whether state-oriented media outlets, which are believed to be conservative, or commercial newspapers that are believed to be liberal and critical, shared the same information on Weibo. Their users and followers re-tweeted

such posts further out leading to the information environment on Weibo becoming heavily homogeneous. In such a homogeneous information environment, the nationalistic discourse emphasizing China's glory was more easily disseminated.

Another visibly duplicative discourse is about Liu Guoliang, the head coach of Chinese men's table tennis team, who had won all titles at major world tournaments. The news began with "[Liu Guoliang gave response to be called as 'fatty knowing nothing about table tennis': It's funny and happy]" raised to the hot-ranking more than 8 times during Rio games. The buzzword of "fatty knowing nothing about table tennis" came from a post like below (by @Neng Qia Hui Suan Pan Ban Xian).

Gossip group is transporting information from PTT, the Taiwanese BBS which is hard on eyes. Among comments on the competition between Zhang Jike and Taiwanese, there is something really goofy: [Twitter user mi2ery: Is the fatty who sit behind Chinese team a bureaucrat? It seems that he is the only one knowing nothing about table tennis all around the studio]. I guess, he/she is talking about this fatty, (a picture of Liu Guoliang).

From then on, the "fatty knowing nothing about table tennis" were used as mocking the "ignorance" of Taiwanese. Along with the discourse like "this fatty can beat you all down just by a piece of transportation IC card", the glory and legend of Chinese table tennis team were reproduced.

On the other hand, China's eagerness for Olympic gold medal seemed to decrease during the Rio games. Several non-gold medalists gained popularity online, and were also commented on positively by official media. Fu Yuanhui won a bronze medal in the 100m backstroke at the Rio games, doubling over in joy at an interview after the games, as she said, "I was so fast! I'm very, very satisfied with my result" (Fan, 2016). Fu gained popularity because of her emotional transparency, and the People's Daily praised the online population who loved Fu as a "rational audience" who did not obsess over gold medals. However, as aforementioned, Chinese online public discourse had not obsessed over gold medals since 2012. The reason why the People's Daily praised the online population as becoming a "rational audience" can be attributed as the People's Daily's tactic of embracing the popular discourse to thus recover its popularity among the online population.

Summary about Rio Olympics

Under the 2014 "media convergence" policy, many mainstream media outlets actively began to publish information on their official Weibo accounts. In the case of media events like the Olympics, mainstream media outlets with more experts of instantaneous reporting actually offer fast news updates. The information of instantaneous reports with nationalistic sentiment could be explosively spread within a very short time to then construct a highly homogeneous information environment

on Weibo. A homogeneous information environment can easily stimulate further nationalism.

Media policy aiming at the rehabilitation of the mainstream media's online influence created an environment in which nationalistic discourse became more visible and easily circulated. In such a media environment, the so-called popular nationalistic discourse become extremely similar to the official nationalistic discourse presented by mainstream state-oriented media, and they both mean nothing other than consumption.

Chang-De Liu (2015: 111) discusses that Taiwan's nationalistic discourse of anti-Korea and anti-China shows a tendency of "non-politic" and "entertaining sentimental performances" in the 2000s. This tendency of entertaining sentiment is confirmed in China's nationalistic discourse toward Taiwan.

Conclusion

In 2014 CCP launched the "media convergence" policy. Up until the beginning of the 2010s, it is said that the "national media's authority was weakened, and the Party's policies are frequently doubted online" (People's Daily Online, July 29, 2011). Online criticism against the government over its perceived abandonment of Chinese athletes for the "reputation of the nation" at the London games is one example of how the people doubted the CCP's policy. The CCP did not overlook such a rift between the online discourse and official discourse because it could cause social instability. Therefore, the CCP took a strong stance on online opinions that may undermine the CCP's legitimacy and ruling policies. This is how online popular nationalism converged into official nationalism.

Unlike the existing literature that suggests online popular nationalism to be liberal, democratic, and empowering, my study has showed that online nationalism during the 2010s was nothing more than a tool of self-legitimization as well as official ones. It has presented how and why converged nationalistic discourse have become "expendable" to online voices.

NOTES

1. According to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), China's online population was 620,000 at October 1997 (http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201206/t20120612_26721.htm), 2.1 million at the end of 1998 (http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201206/t20120612_26723.htm), 8.9 million at the end of 1999 (http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201206/t20120612_26725.htm), 22.5 million at the end of 2000 (http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201206/t20120612_26727.htm), 79.5 million at the end of 2003 (http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201206/t20120612_26729.htm).

net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwzxbg/hlwtjbg/201206/t20120612_26704.htm), 111 million at the end of 2005 (http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwzxbg/hlwtjbg/201206/t20120612_26708.htm).

2. They are CCTV's official account @*Yang Shi Xin Wen*, Global Times's official account @*Huan Qiu Shi Bao*, the second large state-owned news agency China News Service's official account @*Zhong Guo Xin Wen Wang*, Southern Metropolitan's official account @*Nan Fang Du Shi Bao*, Hong Kong based Phenix news weekly's official account @*Feng Huang Zhou Kan*, People's Daily net's official account @*Ren Min Wang*, China's Daily's official account @*Zhong Guo Ri Bao*, Nanjing based evening paper Yangtse Evening's official account @*Yang Zi Wan Bao*, Guangzhou Daily's official account @*Guang Zhou Ri Bao*, China National Radio's official account @*Zhong Guo Zhi Sheng*, Southern Daily's official account @*Nan Fang Ri Bao*, and Beijing based tabloid Jinghua Times's official account @*Jing Hua Shi Bao*.

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