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The construction of nationalism in Chinese media events in the reform era: an analysis of online mass communication, 2008-2012

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Chapter 4 Methodology

In this dissertation, I use a mixed method, involving qualitative and quantitative analyses, to understand how mass media events have influenced online Chinese nationalism in two case studies. I will specifically go into the following questions: how does the Chinese government design media events to propagate state nationalism? In what way do media companies report certain events to stimulate popular nationalism? How are nationalist sentiments of the Chinese, in particular netizens, expressed in online communication? In this chapter, I will explain the methodology that I will use to address these questions. First, I identify my research aims and then explain what methods I use to reach these. These methods are multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) and the so-called automated sentiment analysis program (ASAP), which I will elaborate on in the following part.

4.1 Research Aims

The main aims of this research include two parts: 1. to elucidate how the government and the media use mass communication to construct state nationalism; 2. to examine online expressions of popular nationalism. I will look at this subject from the perspective of mass media events. The first aim hereby is to examine if and how the construction of nationalism is different in the case of a staged media event, where the information disseminators have had ample time to prepare and script all media content, and in the case of an unforeseen, abrupt event, where media content has to rely on certain protocols, but have otherwise a much more impromptu character. In addition, it is worthwhile to examine the workings of nationalist discourse on BBS forums and comment sections separately with staged and abrupt media events. In order to reach these aims, I will look at two case studies, one representing a staged media event and one an abrupt media event: the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, as the first case, and the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident in 2012 as the other.

In the first case study, I focus on the 2008 Beijing Olympics and compare it to the 2012 London Olympics regarding the presentation of the opening ceremony and related online nationalist public opinions of Chinese audiences. The second case, the 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident, is an example of an abrupt, non-staged event. I will focus on media coverage of this event to illustrate how nationalist discourses play out in such a case.

The MCDA is a method that examines the texts and visual elements of media communication. I use the MCDA to analyze nationalist communication implemented by the government or the media in both cases. To deal with the second aim, I apply content analysis to explore online public opinion that reflects audiences' online nationalism. For the first case study, the 2008 Beijing Olympics, I conducted a manual content analysis on a part of the Internet data sets.⁶¹ For the second case study, I carried out the ASAP to analyze the collected full data sets. The reason to apply different methods in these two case studies is that I did not have access to any data collection software when I did the first case study in 2014, and thus I could only collect the data by manual labor. As the collected data set was relatively small, this did not pose any serious problems. When I worked on my second case study, I did have access to a data collection software system. In addition, I developed the ASAP, allowing me to do nationalist sentiment analysis automatically. Figures 4.1(a) and 4.1(b) below show the two modes of analysis in a schematic diagram:

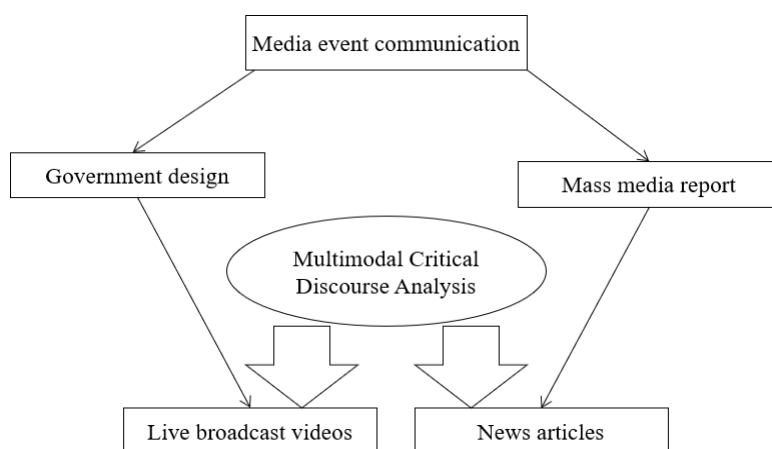


Figure 4.1 (a) Schematic diagram of media event communication analysis

⁶¹ In this case study, the comment number of the whole data set in each thread is about 1300-6800. I chose 100 comments from the middle (comment 1001-1100). Although the 100 collected comments are smaller than the whole data set, they are close to netizens' real without distortion from invalid opinion (for more details, see Section 5.3.2).

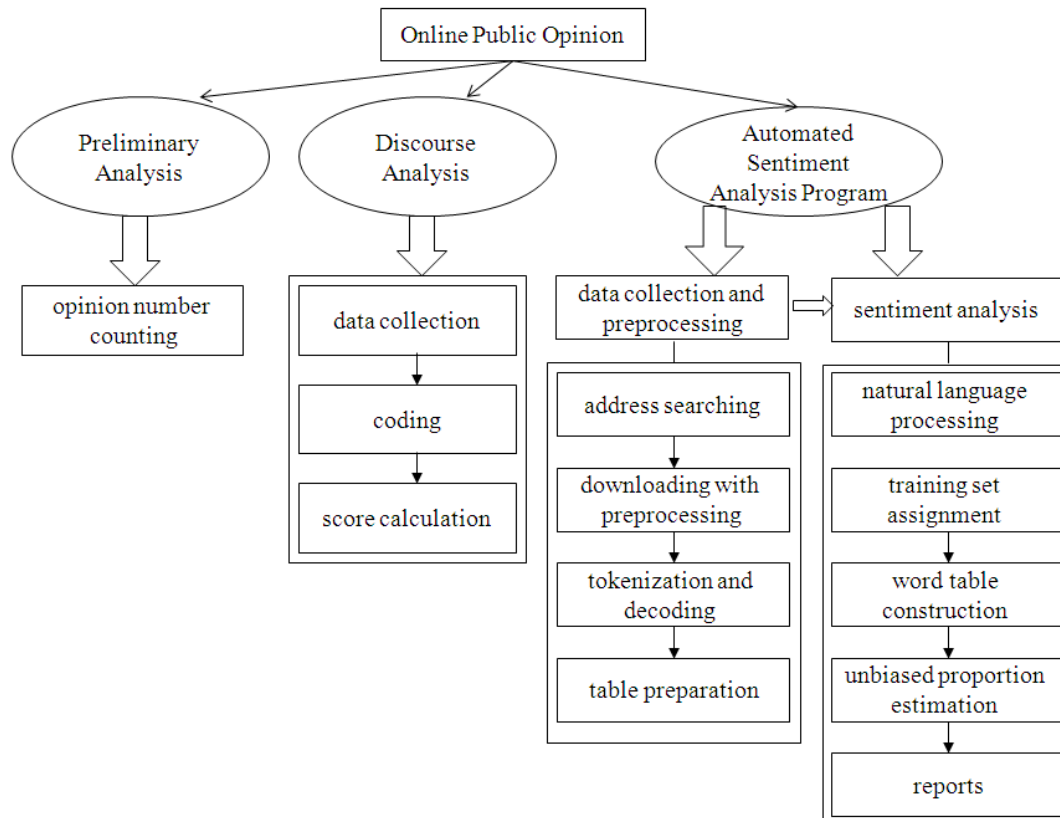


Figure 4.1(b) Schematic diagram of online public opinion analysis

4.2 Media Event Communication: Discourse Analysis

To explore nationalist discourses concerning Chinese media events, I first address the differences between government-staged media events and abrupt media events. In staged media events, both the government and media play essential roles in the construction of nationalism.⁶² The government acts as an organizer or designer to stage these events. Because these events represent state affairs (e.g., the Shenzhou missions represent the PRC's comprehensive national strength; the Shanghai World Expo manifests the PRC's history and culture), they remind audiences of their national identity by telling "national stories." In addition, in these media events, the government applies specific strategies to directly arouse state nationalism, which I will detail in Chapter 5. Media companies act as the agents to transmit these events to audiences, following the pre-scheduled account of official nationalist discourses. However, they do not have much influence on shaping

⁶²In fact, in mass communication through Internet media, sometimes netizens are active information transmitters instead of passive receivers, disseminating information with posts, blogs, micro-blogs, etc. However, compared to official information disseminators with dominant discourse power in society, netizens' information dissemination is much less influential in portraying media events. Yet, we admit that they, to some degree, shape online public opinion.

public opinion with their own strategy. In this light, to analyze nationalist discourses presented in staged events, we mainly need to analyze how the government organizes and designs media events. In contrast to this, in abrupt media events (more specifically, the ones that stimulate popular nationalism), it is mainly media companies rather than the government that shape public opinion with detailed reporting—although, admittedly, the government has its way to show attitudes toward the events. Therefore, to explore nationalist discourse in abrupt media events, I will focus on how media companies cover the events.

Media events are narrated with discourses that Michel Foucault (1975/1977) regards as an important tool to build up a “knowledge system” connected to power in society. Foucault illuminates the relation between knowledge and power as follows:

Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of the “truth” but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, “becomes true.” Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation, and the disciplining of practice. Thus, there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute, at the same time, power relations (Foucault, 1975/1977, 27).

Based on Foucault’s argument, all communication agents are comparable to “institutions” that represent power to audiences, while the procedures of mass media events are analogous to the production of discourse. Produced by those with dominant social or political power (the government and media companies), the related discourse is “knowledge” to be learned by mass audiences. As knowledge is endowed with authority, audiences tend to follow the ideas conveyed in such knowledge. Although the idea that “the highest truth resides in what is said” (Foucault, 1969/1972, 216) seems controversial, discourse created by mass media plays a prominent part in conveying the “truth”—including nationalism—in the process of mass communication. Consequently, based on Foucault’s discourse theory, I will analyze the discourses that the two agents of mass communication employ in media events: the government and media companies, and their varying roles in constructing knowledge of nationalism in both staged and abrupt media events.

Discourse is language units and visual symbols that convey meanings. Foucault (1969/1972, 123) points out that “discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation.” Here “the statements” especially refer to textual materials. In addition, mass communication involves visual texts, including images and videos. Regardless of forms, if they emerge in the communication of media events, we may consider them as discourse. Therefore, I define discourse in media events in a broader sense as all kinds of materials, including texts, images, and videos systematically presented by mass media.

Discourse analysis involves various kinds of communication materials. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2001) coin the term “multimodal” and note that language, images, and sound are different parts of the same discourse. They propose that the multimodal communication theory focuses on two aspects: semiotic resources and communicative practices, including discourse, design, production, and distribution (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Furthermore, David Machin and Andrea Mayr (2012) classify communication materials into two categories: text and spoken language, and visual communication, such as images and videos. They analyze texts with a critical linguistic method, critical discourse analysis (CDA), aiming to “show language and grammar can be used as ideological instruments” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, 4). However, to deal with visual communication, they suggest applying the MCDA⁶³ to study “how images, photographs, diagrams and graphics work to create meaning” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, 9). They outline several methods to analyze the language in texts by exploring lexis, metaphorical tropes, nominalization, and presupposition. They also examine semiotic recourse to discuss the attitudes of the speakers. Based on this approach, I will separately analyze two types of discourse that construct nationalism in the live broadcasts of media events: news texts and visual symbols.⁶⁴

Discourse analysis, however, is not just confined to texts and videos. The context where discourse is produced is worth considering: mass communication limits audiences’ possible understandings

⁶³ Schneider (2012) has provided a detailed discussion on multimodal analysis in his book *Visual Political Communication in Popular Chinese Television Series*.

⁶⁴ Concerning discourse analysis, multimodal discourse, semiotics, and visual analysis, Schneider (2013a, 2013b, 2013c) discusses the steps of different analysis methods.

of news information in a predetermined context (Schneider, 2012, 12). “Context” includes a “cognitive process and representations or socio-cultural factors” (van Dijk, 1988, 25). Teun van Dijk (1988, 29) indicates that “a full-scale analysis of discourse involves an integration of text and context in the sense that the use of a discourse in a social situation is at the same time a social act.” He also suggests that a complete account of news discourse includes a description of the textual structure of news and a depiction of the production and reception process of the news discourse (van Dijk, 1988, 30). In the Chinese case, the textual structure of news is predetermined by media companies; the production of news is related to media outlets, media companies, and the government; and the reception process of news pertains to audiences.

In staged and abrupt media events, different subjects merit a close look. The government designs and organizes the staged events to satisfy audiences and “sell” state nationalism to promote people’s national identity and win immediate popular support. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, 119) argue that “design adds two things to the discourse: (1) it contextualizes, makes it work within the context of a communicative interaction ... and (2) it selects which modes will be used to realize which aspects of that communicative interaction. ...” Therefore, live video broadcasts are the primary sources to study mass communication in government-staged media events. In abrupt media events, however, as there is no design, the subject of analysis shifts to how media outlets and media companies disseminate this information (whether based on existing protocols, on an ad hoc basis, or a mix of the two). It is vital to bear in mind that, in disseminating the information concerning abrupt events, the media, especially state media—following the “Party principle”—at all times have to act as the “mouthpiece” of the Party and people (Zhao, 1998, 19). In short, in exploring the two types of media events, staged and abrupt, I shall mainly focus on live broadcasts with staged events to examine how state nationalism is constructed through visual presentation. For the second one, I shall analyze news reports released by media companies to explore how popular nationalism is shaped in news discourse.

Staged Events: Government Design

The government-staged events by nature engender nationalism, as the government has an incentive to promote audiences’ national identity to get public support. For example, in the 2010 Shanghai

World Expo, the government collaborated with diverse actors, such as enterprises and media corporations, to create a range of discourses that constructed a sense of central Chinese nation/nationalism (Schneider, 2014). Even if the government does not intentionally design events in a patriotic mode, the events still bear certain patriotic characteristics to promote nationalism. For instance, media events such as the “Two Conferences” (*lianghui* 两会): The National People’s Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), held every year to improve government work, are not directly centered on nationalism. Nevertheless, such events are by default nationalist because they are related to national politics, implying that a national level is a natural place for significant politics. Terms like “our nation” (*woguo*, 我国) are commonplace and seem normal in official discourse when discussing national politics. It is not aggressive or radical nationalism, but it still flags in the national context.

What is more, in some cases, the topics in the events that are directly related to nationalist discourse make the point clearer. For example, when referring to the work of the Foreign Ministry, it often involves foreign relations such as Sino-American relations and Sino-Japanese relations. Addressing disputed territorial issues in the conferences is regarded as a kind of expressing nationalism. Based on the MCDA, I will explore how the government narrates the events, what kind of tactics it uses in the narratives, and how the events promote audiences’ nationalism.

On a macro-level, I will look at staged events as a whole to discuss their design and organization in terms of background, time, space, duration, participants, and programming. Sometimes more indirect elements, such as narration, also play an important role. For instance, the tone, voice volume, and word selections in the narration form a certain mood. Taking these elements into account in the analysis leads to a better understanding of staged media events and how nationalism plays out in these events. In addition, I will take the social context during the events into consideration and explore how it influences the design of staged media events. To be more precise, apart from live broadcasts of these events, I will also explore the sub-events attached to the main events and to the official propaganda and policies pertaining to them. For example, the Beijing Olympics propaganda involves the major event in August 2008 and pre-game events including the Olympic education program, the volunteer recruitment program, and the torch relay. Such pre-game events form a social

context, exerting an influence on the whole media event.

Some staged media events, lasting several days or even months, span a multitude of videos. To avoid exhaustingly analyzing all related videos, I chose the videos containing key moments. The critical moments in a staged media event depend on the type of the event. A useful classification here comes from Dayan and Katz (1992), who discern the types “Contest,” “Conquest,” and “Coronation.” For all of these, the beginning and end are critical moments. In a Contest, artistic performances announce the beginning or end and showcase the culture and history of the hosting countries. The Contest transmits political ideology, as a group of celebrities in various fields (sportsmen, statesmen, or other celebrities) are involved, and their presence and speeches raise attention from the audience. In a Conquest, the beginning lays the foundation for a great success in the later process. Furthermore, a good ending of the project is essential, as it shows “an impressive success,” a popular concept in Chinese discourse, depicting the expected results. Concerning Coronation, the ending is the most crucial moment: someone is awarded a prize or appointed a position. In short, the beginning and end are essential parts of media events.

I will select the most critical part of live broadcast videos as research objects to explore nationalism expressed in visual communication, depending on the types of the events. For example, in the case study of the Beijing Olympics, I choose the live broadcast of the opening ceremony to analyze the discourse that constructs state nationalism. It is because the opening ceremony is the starting point of the event, from which audiences learn about the hosting country and the participating countries before the competition begins. More importantly, it presents exquisite cultural performances that presumably cater to audiences’ taste.

I will examine the discourse narration mode in the video: from what point of view and in what process does the government “tell stories”? What is precisely shown? I will discuss discourse content that is the foundation of such narration and focus on the images or icons widely used in media events to increase national pride, such as mascots and national flags. I will ask the following questions: why does the government use these images? What is left out? How do these images convey nationalism? What is the setting in these images? How is salience achieved in these images?

In addition to images, I will explore narrators' announcements to analyze how they arrange their speeches to strengthen state nationalism and how their spoken words are connected to what is shown.

Abrupt Events: News Discourses from Media Companies

Visual and text communications about one topic usually have much overlap. When a textual news report is published online, media practitioners attach pictures and videos to the news text. Nevertheless, news texts represent a different form of discourse to articulate meaning than visual communication. Roland Barthes (1977, 33) indicates that the linguistic message (such as a message in news texts) is twofold: the literal message aimed at identifying something; and the symbolic message used to interpret and fix the understanding of the liberal and undetermined iconic image. Therefore, sometimes language limits the meaning that visual communication conveys. With moving images and spoken words, videos are more direct than texts. However, news texts offer more space for audiences to think about connotations between the lines because when audiences read news items, they control the tempo and have more time to recall their background information and digest the deep meaning. When watching a video, audiences hardly have time to ponder over flashing discourse. Concerning abrupt events where news texts take the leading role, I will focus on news texts' language and editing style to figure out how media companies articulate nationalism in textual communication. I will conduct my research according to the MCDA methods introduced by Machin and Mayr to analyze the discourse of the selected news articles in terms of the following aspects:

- Lexical analysis

Lexical analysis refers to the special vocabulary used in news texts. In news discourse, news editors are inclined to use some words or expressions to convey nationalism, for instance, motherland (*zuguo* 祖国), blessing (*zhufu* 祝福), and realization of a dream (*yuanmeng* 圆梦). In the analysis, I will explore such words that promote national pride or shape nationalist sentiment.

- Representational strategies

Representational strategies are the way that people are addressed. Specifically, they are related to

semiotic choices in CDA (Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 2003: 145, cited in Machin & Mayr, 2012, 77). Since “representational choice will bring associations of values, ideas, and activities” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, 78), I will explore how news texts make referential choices to approach news editors’ intentions. When referring to “social actors,” media have some strategies to address them. Various forms of address, such as functionalization (e.g., “the spokesman”), use of honorifics (e.g., “the General Secretary Xi Jinping”), and pronouns (e.g., we, us, you), are useful in constructing nationalism. For example, Billig (1995, 103) indicates that politicians play the patriotic card on many occasions “in calling upon familiar stereotypes” by “advocating a particular vision of who ‘we’ are, and what ‘we’ should be like” to win people’s support. It is a representational strategy also widely used in Chinese political news. I will analyze how news editors refer to these “actors” in news texts and formulate patriotic views for audiences.

- Rhetorical devices

Rhetoric devices are tools to construct meaning. Aristotle (350BCE/2010, 6) defines rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.” Van Dijk (1989, 82) argues that a given communication purpose determines the rhetorical structure of news. The purpose of news discourse in political communication is essentially persuasion, and communicators or propagandists use many rhetorical devices to better convey their ideas. I will analyze rhetorical devices that influence nationalist communication in news discourse, such as parallelism (ubiquitous in Chinese political news for grand narration or poetic sense), metaphor, and synecdoche. Among these, metaphor is one of the most important rhetorical devices in political communication. George Lakoff and Mark Johan (1980, 3) state that the “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action.” As metaphors highlight one aspect but hide other aspects of an object (Lakoff & Johan, 1980, 10), news editors use metaphors in media events to emphasize some ideas but obscure others.

4.3 Online Public Opinion: Passive Surveys

It is impossible to gauge people’s nationalism with any measuring instrument directly. However, a large amount of online communication data provide a corpus to evaluate nationalism expressed in online public opinion. Compared to the traditional paradigm of audiences’ feedback (reactionary

articles in newspapers), there are vastly more data on opinions aired online, which are accessible far more easily. To analyze such “big data,” social scientists have started to apply computational methods with unprecedented effort. David Lazer, Alex Pentland, Lada Adamic, Albert-Laszlo Barabasi, Devon Brewer, Nicholas Christakis, Noshir Contractor, James Fowler, Myron Gutmann, Tony Jebara, Gary King, Michael Macy, Deb Roy, and Marshall van Alstyne (2009, 722) indicate that “a computational social science is emerging that leverages the capacity to collect and analyze data with an unprecedented breadth, depth, and scale.” Furthermore, Wouter van Atteveldt and Peng Tai-Quan (2018, 81) note that “computational methods have the potential to greatly enhance the scientific study of communication because they allow us to move towards collaborative large-N studies of actual behavior in its social context.” That said, it is worth noting that there are cases where computational methods cannot be applied. In these cases, manual methods, covering limited amounts of data, still prove to be indispensable.

Concerning the role of the surveyor in the analysis of online public opinion data, I call the method (because data are collected online after netizens actively publish their opinion) “passive surveys” to distinguish it from traditional ones that I regard as “active surveys.” The research of big data has some advantages over traditional research methods. In traditional, active surveys, such as interviews, a surveyor distributes questionnaires, so respondents are aware of being interviewed. This awareness may raise concerns, such as leaking personal information and lead to biased responses. Some respondents even refuse to participate. Neil Munro (2018) points out that refusal bias exists in traditional surveys in the PRC, largely affecting the measurement accuracy of political trust.

Online passive surveys, in contrast, reduce the chance of refusal bias. In traditional surveys, respondents give opinions as responses and are aware of how their responses might be used—and possible repercussions for them. For passive online surveys, however, the goal of voicing opinions is not in response to a survey; furthermore, netizens are mostly anonymous and prone to be spontaneous. In other words, gathering online data on opinions allows researchers to measure respondents’ actual behavior instead of their self-reported attitudes (Munro, 2018, 82). Although such online opinions are contextual and only represent an individual’s views at a particular time and in a specific part of cyberspace, analysis of online public opinion data sheds light on the study of

mass communication besides traditional opinion surveys.

With an automated collection and analysis of big data, it is reasonable to assume that the gathered data is representative of the actual public opinion due to its enormous “sample” size. However, due to certain limitations of (current) technology, big data extraction is sometimes impossible. In these cases, a manual method may yield results. The drawback is that a manual method can only deal with limited data, but the result is still representative with correct sampling methods. Both methods follow the same steps in the process: data collection, data coding, and calculation. Regardless of which method I use for the final analysis, I will do a preliminary analysis in each of my case studies by counting the number of clicks and comments on the subject to examine netizens’ interest in these topics. The netizens’ interest further indicates a general representation of their nationalist behavior, as the media event is organized or takes place in a nationalist setting and represents national interest. In other words, a nationalist sentiment fosters interest in national media events.

Manual Discourse Analysis

When it is impossible to obtain all data automatically, I choose to retrieve a sample of the data set representing most online opinions. I use this method to analyze the representative data for the first case study, the Beijing Olympics. The necessary steps of manual discourse analysis are data collection, coding, score calculation, and results. A search on keywords is a common way to collect relevant data. I chose the names of the events as keywords (for details, see Chapter 5). After collecting the data, I established a set of rules to code nationalist meanings expressed in the opinion texts. For different events, I used slightly different coding rules that I will detail in the case study (for details, see Appendix 1 and 3). I then manually analyzed online comments regarding the threads on Tianya BBS. After that, I calculated the total scores on different topics.

Automated Sentiment Analysis Program (ASAP)

Pang Bo and Lillian Lee (2008, 10) define sentiment analysis as “the computational treatment of opinion, sentiment, and subjectivity in text.” In other words, a computer can be used to analyze big data to detect sentiments represented in texts automatically. Pang and Lee (2008) also suggest that sentiment analysis mines the data in terms of its features, including term presence, position

information, parts of speech, syntax, negation, and topic-oriented features. The automated sentiment analysis program (ASAP) is mainly adapted from a previous approach, ReadMe, proposed and developed by Daniel Hopkins and Gary King (2010).⁶⁵ The function of the ASAP is to perform calculations of the proportion of file/comment catalogues with various sentiments, also called “opinion mining.” It serves as an automatic classifier for objects. I used the ASAP to evaluate nationalist sentiments expressed in online public opinion data in the second case study, the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident.

In the process of analysis, I used a supervised learning approach in the ASAP with unbiased estimation. This approach consists of the statistical processing of a given training set, i.e., a set of examples used to train the computer to understand the sentiments in all online discourse. With the hand-coded training set, the ASAP efficiently calculates nationalist sentiment percentage with different points or scores to indicate the different levels of nationalist sentiment. This information demonstrates how news coverage influences nationalism expressed in online discourse. Five steps are included in sentiment analysis with the ASAP: natural language processing, training set assignment, word-table construction, unbiased proportion estimation, and results reporting (see Figure 4.1 (b)).

Step 1. Natural language processing with Chinese word segmentation

Hopkins and King (2010, 232) argue that concerning processing an English text, it is necessary to convert all the words into lowercase, eliminate punctuation, and stem the word based on the characteristics of the English language. Analyzing a Chinese language text, however, is different. Chinese is made up of characters instead of letters that form words. These characters have no upper- or lowercase and no stems. Furthermore, different combinations of characters generate various meanings. For example, the word “国家” has two characters. If it is read character by character, it has two meanings: state and family. However, if it is read as a word, “国家” means country or nation-state. In terms of the essence of meaning, English stems are similar to Chinese words. Therefore, in this analysis, I will adapt the Chinese word segmentation system that was realized

⁶⁵ A comprehensive natural language processing module for Chinese word segmentation makes the ASAP different from the original ReadMe.

through a word library and the Institute of Computing Technology, Chinese Lexical Analysis System (ICTCLAS) tool package.⁶⁶ When the computer analyzes the data from a text, it deals with the text in the unit of words or expressions instead of only characters. For example, if there was no word segmentation system, the sentence “我讨厌日本人” (I hate the Japanese) would be processed as 我/讨/厌/日/本/人; if a word segmentation system was added, the sentence would be processed as 我/讨厌/日本人. In this way, the computer deciphers the meaning of the text more accurately.

Step 2. Training set assignment

A prerequisite for the ASAP is a hand-coded training set large enough to contain all examples of nationalist sentiments in the online discourse that is to be analyzed. This is mainly determined by the size of the training set and the style of the comments. Using the examples of blogs (usually 300 words per blog entry), Hopkins and King give the following suggestion:

Coding more than about 500 documents to estimate a specific quantity of interest is probably not necessary unless one is interested in much more narrow confidence intervals than is common or in specific categories that happen to be rare. For some applications, as few as 100 documents may even be sufficient. (Hopkins & King, 2010, 242)

Since the comments I analyzed are of a much smaller size (most are less than 20 words) than the blogs analyzed by Hopkins and King (2010), I selected 300 comments in each case study as enough for the desired estimation accuracy. I randomly selected the first 300 comments from the local comment database that I downloaded from the data source with a fixed number. Then, I manually coded the selected comments to be the training sets according to the coding rules. With this training set, the ASAP learned how to understand and code the residual comments.

Step 3. Word table construction

After the previous steps, the training set of comments and the comments for automated sentiment analysis were loaded from a spreadsheet file to a word table for further statistical processing. Based on the training set, the ASAP recognized which words in the samples gained high points and which

⁶⁶ I adapted the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) system, see <http://ictclas.nlpir.org/>, accessed 9 August 2014.

words deserved low points. For example, in the training set, I marked the comments containing the phrase “打日本” (strike against Japan) with 2 points and those with the meaning of “谴责” (condemn) with 1 point, which was memorized by the ASAP.

Step 4. Unbiased proportion estimation of comments with different sentiment levels

The ASAP regarded all words in the comments as an unsorted collection to process the residual comment data. In other words, it processed each comment as a set of individual words, ignoring the grammar structure and the word order. Therefore, Hopkins and King (2010, 232) indicated that this provided a relatively low biased proportion estimation of comments with different sentiment levels.

Step 5. Results

After finishing the previous four steps, the ASAP output various proportions of comments with their different nationalist sentiment levels. Based on the results, I summarized the analyzed online nationalist sentiments and discussed the media impact on netizens' nationalist/patriotic sentiments in the case study chapter (See Chapter 6).

Overall, I used the multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) to analyze nationalist communication implemented by the government and media. To explore netizens' nationalist sentiments and evaluate media effects, I applied the manual or automat method in different case studies. In the 2008 Beijing Olympics case study, I used the manual method for the small data set; in the case study of the 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident, I used the automat methods. In the following chapters, I will show how I applied these different methods to the two case studies to examine how the Chinese government and Chinese media influence netizens' articulation of nationalism.

4.4 Conclusion

Media reform and conglomeration in the last three decades in the PRC deeply affect how mass communication incorporates CCP propaganda, resulting in market forces and the Party principle becoming two separate lines between which mass media have to balance (Zhao, 1998). Internet media converging with traditional media provides netizens with a public sphere where they are able

to publish their opinions presenting nationalist sentiment. In this dissertation, I study two kinds of media events, government-staged media events and abrupt media events, to analyze how state nationalism and popular nationalism play out in this new media landscape. To conduct research on nationalist tones in communication in media events, whether staged or abrupt, I identified research aims that include government/media propaganda that elicits a nationalist public opinion as a response. For the case study that represents a staged media event, the 2008 Beijing Olympics, I applied the MCDA on visual communication. In the case study that represents an abrupt media event, the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident, I also used the MCDA on nationalism framed in opinion pieces on the media company Tencent's website. Applying passive surveys, I adopt established forms of content analysis to explore netizens' public opinions. I applied manual methods to the first study and the automated sentiment analysis program (ASAP) to the second one consisting of numerous comments published by netizens.

I must state a few limitations and reservations concerning the methodologies. First, my big data analysis with the ASAP in the case study of the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident was the first time anyone applied such a program. While the results seem promising, more cases need to be tested in the future for the higher reliability of this automated method. Second, in the case study of the Beijing Olympics, the automated data collection systems were not available to retrieve the full data set on Tianya BBS, so manual collection was necessary, limiting the number of the researched comments. Therefore, to come to a fuller understanding of this case study, suitable data collection software will aid future research. Third, when setting up the coding rules for nationalism, it was difficult to identify implied meanings of comments, such as "object to the Olympics" and "hate the government." Sometimes, when people's views on media events are not fully congruent with their nationalist ideas, it is difficult to gauge their nationalist sentiment. For example, if a comment shows the only disagreement with the government (or with the event), this seems unpatriotic at first glance, but it may as well be the opposite.⁶⁷

Such ambiguous situations generate complex results in the analysis, and in future research, I will

⁶⁷ In most cases, I treated such an opinion as patriotic because it showed, first and foremost, netizens' concern about national affairs. Although this was complex, I had done all the coding myself, which ensured the unified judgement of the comment texts.

treat such comments separately. To do so, I will set up more sophisticated coding rules by combining concrete context with these negative comments to identify their deeper meaning. At the same time, I will also refer to the preliminary analysis of the participation of netizens on that topic showing their concern about the events (state affairs). This will make for an even better understanding of online nationalism. In the case study of the 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident, the ASAP already carried out a complicated evaluation on netizens' nationalist sentiments, thus shedding light in the field of the complex, large-scale study of online public opinion.