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 6 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands Incident: Fighting for the Unification Dream

In this chapter, I investigate how Tencent, a leading Chinese news media company, shaped online popular nationalism and how Chinese audiences reacted to express their nationalist sentiments regarding an abrupt media event—the 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident. Selecting eighteen opinion pieces on Tencent website, I use discourse analysis and the ASAP to examine online mass communication of popular nationalism. I also explore whether an interaction exists between online and offline nationalism. To do so, I will address the following questions:

1. What was the social demand established by the government and media in the incident? How did they establish it?

2. What were Tencent's attitudes towards the incident? How did Tencent set the agenda to draw public attention? What frames did Tencent use to narrate this incident and adjust audiences' nationalism?

3. How did audiences react to opinion pieces on the incident? To what extent was popular nationalism presented in the related comment sections? Did online nationalism reach an extent arousing offline activism? Did Tencent help the government maintain legitimacy?

4. Did online nationalism interact with offline nationalism?

I first analyze Tencent's general attitudes towards the incident through careful text reading and identify these attitudes guide public opinion by highlighting or de-emphasizing the three elements of nationalism (boundaries, collective memories, and people's engagement). Following this initial assessment, I conduct qualitative and quantitative analyses. Applying Foucault's discourse theory, I analyze Tencent's news discourse to discuss how Tencent convey "knowledge" or "truth" to shape nationalist public opinion. I look at the communication characteristics of four Chinese news portals and compare how they edit news reporting through their unique news column called *zhuanti* (专题)

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on the incident, which supports my selection of Tencent as the research website. I conduct a discourse analysis of opinion pieces in Tencent's original news column In Touch Today (*Jinri Huati*, 今日话题) to explore Tencent's news frames and then make a detailed statistical analysis of the opinion pieces, followed by a discussion of the research results. In the end, I find that Tencent mainly adopted restrictive attitudes towards nationalism through a set of frames. These frames obscure the boundaries, skip the collective memories, and decrease nationalist engagement to weaken nationalist sentiments. Tencent shaped online popular nationalism at a level that prevented serious offline activism and government threats.

6.1 The Unification Dream

Chinese authorities have constructed a social demand related to the incident through the narration of the unification dream. Since Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇, also known as First Emperor of Qin), China has been a unified state that conquered all other warring states in 221 BCE. However, in modern times, with twenty neighboring countries, territorial disputes have always been bothering the PRC. Chinese leaders have made great efforts to promote national (re)unification, which established a social demand in public perception. In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping put forward a principle known as "One country, two systems," according to which Hong Kong returned to the PRC in 1997 and Macau in 1999. The PRC currently looks for ways to apply the principle to reunification with Taiwan, but this issue is still unsolved. Former President Jiang Zemin (2006) delivered a speech in 1995 to propose eight propositions for the PRC's peaceful reunification with Taiwan. In addition, former President Hu Jintao (2009) advocated finding a peaceful solution for the Taiwan issue to realize the unification dream.

What is more, territorial disputes with neighboring countries such as Japan and the Philippines are also barriers to national unification. In 2012, shortly after Present Xi Jinping assumed power, he formulated the "Chinese dream," of which the unification dream is an important part (Xi, 2013). This narrative prompted the Chinese to keep a close eye on all territorial issues. When conflicts emerge, popular nationalism is correspondingly triggered. As discussed in previous chapters, such nationalism is different from state nationalism, but the two may intermingle when incidents happen.

6.1.1 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands Incident

The Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands conflicts, part of the larger East China Sea disputes between mainland China, Taiwan, and Japan, have existed since the 1970s. It is currently one of the most important on-going disputed issues, hindering the realization of the unification dream claimed by the official.

The Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands conflicts are part of a wide antagonization of Japan. The Japanese military defeated China in two Sino-Japanese Wars—the main source for anti-Japanese sentiments and Chinese popular nationalism (Zarrow, 2005). Additionally, the Patriotic Education Campaign and other Chinese modernization narratives considered Japan the most significant antagonist, making anti-Japan sentiments a crucial part of nationalist discourses for the Chinese.

The Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands are a group of uninhabited islands located in the east of mainland China, northeast of Taiwan, west of Okinawa Island, and north of the southwestern the Ryukyu Islands. As it was reported by the Committee for the Co-ordination of Joint Prospecting for Mineral Resources in Asian Offshore Areas that there might be energy deposit under the sea, it aroused these conflicts (Blanchard, 2000, 98). The situation boiled down to the PRC and Japan claiming sovereignty over the uninhabited islands, leading to confrontations for many decades.

The most recent confrontation happened in April 2012, when the Tokyo government proposed to purchase three of the five islands from a private owner. The Chinese regard it as Japanese provocations, triggering strong popular nationalism, as evidenced by online nationalist discussions and large-scale street demonstrations. Chinese mass media devoted an extensive amount of time and broadcasts to the conflict, thereby framing it as a media event. According to Dayan and Katz's (1992) definitions, this media event was an instance of a Contest and, eventually, a Conquest. As the conflict escalated and reached a climax when the Japanese government officially signed the purchase in September 2012, it symbolized that Japan conquered the islands and won the Contest. It lasted for about five months (April-September 2012) and comprised of a set of sub-events, each reported diligently by media outlets. For the sake of convenience, I drew up a timeline of these sub-events[97]

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[97] This is an abbreviated and revised timeline, based on the earlier and more detailed timeline by Michael D. Swaine (2013, 13-17).

of Japanese activities in Table 6.1 and Chinese reactions in Table 6.2:

Japanese activities

Date	Event
16-04-2012	Shintaro Ishihara, a Japanese right-wing politician and outspoken governor of Tokyo (1999-2012), proposes to purchase the islands and have them administered by the Tokyo government[98].
17-04-2012	Shintaro Ishihara declares that the Tokyo government and the owner of the islands have almost reached a purchase agreement.[99]
19-04-2012	Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda claims that the Japanese government will temporarily not interfere with the island purchase of the Tokyo government.[100]
28-04-2012	The Tokyo government calls for fundraising to purchase the islands.[101]
04-06-2012	The Japanese donate one billion Japanese yen to purchase the islands; officials plan to visit the islands in summer.[102]
11-06-2012	Six Japanese officials inspect the islands.[103]
12-06-2012	The National Diet[104] holds a public hearing about purchasing the islands.[105]
25-06-2012	Eight Japanese officials visit the islands.[106]
06-07-2012	Two Japanese officials visit the islands.[107]
07-07-2012	The Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda announces to nationalize the islands.[108]
24-07-2012	The Japanese government prepares to nationalize the islands officially.[109]
15-08-2012	Japanese authorities detain 14 Hong Kong activists.[110]
17-08-2012	The 14 Hong Kong activists are set free.[111]
27-08-2012	The Japanese government budgets two billion Yen for purchasing the islands.[112]
05-09-2012	The Japanese government reaches an agreement with the owner to purchase the

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[98] CNTV, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120417/000487.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

[99] Sankei Shimbun, available on huanqiu.com, see https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJv1nN, accessed 20 August 2014.

[100] The Nikkei, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120419/000509.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

[101] CNTV, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120427/001227.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

[102] China.eastday.com, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120604/000212.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

[103] *Beijing Morning Post*, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120611/000363.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

[104] The National Diet refers to Japan's bicameral legislature.

[105] CRI Online, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120612/000009.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

[106] CNTV, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120626/000188.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

[107] *China News*, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120611/000363.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

[108] *Global Times*, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120707/000636.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

[109] *China Economic Net*, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120725/000202.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

[110] CRI, available on Sohu, see http://news.sohu.com/20120816/n350751360.shtml, accessed 20 August 2014.

[111] *Beijing Times*, available on Sohu, http://news.sohu.com/20120817/n350839788.shtml, accessed 20 August 2014.

[112] Xinhua News Agency, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120905/001233.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.

	islands.[113]
10-09-2012	The Japanese government passes the policy of nationalization of the islands.[114]
11-09-2012	The Japanese government signs the contract with the owner of the islands.[115]

Table 6.1 Timeline of Japanese activities

Reactions of the PRC

Date	Event
15-08-2012	Activists from Hong Kong land on the islands support the PRC's claim of sovereignty.[116]
19-08-2012	The first wave of massive anti-Japanese demonstrations emerges in cities across the PRC, including Beijing, Jinan, and Qingdao,[117] which constitutes the first wave of offline activism.
10-09-2012	The Chinese government declares sovereignty by announcing the base points, -lines, and territorial coordinates of the islands.[118]
14-09-2012	Chinese coast guard vessels enter the disputed territorial waters.[119]
15-09-2012	The second wave of massive anti-Japanese demonstrations emerges across the PRC and calls for a boycott of Japanese products.[120]
18-09-2012	The 81st anniversary of the Mukden Incident[121] is commemorated in China.[122]

Table 6.2 Timeline of the PRC's reaction

From this timeline emerges the following: after the Japanese government bought the islands, the

Chinese government applied soft ways to protest Japan by announcing the territorial coordinates of

the islands and sending vessels to the territorial water instead of directly waging war. This, in some

sense, suggested the PRC was defeated in the Contest. The 2012 incident demonstrates the workings

of nationalism and the goal (working towards the unification dream by obtaining sovereignty of the

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[113] *Global Times*, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120905/000759.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.
[114] People's Daily Online, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120910/001514.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.
[115] *China News*, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120911/001101.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.
[116] Xinhua Net, available on Sohu, see http://news.sohu.com/20120817/n350832132.shtml, accessed 20 August 2014.
[117] Xinhua News Agency, available on caixin.com, see http://international.caixin.com/2012-08-19/100425762.html, accessed 20 August 2014.
[118] Xinhua News Agency, available on Sina, see http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-09-11/021925143125.shtml, accessed 20 August 2014.
[119] Xinhua News Agency, available on CNTV, see http://news.cntv.cn/china/20120915/100385.shtml, accessed 20 August 2014.
[120] *Lanzhou Morning Post*, available on Tencent, see https://news.qq.com/a/20120916/000572.htm, accessed 20 August 2014.
[121] The Mukden Incident is an event launched by the Japanese army for the invasion of northeastern China in 1931.
[122] *China News*, available on Tencent, see http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-09-18/005025193047.shtml, accessed 20 August 2014.

islands) was not met.

6.1.2 Major Chinese Commercial News Portals

Chinese commercial news portals are more popular among news consumers than official websites. As Stockmann (2012, 227) notes that "the Internet may emerge as a more credible information source compared with traditional media," the reporting of commercial news portals run by non-official media companies would be even more interesting and believable to Internet users than official news websites.

Four major non-official news media companies exist in the PRC: Tencent (qq.com), Sina (sina.com.cn), NetEase (163.com), and Sohu (sohu.com), each establishing an online news portal around 1998. According to the PRC's provisions on the administration of Internet news information services, Internet media—including these news portals—only have the right to gather and repost news from traditional media outlets in the PRC, instead of creating their own news content.[123] Under this constraint, these websites adopt two news reporting ways: besides publishing aggregated news items, they can also publish opinion pieces on hot news.[124] This gives news portals a certain degree of freedom in producing original content (editorials, opinions, blogs, pictures, videos, etc.) that is still contingent on the news. By their subjective nature, opinion pieces are prone to affect audiences' thoughts and behaviors, unlike the more static relaying of news coverage.

News design of zhuanti by news portals

The 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident lasted for about six months, followed by a series of protective activities from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. News portals heavily commented on the events through special news columns with extensive, in-depth background information, called *zhuanti* (专题, "special reports")[125]. As shown in Figure 6.1, the news design of the four websites' *zhuanti* on the incident was similar in terms of form and content. Each *zhuanti*

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[123] See http://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/provisions-on-the-administration-of-internet-news-information-services, accessed 2 May 2013. Although Internet media are not allowed to interview, they may use clickbait headlines to attract attention.

[124] News portals may also repost comments and opinions from other channels. However, this is not their major feature.

[125] For an example (on Tencent), see http://news.qq.com/zt2012/dyd/, accessed 20 July 2014.

had a masthead with obvious Chinese characters showing the title, the subtitle, and images that depicted the incident. Under the masthead, three-column parts comprised the major content: some videos were on the left side; news items were in the middle; a timeline was on the right (except Sohu).
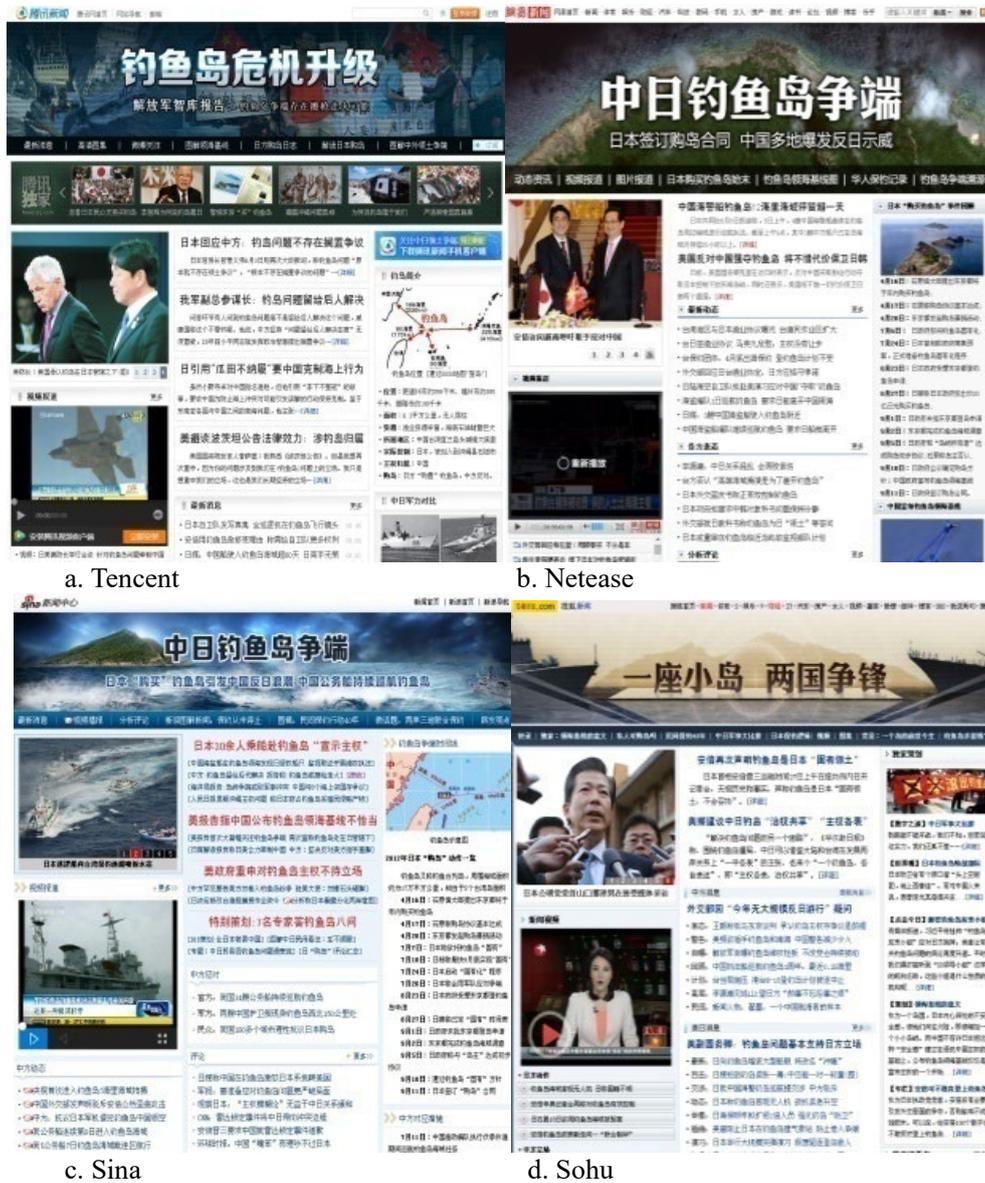

a. Tencent

b. Netease

c. Sina

d. Sohu

Figure 6.1 *Zhuanti* of the four major news portals on the 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident[126]

The latest news in the middle of the webpage of news portals' *zhuanti* about the 2012 incident looked alike because their editors gathered news items from either official or non-official media outlets, telling similar stories about the incident. Among various news materials on *zhuanti*, I will focus on

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[126] Images sources: http://news.qq.com/zt2012/dyd/, http://news.163.com/special/dydzd2012/, http://news.sina.com.cn/z/rbgd2012/, and http://news.sohu.com/s2012/baodiao/, accessed 2 August 2014.

the mastheads (the title sections at the top) and the timelines edited by the four websites. The masthead was equal to a book cover, catching the first attention. The timeline included the general information of the incident, through which audiences could learn about the incident in a fast way. Table 6.3 highlights the similarities and differences between the mastheads of the four *zhuanti*:

Website	Title	Subtitle	Masthead image(s)
Tencent	The Escalation of the Diaoyu Islands Crisis 钓鱼岛危机升级	According to the Report of the PLA Think Tank, War Can Arise 解放军智库报告，钓鱼岛存在擦枪走火的可能	Aerial view of two cruising warships on the left (taking up approximately one third of the space), Baodiao movement protesters in Hong Kong on the right (remaining two thirds).
NetEase	The Sino-Japanese Diaoyu Islands Crisis 中日钓鱼岛危机	Japan Signed a Purchase Contract; Anti-Japanese Demonstrations Break out across China 日本签订钓鱼岛合同；中国多地爆发钓鱼岛反日示威	Aerial view of a part of an island's coastline.
Sina	The Sino-Japanese Diaoyu Islands Crisis 中日钓鱼岛危机	Purchasing the Diaoyu Islands Triggers Anti-Japanese Tide in China; Chinese Official Ships Continuously Cruise the Diaoyu Islands 日本"购买"钓鱼岛引发中国反日浪潮；中国公务船持续巡航钓鱼岛	Sea view of the Diaoyo islands on the left; tempestuous sea, highlighted the contrast in a dark sky that implies a storm; warship approaching the islands on the right.
Sohu	Two Countries Fight for Small Islands 一座小岛，两国争锋	[No subtitle]	The boughs of two warships in the front, on a blue sea and cut off by diagonal blue lines, framing the Diaoyu (Senkaku) islands in the background, set in warm, yellow-brown color tones.

Table 6.3 The styles of mastheads of *zhuanti* of four news portals

The mastheads of *zhuanti* on the four news portals were homogeneous. Tencent used the word "escalation" and explicitly predicted war in the subtitle, presumably to catch audiences' attention. Sohu used the most subtle wording, not even naming China, Japan, or the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands in the title. NetEase and Sina used the same neutral title. Both subtitles mentioned the "anti-Japanese" demonstrations; Sina added information about the official action on the islands. The background images of the mastheads primarily showed the islands (NetEase, Sina, and Sohu) and/or warships

(Tencent, Sina, and Sohu). They used two kinds of views, aerial views (Tencent and Netease) and sea views (Sina and Sohu). These images and views implied the territorial conflicts between the two countries and some reactions to the conflicts.

All *zhuanti* provided a timeline with a summary of the events from the very beginning (see Figure 6.2), based on information reported by official media outlets. News editors of media outlets operated within certain boundaries set by the CPD (Brady, 2008; Stockmann, 2010) to enforce authenticity in news coverage. Sometimes, authenticity proved to be a fluid concept, hinging on perspective. This reflects what Linus Hagstrom (2012) argues: "power shift" narratives in East Asia show that the "truth" in the 2010 Sino-Japanese dispute was very much a matter of perspective. Concerning the incident, the perspectives of the four news portals were arguably on the Chinese side, prompting them to construct the knowledge to the audiences in ways that supported the PRC and opposed Japan.

Tencent

NetEase

Sina

Sohu

Figure 6.2 A timeline of the incident on Tencent, NetEase, Sina, and Sohu[127]

Figure 6.2 shows that the contents of the four timelines looked similar, mainly recording Japanese activities subevents by subevents. Sohu was a bit different: it combined Japanese activities and the PRC's reactions within one timeline. The timelines of NetEase and Sina were the same with 12 sub-events. The timeline of Sohu covered more than one year (April 2012-August 2013), but during the main period of the incident (April-September 2012), it recorded 15 sub-events, including the PRC's reactions. Tencent summarized the 15 sub-events following the same clue. Thus, Sohu and Tencent (the same in terms of subevent number) have created a more detailed timeline followed by NetEase and Sina. Nevertheless, as all the storylines were almost the same, such minor differences would not create much deviation from the four websites' incident development. Audiences grab the plot of the incident in similar ways.

The layout of the four timelines also looked similar except Sohu. For example, NetEase and Sina created almost identical layouts. The top two timelines separately present two pictures (NetEase: a sea view; Sina: a map), indicating the territorial disputes (see Figure 6.2 NetEase & Sina). Tencent designed the timeline in a matrix with various sub-events. In each sub-event, a picture with description links allowed audiences to view the details of the sub-events (see Figure 6.2 Tencent). Only the timeline layout of Sohu was different. The timeline was displayed month by month, with two to three subevents on each time slot. If audiences want to view more details following the time slots, they had to click the slot contents. It meant that Sohu's timeline layout was not as obvious as what the other websites had done, but it was clearer to guide audiences to follow the established clue. Although the timeline layouts on the four websites were somewhat different, they did not change what the websites aimed to inform the audiences.

In summary, the four news portals similarly narrated the incident, in terms of the mastheads and the timelines. Although some differences, such as timeline layouts and titles, their narration of the contents was almost the same, telling the audiences about Japan's interruption of the unification dream of the Chinese.

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[127] Image source: http://news.qq.com/zt2012/dyd/, http://news.163.com/special/dydzd2012/, http://news.sina.com.cn/z/rbgd2012/, and http://news.sohu.com/s2012/baodiao/, accessed 2 August 2014.

Tencent and its column: Jinri Huati

As news content and form on the incident created the four news portals look homogenous, their influence on public opinion is also alike. To research these commercial websites, I chose Tencent as a representative for the following reasons. First, Tencent is the most popular website among the four. According to Alexa,[128] the four rank as follows: Tencent (qq.com): No. 2 >Sohu (sohu.com): No. 4 > Sina (sina.com.cn): No. 9 > NetEase (163.com): No. 38. Second, Tencent has developed two instant messaging apps: Tencent QQ (developed in 1999) and Wechat (*weixin*, 微信, developed in 2011), providing an extensive user base (798 million active QQ user accounts and over 300 million registered Wechat users in 2012. [129]) A miniature Tencent news website or a breaking news snippet pops up at times in the user interface of the QQ and Wechat apps, linking to Tencent's website and thus increasing traffic. Third, although not allowed to create news content in the form of reporting in a very neutral style, Tencent has its own opinion-giving columns that effectively function as a kind of "Tencent news." Compared to other news portals where opinion pieces on the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident are relatively scattered, Tencent creates the detailed column *Jinri Huati*,[130] providing systematic and in-depth analyses of the incident.

Established in 2005, *Jinri Huati*, one of the most influential columns of Tencent, has published over 2000 series of news topics. Unlike those official news reports, opinion pieces in *Jinri Huati* have a clear sense of what should or should not be done, and they provide constant analyses of current hot topics. This way, Tencent's attitudes about the incident become apparent, enabling us to understand how Tencent shapes public opinion on nationalism. What is more, audiences' online comments, visible on the news comment sections attached to these opinion pieces, provide direct evidence to investigate the interaction between Tencent's communication and online expressions of popular nationalism.

6.1.3 News Comment Sections

With the expansion of Internet media, readers get used to reading online news through apps or

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[128] See http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/CN, accessed 20 December 2019.
[129] See https://finance.sina.cn/usstock/hlwgs/2013-03-20/tech-ichmifpy3201182.d.html?fromtech=1&from=wap, accessed 21 December 2020.
[130] See http://view.news.qq.com/zt2012/rbyy/index.htm, accessed 20 July 2014.

websites that are different from traditional newspapers. The online news is closely followed by comment sections where audiences can exchange knowledge and ideas. Tai-Yee Wu and David Atkin (2017, 75) indicate that "informing, exhibitionism, and obtaining feedback are found predictive of the frequency of commenting on online news comment sections." News comment sections are an important communicative space for audiences to participate in political discussions, and it is found that "over 90% of newspapers and television news websites had a comment section in late 2013" (Stroud, Muddiman, & Scacco, 2016, cited in Stroud, Muddiman, & Scacco, 2017, 1728). Florian Toepfl and Eunike Piwoni (2015) indicate that comment sections on news websites construct counter-public spaces in democratic countries. However, as the PRC is an authoritarian country, counter-public discourse against mainstream ideology is normally censored. Online comment sections, established by mass media, nevertheless form part of the public sphere for political discussion among the audiences.[131] It does not matter whether comments are authentic or not, and it only matters that they are in the public sphere, shaping public discussions.

News comment sections are comparable to letters to the editor of traditional newspapers. However, in traditional newspapers, only a few letters are published due to limited space and editorial considerations. When they pass the selection to be published, letters to the editor undergo an editing process, which may tailor their size, tone, and content. Thus, it is hardly possible for readers to exchange ideas via traditional newspapers directly. In contrast, online comment sections enable readers to post comments not subject to selection and editing processes. In addition, time and place constraints interwoven with the traditional publishing process do not apply to online news. Therefore, theoretically, users are free to post as many comments as they want, on whatever they want—even if it is not applicable to the topic at hand. User-generated comments influence other users beyond the new items per se, as they can invoke a reply chain on their own, which is no longer relevant to the news the top-level comment reply to. Giving comments play an increasingly critical role in audiences' news consumption process. For example, in the US, 37% of Internet users are involved in the news process by posting comments, reposting news items, etc.; 25% of Internet users comment on news stories (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010). In South Korea,

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[131] As discussed in the theoretical chapter, Dean criticizes that the net is not a public sphere. Yet, in the PRC, the Internet, in principle, allows all people to discuss various legal frameworks, which constructs a platform functionally similar to the public sphere.

84.3% of online news users read others' comments at least once a week (Na & Rhee, 2008, cited in Lee & Jang, 2010, 826).

News comment sections provide a novel perspective to explore online public opinion directly after media communication. However, not everyone posts online comments after reading news stories. Wu and Atkin (2017) find that it is more likely for agreeable and narcissistic Internet users to post comments on news websites. Comments reflect how audiences think about issues. Henrich and Holmes (2013, 2) note that "comments yield real-time insights into public attitudes on issues, the factors that influence decision making on an issue, and the particular content that most strongly influences these decisions. These comments and responses serve as a gauge of public opinion that is immediate, spontaneous, and (presumably) honest." In addition, Manosevitch and Walker (2009) suggest that readers' comments create more diverse and authentic public deliberation than traditional letters to the editor. Online comment sections serve as a useful platform to analyze public discourses on the immediate news.

In this case study, I will examine popular nationalism expressed in online comments on Tencent's opinion pieces concerning the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident. Since news comment data are directly linked to the related opinion pieces, other topics beyond the scope of the news stories normally will not be discussed. In other words, unlike BBS discussions in which audiences post whatever they like in any thread, news comments mainly involve a few specific articles designated by media editors, significantly narrowing the focus. As these opinion pieces have passed the PRC's censorship regime, it stands to reason that the ensuing discussions fall within the realm of acceptable discussions, leading to less strongly censored debates than those on social media that concern a plethora of unvetted topics. Although the Fifty-cent Army may delete sensitive comments or add favorable opinions in comments on certain unfiltered issues, the comments on media-selected topics reduce the possibility of censorship and allow a clear insight into online opinion.

6.2 Tencent's Communication and Online Popular Nationalism

The main research objects of this study consist of opinion pieces (Tencent's communication) and online comments (expressions of popular nationalism) on Tencent's *Jinri Huati* that require different

research methods to examine. In this study, I use discourse analysis to explore the attitudes towards news opinion pieces and figure out how Tencent edited the opinion pieces to shape public opinion. I then apply a computer-assisted method: an automated sentiment analysis program (ASAP, detailed below) to deal with half a million online comments. Concluding the analysis, I compare online nationalism with offline nationalism obtained from a second source to see if they are interrelated.

6.2.1 Tencent's Communication: Shaping Nationalist Discourse

Even when functioning as bridges between the government and audiences, Chinese media, especially commercial media, do not merely boost or constrain nationalism in mass communication. They apply their own logic to political communication and shape nationalist public opinion. As the media have been commercialized since the 1990s, their priority is to seek revenue by catering to the audiences' interests (Stockmann, 2012; Zhao, 1998). One method to accomplish this is to present news in a surprising or interesting way, which may well entail stimulating nationalist sentiments. This strategy often overlaps with the government's goal of using controllable nationalism to maintain its legitimacy (Gries, 2004; Zheng, 1999). Ki Deuk Hyun and Jinhee Kim (2015) suggest that news consumption promotes online political expressions, including nationalism, that aims to boost popular support of the government. However, Zheng (1999) and Gries (2004) point out that nationalism is a mixed blessing: when uncontrollable, it can lead to social and political chaos and even threaten the rule of the government. News portals take this into account when creating and posting news stories. That way, even if they "constantly make small troubles for the authorities," they "will not fundamentally challenge the existing and political social order" (Zhao 1998, 162). In practice, this means that when popular nationalism manifests itself excessively on the Internet due to certain news stories, news portals such as Tencent switch to content that has a less inflammatory effect to avoid offending the government.

Data selection

The discussion of the 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident in *Jinri Huati* is extensive, organized in a series of more than twenty opinion pieces. I chose the first eighteen (see Appendix 2) because they cover almost the whole scope of the incident from April to September 2012. The several remaining articles published after the climax of the incident were considerably less influential and

thus had little bearing on online nationalism, which is why I excluded them from the analysis.

Method and results

First, I analyzed the publishing frequency of the opinion pieces to examine how Tencent made the incident noteworthy through agenda setting. I then identified the elements in these opinion pieces that constructed nationalist attitudes by looking at Tencent's attitudes towards nationalism. After that, I employed framing analysis to explore how Tencent portrayed the conflict issues. Finally, I examined the styles and organization techniques of the opinion pieces.

Publishing frequency and attitudes towards nationalism

Tencent did not update the series of opinion pieces at a fixed frequency. The fluctuation in publishing suggested how Tencent set the public agenda. Table 6.4 shows that opinion pieces on *Jinri Huati* followed sub-events with a firm delay of up to almost two months. The first opinion piece followed the first sub-event in the incident*,* on 16 April, after two weeks. This shows that, after Shintaro Ishihara's plan to purchase the islands was reported, Tencent released the corresponding opinion pieces to guide public opinion not to arouse excessive nationalism. In May 2012, little actual incident development produced little news on this topic, so Tencent did not release any opinion piece. Another four sub-events were reported in June 2012 (opinion pieces 5 to 8), and only two related opinion pieces (opinion piece 2 and 3) emerged in July 2012. When the Japanese authorities detained 14 Hong Kong activists (15 August 2012), and massive demonstrations emerged across the PRC, symbolizing that the conflict reached a minor climax, Tencent rapidly released six articles (opinion piece 4 to 9). The emergence of multiple articles within a short period (13 days, 16-28 August 2012) strongly suggests Tencent's agenda setting. This is further evidenced by the following: when the dispute came to a climax in September 2012, Tencent released nine articles (opinion piece 10 to 18), the largest number within one month during the incident.

Comparing the publishing frequency and content of opinion pieces to the incident development suggests that, in the different phases of the incident, Tencent utilized different strategies in releasing opinion pieces. In general, the publishing frequency was positively correlated with the development of the incident. Tencent published opinion pieces at a relatively low frequency in the beginning;

later, corresponding to the development of various sub-events, the publishing frequency increased. The magic bullet theory assumes that audiences passively receive information from mass media, and the communication process is in a way that the media use a gun (messages) to shoot into audiences' heads (thinking or behavior) (Asa, 1995; Lasswell, 1927). Although this theory is criticized for the passiveness of audiences (Sproule, 1989), it still helps understand media strategies in the Chinese situation where propaganda mesmerize a large audience. In addition, most Chinese audiences can only read filtered digital information and hear just one voice from the government, which limited their recognition and understanding of various issues. This makes Chinese audiences more passive than many of their counterpart in the rest of the world. Therefore, the more opinion pieces published, the closer attention it would receive from audiences. This was also an indication of Tencent's agenda-setting strategy.

I mark the attitudes in the opinion pieces in Table 6.4 as below: the opinion pieces that promoted nationalism by attracting audiences' attention to the incident and directly or indirectly encouraging them to resist Japan, I marked as "stimulative;" for those creating a diversion from the incident or called for calming down when violent behavior emerged, I marked as "restrictive."[132] The incident development described in the summarization in *zhuanti* (listed in the third column) sets an informative timeline for editors of *Jinri Huati* to arrange the publishing frequency and content of opinion pieces. I compare the timeline (facts) with Tencent's attitudes towards nationalism in each opinion piece in *Jinri Huati* (opinions) and then plot its attitudes towards nationalists in the last column of Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 consists of three main parts: incident development, Tencent's reaction, and how the latter shapes attitudes. The first part, in column three, is an incident development summarization by

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[132] For example, the first opinion piece (titled "how to view the Japanese people's support for purchasing the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands?") discussed that Japanese nationalist right-wing groups (Uyoku dantai) were politically extremist and that the purchase of the Diaoyu (Senkaku) islands did not show Japanese nationalism was rising. The consensus was that the PRC and Japan maintained a normal relationship at this stage. The PRC had only to account for the potential extremism of Japanese right-wing groups. In this opinion piece, these Japanese right-wing groups were considered an outlet for nationalist emotions. Therefore, I marked it as "restrictive." Another example is the second opinion piece (titled "What is the purpose of Japan's nationalization of the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands?") that discussed Shintaro Ishihara's purchase aims and the Japanese government's nationalization of the Islands, indicating more strongly that nationalism was aroused among Japanese people. This opinion piece appealed to the Japanese and the Chinese to not react impulsively if both countries aimed to settle the dispute peacefully. In other words, it tempered excessive nationalist sentiments. Therefore, I marked this opinion piece's attitude as "restrictive" as well.
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Tencent's editors in *Zhuanti*. Although this summarization, being news content, is not entirely subjective, it recounts facts, at least in part. The second part in column five lists article titles, illustrating Tencent's tone in reacting to these events. The third part is my evaluation of Tencent's nationalist attitudes displayed in the opinion pieces by adjusting three elements constructing nationalism (boundaries, collective memories, and people's engagement).

		Incident developments[133]		Tencent's reaction in opinion pieces		
No.	Date	Development in the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident	Date	Corresponding opinion piece in *Jinri Huati*	Tencent's attitudes towards nationalism
1	16 Apr.	Shintaro Ishihara proposes to buy the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands.	1 May	How to view the Japanese people's support for purchasing the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands?	Restrictive：obscure boundaries
2	17 Apr.	Shintaro Ishihara claims that the Tokyo government and the owner have reached an agreement.	16 Jul.	What is the purpose of Japan's nationalization of islands?	Restrictive: obscure boundaries
3	19 Apr.	The Japanese Prime Minister claims that Japan would not interfere with the purchase by the Tokyo government.	28 Jul.	Implications of Major General's claim "The Ryukyu Islands[134] belongs to China."	Restrictive：decrease engagement
4	28 Apr.	The Tokyo government called on people to donate for the purchase of the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands.	16 Aug.	How to view "defending the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands" among the populace?	Stimulative: increase engagement
5	4 Jun.	The donations reach one billion yen; officials plan to land on the islands in summer.	20 Aug.	Why does the South Korean government vigorously defend the Dokdo Islands (Takeshima)[135]?	Stimulative: emphasize boundaries
6	11 Jun.	Six Japanese officials inspect the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands.	21 Aug.	Boycotting Japanese products: causing a no-win situation	Restrictive: decrease engagement
7	12 Jun.	Japan held a public hearing on the purchase of the islands.	23 Aug.	Should we fight for the islands?	Restrictive: decrease engagement
8	25 Jun.	Eight Tokyo officials land on the islands.	27 Aug.	A patriot: Shintaro Ishihara	Restrictive：obscure boundaries
9	6 Jul.	Two Ishigaki[136] officials landed on the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands.	28 Aug.	Is it deplorable to applaud the behavior of attacking the Japanese Ambassador?	Restrictive: decrease engagement
10	7 Jul.	The Japanese Prime	1	If we declare war, can we	Restrictive:

[133] This is based on the timeline I outlined in Section 6.1.1.
[134] The islands are currently under the administration of Japan.
[135] The Dokdo Islands (Takeshima) are disputed islands between South Korea and Japan. Tencent editors use this case as an example to encourage readers to join the protest actively.
[136] Ishigaki is a Japanese city.

		Minister asserted that the islands would be nationalized.	Sept.	beat the Japanese?	decrease engagement
11	24 Jul.	The Japanese government officially declares to nationalize the islands.	3 Sept.	Is it useful for Chen Guangbiao [137] to advertise for the islands?	Restrictive: decrease engagement
12	15 Aug.	Japanese authorities detain fourteen Hong Kong activists.	13 Sept.	Rare earth is not an army, so it is unwise to use it for the resistance against Japanese aggression.	Restrictive: decrease engagement
13	17 Aug.	The fourteen Hong Kong activists are set free.	14 Sept.	Why are the Japanese not patriotic enough?	Restrictive: decrease engagement
14	19 Aug.	The first wave of massive anti-Japanese demonstrations emerged in cities across the PRC, including Beijing, Jinan, Qingdao, etc.	15 Sept.	The Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands crisis: is the US the real manipulator?	Restrictive: decrease engagement
15	5 Sept.	The Japanese government has reached an agreement with the owner to purchase the islands.	16 Sept.	Those who exert violence with mendacious patriotism should be punished.	Restrictive: decrease engagement
16	10 Sept.	The Japanese government passes the policy of nationalization of the islands.	17 Sept.	Why is it difficult to break the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands deadlock?	Restrictive: decrease engagement
17	11 Sept.	The Japanese government signs the contract with the owner of the islands.	18 Sept.	Everyone is responsible for the rise and fall of the country.	Restrictive: decrease engagement
18	10-23 Sept.	The second wave of massive anti-Japanese demonstrations merged across the PRC and called for a boycott of Japanese products.	20 Sept.	It is unnecessary to be overly pessimistic about irrational anti-Japanese behavior.	Restrictive: decrease engagement

Table 6.4 Comparisons between incident developments and attitudes presented in opinion pieces

By analyzing the eighteen articles, I attempt to understand Tencent's general opinions shaping popular nationalism based on the incident development. I also identify how Tencent shaped such attitudes with the three nationalist elements. As discussed above, Chinese commercial media, in some sense, need to help the government guide public opinion and foster a stable society. It is reasonable to assume that Tencent's editors take potential nationalist sentiments into account before releasing the articles. Whether the selection of the articles aims to stimulate or discourage nationalist

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[137] Chen Guangbiao is a Chinese recycling entrepreneur and philanthropist.

sentiments depends on the framing purpose.

It showed that in the reporting on the incident, Tencent was not enthusiastic about promoting popular nationalism. Among the eighteen articles, I have marked only two as "stimulative" and the other 16 as "restrictive," indicating that most articles, in my opinion, attempted to maintain a modest nationalism. The conflicts seemed to spark nationalism among the Chinese on their own. In particular, the Japanese government signing the purchase contract on 11 September 2012 triggered the nationalist sentiments of many furious Chinese. The eruption of nationalism surrounding the incident caused violence towards the Japanese living in the PRC and even some Chinese who either work for a Japanese company or married a Japanese spouse (Weiss, 2014). This situation threatened state administration over society. Social chaos induced by excessive nationalism would ruin the government's image or even legitimacy (Shirk, 2008). It was thus plausible that the shift in Tencent's article analysis followed internal decrees by the authorities to curb nationalist sentiments. Tencent altered the contents of the opinion pieces 6 to 18 to shift towards a position as a voice of reason. Its attitudes towards popular nationalism on the incident were mostly restrained, not stirring radical nationalism. That would also meet the authorities' expectation for maintaining legitimacy.

I have argued that the three elements that construct nationalism are boundaries, collective memories, and people's engagement (see Chapter 1). Weakening or strengthening these will thus decrease or increase nationalism. I then identify to what degree these three elements are present in the eighteen opinion pieces. I labeled the results with the attitudes in column six of Table 6.4 and found that Tencent mentions national boundaries between the PRC and Japan but would not emphasize these (with one exception in opinion piece 5). Instead, Tencent tried to obscure the boundaries (to reduce antagonism) between the PRC and Japan by narrowing the definition of the enemy as the Japanese right-wing group rather than the Japanese government and people. In addition, the articles hardly mention past national humiliation brought by Japan, thus downplaying the factor of collective memories. They pleaded for less engagement in extremist nationalist expressions and activities such as violence and boycotts (13 out of 18 opinion pieces).

As it is difficult to satisfy the social demand of obtaining the sovereignty of the islands, a safe way

to deal with the rising social demand is to reduce and/or limit popular nationalism to a level that will not threaten the legitimacy of the authorities. When the incident approached the climax, Tencent's major restrictive nationalist attitudes prove that they use this strategy.

Framing analysis

An analysis of Tencent's attitudes is not enough to capture analytically the fundamental patterns that Tencent editors used to shape nationalist discourse. To look further into this issue, it is worth exploring how Tencent framed the incident to shape audiences' perception. To do so, I will rely on Baldwin van Gorp's (2010, 91) notion of "frame packages" that include "an integrated structure of framing devices and a logical chain of reasoning devices." Van Gorp (2010, 92) argues that the core of doing a framing analysis is to "identify the framing and reasoning devices and to relate them to a condensing symbol, which is part of a shared culture." Gamson and Modigliani (1989, 3) note that framing devices suggest how to think about the issue and reasoning devices justify what should be done about it. They identify five framing devices: metaphors, historical exemplars from which lessons are drawn, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images, and three reasoning devices: roots, consequences, and appeal to principle (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, 3). Reason devices are what Entman (1993, 52) identifies as "definition functions" of frames that directly interpret the problems, casual connections, moral evaluations, and solutions.

To do a framing analysis in this case study, I used three coding procedures: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (cf. Strauss & Corbin, 1990, cited in van Gorp, 2010, 93). I used open coding to identify the elements related to nationalism. I examined what framing and reasoning devices were employed with axial and selective coding and then grouped these elements. Finally, I identified a set of frames to analyze how Tencent constructed meanings they wanted to express. Table 6.5 shows my identifications of framing and reasoning devices in the opinion pieces.

Source text (examples)	Framing devices	Reasoning devices
1. 稀土不是部队，拿来"抗日"不靠谱。 It is unwise to use rare-earth that is not an army to resist Japan. 2.日本战后，防"爱国主义"如	Metaphors 1. Metaphor "army" suggests that some people used rare earth as a weapon to protest against Japan, which is as irrational as boycotting Japanese products.	Causal connection—roots of the conflicts: Japanese right-wing groups who provoked the disputes

洪水猛兽。 After WWII, Japan regards "patriotism" as fierce floods and savage beasts (great scourges). 3.钓鱼岛成为了日本政客们的"工具"。 Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands became a "tool" of Japanese politicians. 4.现代社会和平解决领土争端已成潮流。 Peacefully solving the territorial issue becomes a tide in modern society 5."爱国"不是挡箭牌。 Patriotism is not a shield. 6.美国和日本联手，中国还谈何"洗刷耻辱"。 If the US is united with Japan, there is no way for the PRC to remove the disgrace. 7.仇恨、对立是中日关系毒瘤。 Hostility and antagonism are the tumors of Sino-Japanese relations.	2. Metaphor "fierce floods and savage beasts" depicts patriotism as a bad thing for people. 3. Metaphor "tool" suggests that Japanese politicians use the islands for their own political ends. 4. Metaphor "tide" refers to a strong force that prompts people to solve the territory issue peacefully. 5. Metaphor "shield" suggests that people should not do evil things in the name of "patriotism." 6. Metaphor "disgrace" refers to the territory invasion that the PRC suffered from Japan in the incident. 7. Metaphor "tumors" indicates that the PRC should not hold an inimical and antagonistic attitude towards Japan, which is not good for bilateral relations.	Solution—appeal to the principle: 1. Shelving differences and seeking joint development
1.韩国国民在美国、澳大利亚等地登了非常多宣誓独岛（日称"竹岛"）主权的广告。 South Korean people advertised the sovereignty of the Dokdo Islands (Takeshima) in the US and Australia. 2.想想俄罗斯把天然气用作外交工具的前车之鉴。 Think about the lessons of Russia that used natural gas as a diplomatic tool 3.像美国[……]也允许各种反战的声音充分表达自己的意见。 The US allowed people to express various anti-war views. 4.最早的一次抵制日货运动是在 1908 年 The earliest boycott of Japanese products took place in 1908.	Exemplars 1. This sets a good example for Chen Guangbiao's advertisement for Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands in the *New York Times*. 2. Russian case teaches a lesson for the PRC to deal with conflicts. 3. The US example implies that different anti-war views should be allowed in the PRC. 4. This uses the example of the boycott in 1908 to explain the different situations nowadays and suggests that boycott is not applicable to protest against Japanese now.	2. Sovereignty advertisement is an acceptable way to express nationalism.
1.损敌八百，自伤一千 (A no-win situation) 2.中国元素 (Chinese elements)；不惜一战 (go to war at any cost) 3.爱国者 (patriots) 4.开战(go to war) 5.天下兴亡，匹夫有责	Catchphrases The catchphrases are either idioms or words that arouse people's attention. Words such as "Chinese elements" and "patriots" construct an imagined community for the audiences.	

(Everyone is responsible for the rise and fall of the country) 6.非理性反日(irrational anti-Japanese)		
1.右翼势力"捣乱"只是中日关系支流。 Troublemaking of right-wing groups is not mainstream Sino-Japanese relations. 2.日本谋求正常国家。 Japan intends to act like a normal state. 3.日本在"实际控制"上，确实占优。 In terms of actual control (of the islands), Japan has an advantage over the PRC. 4.但是全球化让抵制不再可能成功。 Yet, boycott tends to be no success because of globalization	Depictions The depictions portray the issues of the conflicts in the aspects comprising 1. Who is the main actor in the conflicts? 2. What is the intention of Japan? 3. Compared to Japan, what is the advantage and disadvantage of the PRC in the conflicts? 4. Boycott is not a good way to express nationalist sentiments.	Problem definition: It defines that the island conflicts are caused by Japanese right-wing groups and implies that the conflict should not ruin Sino-Japanese relations.
An example of visual images (see Figure 6.3)	Visual images Tencent has posted at least three pictures in each of the eighteen articles to illustrate the texts and provide further information.	
1. 为袭击日驻华大使叫好令人叹息。 It is deplorable to applaud the attack of the Japanese Ambassador. 2. 不要做比日本右翼更不堪的"毒瘤"。 Do not become a malignant tumor that is even worse than Japanese right-wing groups. 3.借爱国之名释放人性丑恶是卑鄙。 Exhibiting the evil side of human nature in the name of patriotism is despicable.	Moral appeals: 1. Attacking the Japanese Ambassador is harmful to diplomatic relations, which should be blamed. 2. Committing violence should never be done. 3. Patriotism is not an excuse to commit violence.	Moral evaluation: Committing violence is immoral to express nationalism.

Table 6.5 Framing and reasoning devices in opinion pieces

Table 6.6 lists the eight frames I identified in these opinion pieces by frequency in descending order. These frames illustrate how the opinion pieces use the sub-events in the incident to construct nationalism. They also tell audiences how to express nationalism by suggesting mild protest ways.

No.	Frame	Frequency (n/18)	Description
1	Nationalist frame	18	The nationalist frame is common and exists in all selected opinion pieces since the core issue of the incident is framed as

			the PRC being invaded by Japan. The story unfolds to answer three questions that construct the nationalist frame: (1) who invades the PRC, (2) how to view the invasion, and (3) what to do with the invasion?
2	Rationaliz ation frame	9	This is a keyframe to "teach" audiences how to express nationalism. Rationalization calls for calming down nationalist sentiments and stopping boycotts and violence.
3	Attitude frame	7	The attitude frame in the articles involves three aspects: first, the attitude towards the major provocateur (Japanese right-wing groups); second, the attitude towards the incident (should the PRC hold a harsh tone towards Japan?);[138] third, the attitude towards Sino-Japanese relations. An attitude of tolerance, cooperation, and sharing is suggested for future Sino-Japanese relations.
4	Anti-war frame	5	Anti-war frames are important content of Tencent's attitudes. Tencent uses five anti-war frames to calm audiences down.
5	Economic frame	5	This frame is mainly related to protesting behavior that causes an economic loss for the PRC, such as boycotting Japanese products or cutting off trade with Japan.
6	Invader frame	4	The invader frame explains a few questions: who is the real invader? What roles did other countries (such as the US) play in the incident? Four articles define Japanese right-wing groups instead of Japanese people and the Japanese government as the major invader in the incident. In addition, the US is not regarded as a manipulator of the incident. By narrowing the scope of the enemy who causes the conflicts, it mitigates nationalist sentiment.
7	Consequen ce frame	3	The consequence frame is related to irrational expressions of nationalism. Two consequences may occur: in terms of the impact on the nation, it will incur an economic loss and harm diplomatic relations and bring about social disorder; for personal consequences, violent protest behavior harms the Chinese (in the economic and physical perspectives). Besides, those people who exert violence will be punished by law.
8	Solution frame	2	The solution frame provides ways that mitigate the conflicts. As it is difficult to satisfy the social demand by completely solving the problem, to meet the social demand in that situation, one way is to lower the public expectation. Tencent advocates solving the territory issue in a peaceful way, i.e., shelving differences and seeking joint development. Any violent behavior is particularly criticized. In addition, boycotting Japanese products is also seen as an irrational method. Publishing political advertisements (opinion piece 11) and landing on the islands to claim sovereignty are supported (opinion piece 4).

Table 6.6 Eight frames of opinion pieces

With the eight frames shown in Table 6.6, the opinion piece series reveals that the Diaoyu (Senkaku)

Islands incident is an issue with no definite solution for the sovereignty at this stage. They portray

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[138] The answer to which is no in most opinion pieces. For example, opinion piece 3 criticizes Chinese war hawks, and opinion piece 8 indicates that the Japanese support Shintaro Ishihara not because of his toughness but for his dedication to the country.

the incident in two conflicting ways: on the one hand, they draw audiences' attention with inflammatory frames such as the nationalist frame; while on the other hand, they mitigate nationalist sentiments by calling for rationalization, which promises to maintain the legitimacy of the authorities.

Tencent uses different perspectives to deploy the different frames listed above. In most articles, the central topics are elaborated upon from the PRC's perspective, which directly guides the audiences on how to view Sino-Japanese relations and behave in the incident. However, the Japanese side is also discussed in a couple of articles, shaping audiences' understanding of the conflict from different angles. The basic point of view is that Chinese people should be rational in expressing nationalist sentiments because the Japanese hold a relatively calm view, and it is the radical Japanese right-wing group instead of the Japanese people that provoke the conflicts.[139]

Besides Japan and the PRC, other countries, such as South Korea and the US, are covered in some opinion pieces. For example, opinion piece 5, attempting to promote popular nationalism, focuses on Korean nationalism. It discusses how the Korean President Lee Myung-bak went to the Dokdo Islands (Takeshima) to claim sovereignty in Japan-Korea conflicts. The article implies, in my opinion, the PRC should be as tough as South Korea. This is a strategy to increase popular nationalism.

Opinion piece 14 discusses what role the US plays in the incident brings the US and Japan in as a significant topic. It draws the conclusion that Japan is not controlled by the US, so the US is not the real manipulator of the incident. It furthermore indicates that the island dispute depends on Japan's political situation, warning that if the US wants to instigate the conflict, it will shoot itself in the foot. In addition, the opinion piece points out that the purchase of the islands by the Japanese government is caused by certain considerations of Japanese national politics rather than an independent initiative. Other opinion pieces further argue that Japanese right-wing groups are the major provocateur. This attempts to narrow the scope of the "enemy" to certain groups, i.e., the

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[139] Opinion piece 3 presents an interesting point in this case: Tencent criticizes some official media that use hawkish discourse (*yingpai yanlun*, 鹰派言论). Official media, as the government's mouthpiece, likely adopt a military propagandistic tone sooner. Tencent balances such discourse to mitigate popular nationalism to a safer level.

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Japanese right-wing groups, so that it mitigates audiences' antagonism towards the Japanese government.

In short, the different perspectives increase audiences' interest in the opinion pieces and broaden their horizon on how to view the incident. No matter what perspective the articles ultimately took, a strategy is to advocate being "rational" and "calm." This is the basic framing of the nationalist viewpoint established by Tencent.

Editing styles: a specific example

Besides attitudes and frames, editing styles, particularly how the articles are organized, also play a vital role in conveying meanings. I will discuss this point using a specific example: opinion piece 6, shown in Figure 6.3 screenshot A. It is about rational patriotism and argues that people should not act like radical nationalists using violence. A picture attached to the article shows several nationalists vandalizing a Toyota while a group of bystanders watches the nationalists' violent behavior. Below the heading is an outline of the anti-Japanese behaviors in this instance in three steps: the first is the expression of nationalist sentiments without much practical action. This is the lightest way of protesting and has no noticeable impact. The second is a boycott of Toyota and impeding Chinese workers in Chinese car companies that produce Japanese cars. Such radical nationalism, Tencent argues, harms the benefits of fellow citizens and the PRC, and is therefore judged unwise: this is expressed in the title, "Boycotting Japanese products: causing a no-win situation." The third is the damaging of Japanese products, in this case, the Toyota. This falls in the category of vandalism and is therefore illegal. Tencent condemns this behavior: the opinion piece does not neglect to mention that those who break the law will be punished.

A small picture of the Toyota logo is edited with additional information in Chinese "广汽 Toyota, 广州丰田成立于 2004 年 (Toyota GAC Group, founded in 2004 Guangzhou)," which demonstrates Toyota's connection to the PRC. This picture also describes that Toyota cars used in the PRC are manufactured by the Guangzhou Automobile Group Co., Ltd, a state-owned automobile company.

At the end of the opinion piece, an epilogue identity what is good or not for the expression of

nationalism (see Figure 6.3 screenshot B). With a concise summary, audiences can quickly grab the core point. In this case, by citing Voltaire's words, the epilogue implies that performing excessive nationalist behavior harms society, which should be prohibited.

To sum up, Tencent's editing strategies lie in analyzing news in a plain way. Without space limit, theoretically, Tencent can add as much background information as possible to explain the current news, which cannot be managed by traditional newspapers. Concerning the opinion pieces in *Jinru Huati*, each article has a clear, pointed position on how people should think about the incident or what people should do with the established "common sense," picturized analyses, and epilogues. To be specific, Tencent uses a certain "common sense" (an easy way for audiences to understand the news) to guide public opinion. Tencent's editors add pictures to display important information to make the opinion pieces more understandable. Besides the analysis, an epilogue presents the critical points to help audiences quickly catch the main idea. The epilogue clarifies what attitudes audiences should hold toward nationalism.

Screenshot A

Screenshot B

Figure 6.3 Screenshots of an example opinion piece in *Jinri Huati*

6.2.2 Online News Comments: Expressing Popular Nationalism

To explore online expressions of popular nationalism, I use a computer-assisted program, the automated sentiment analysis program (ASAP), and run a quantitative (statistical) analysis on the collected half-million online comments. This analysis explores the interaction between audiences' online expression of popular nationalism and Tencent's communication. The idea is to understand public opinion on the related opinion piece in *Jinri Huati* and evaluate how Tencent's framing techniques affect public nationalist sentiments. Below is the procedures of the program.

Procedures

The program consists of three main operational procedures: data collection, hand coding for the training set, and sentiment analysis.

1. Data collection. Audiences' comments are more difficult to collect than opinion pieces. User comments are dynamically delivered to web browsers with limited contents (less than 100 records) per request. This means that, for example, ten thousand comments need a hundred

requests to collect all the data. As there are, in addition, multiple articles to cover (each with their own web address), each with their own comments, it becomes time consuming and thus unfeasible to collect all the comments by hand. Hence, I used a data collection system to collect this data automatically.[140] The data collection system consists of four basic processing units: URL scraping to gather the comments, downloading and preprocessing the comments, tokenizing and decoding the comments, and preparing the hand coding.

2. Hand coding. I code nationalist sentiments reflected in the comments by hand into five levels, based on the content and the tone expressed in them: "very high," "high," "neutral," "low," and "very low," and score these levels at 2 points, 1 point, 0 point, -1 point and -2 points. The five types of coding rules are shown in Appendix 3.

3. Sentiment analysis. In this analysis, I use the ASAP to analyze audiences' comments on the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident to evaluate nationalist sentiment. As introduced in Chapter 4, the ASAP, a supervised learning approach adapted from ReadMe proposed and developed by Hopkins and King (2010), serves as an automatic classifier for opinion mining.

Analysis of online nationalism

Applying the operational procedures as outlined above to the analysis of audiences' comments, I attempt to interpret how audiences' nationalist sentiments interact with media communication with the aid of framing theory. I provide a general analysis of how opinion pieces evolve on Tencent, followed by detailed content and sentiment analyses.

Online comments have to pass the CCP's censorship regime before publishing in the PRC. As indicated by Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts (2013), the Chinese government mainly reacts to "collective action potential" for censorship. News comment sections occur in isolation, as users have no social connection to each other. Besides, they mainly center on the news itself that has already passed censorship, and (as discussed in Section 6.1.3) are thus much safer. The

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[140]I made this collection system based on data collection software named Shuimiao. Retrieved 2 July 2014, from http://www.shuimiao.net/.

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collective action potential may not exist, as the involved audiences normally do not know each other.[141] This makes the comment data set a suitable research object for online nationalist sentiment analysis.

Popular nationalism cannot be measured. However, it is possible to measure nationalist discourses presented in online comments and offline demonstrations. Audiences' engagement in online discussions on the incident is a preliminary reflection of nationalist sentiments, and their actual discussions are major presentations of nationalist sentiments. In addition, on Tencent website, when a new column is set up, a sharp increase in readers might happen. In the well-established column, *Jinri Huati,* the average number of readers is almost constant since it had established more than 2000 series when the incident took place in 2012. What is more, for a media event with substantial nationalist implications, most readers who write comments are likely motivated by nationalist sentiments. In the following part, I will conduct the preliminary study of the comment number and then a sentiment analysis of the selected comments.

Comment number as an indicator

As each opinion piece in *Jinri Huati* provided audiences with a comment section to air opinion, many wrote comments in response to the opinion piece. I present the comment number in the following table.

No.	Publishing date	Number of comments	Titles of opinion pieces
1	01-05-2012	12976	How to view the Japanese people's support for purchasing the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands?
2	16-07-2012	17555	What is the purpose of Japan's nationalization of the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands?
3	28-07-2012	20650	Implications of Major General's claim: "Ryukyu belongs to China"
4	16-08-2012	60156	How to view "defending the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands" among the populace?
5	20-08-2012	3311	Why does the South Korean government strongly defend the Dokdo Islands (Takeshima)?
6	21-08-2012	59054	Boycotting Japanese products: causing a no-win situation

[141] It is contingent for commentators to comment on the same articles, so organizing a collective action would be very difficult. The groups from news comments sections are different from QQ or WeChat chat groups, as the latter ones are much more stable and established based on certain social connections such as shared hobbies. Some of the QQ or WeChat groups are acquaintances. Hence more censorship will exist in the latter groups than the former groups.

7	23-08-2012	70431	Should we fight for the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands?
8	27-08-2012	4225	A patriot: Shintaro Ishihara
9	28-08-2012	65911	It is deplorable to applaud the behavior of attacking the Japanese Ambassador.
10	01-09-2012	93275	If we declare war, can we beat the Japanese?
11	03-09-2012	13869	Is it useful for Chen Guangbiao to advertise for the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands?
12	13-09-2012	27786	Rare earth is not an army, so it is unwise to use it for resistance against Japanese aggression.
13	14-09-2012	14493	Why are the Japanese not patriotic enough?
14	15-09-2012	15149	The Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands crisis: is the US the real manipulator?
15	16-09-2012	37886	Those who exert violence with mendacious patriotism should be punished.
16	17-09-2012	22084	Why is it difficult to break the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands deadlock?
17	18-09-2012	6368	Everyone is responsible for the rise and fall of the country.
18	20-09-2012	12063	It is unnecessary to be overly pessimistic about irrational anti-Japanese behavior.

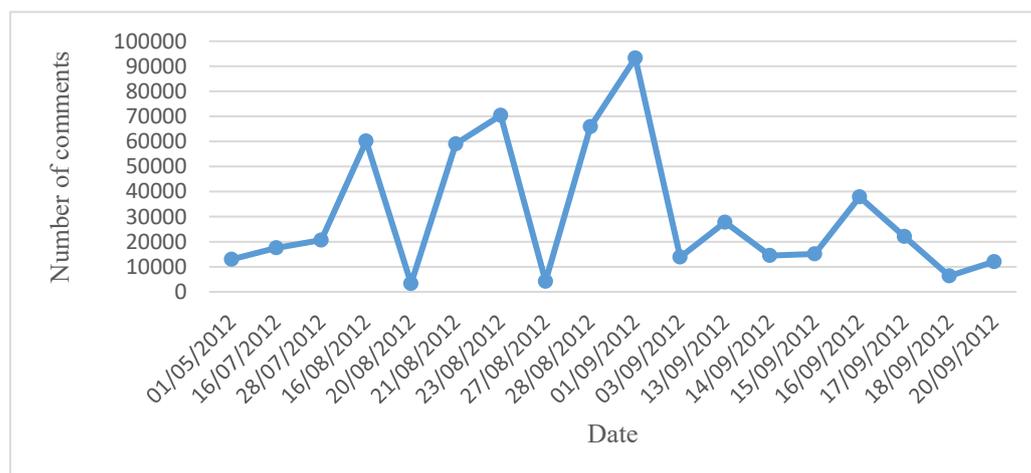Table 6.7 Comment number of each opinion piece

Figure 6.4 Comment number of each opinion piece

I obtain the publishing date and the comment number of each opinion piece, as shown in Table 6.7. To demonstrate the relationship between important events during the incident and the number of comments, I plot these on the y-axis (the x-axis holds the publishing date of the corresponding opinion pieces) of the graph in Figure 6.4. As shown in Figure 6.4, the highest number of comments is on the article published on 1 September, followed by the article published on 23 August. During that period, the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands conflicts approached a climax, so Tencent had an incentive to publish more opinion pieces to elaborate on the story, catering to audiences' demand.[142]

[142] More development in the incident arouses more curiosity of the audiences. Table 6.3 shows that Tencent published four articles from 23 August to 1 September, much more than its normal publishing tempo in the beginning.

These spikes in coverage and comments indicate inflamed nationalist sentiments.

The titles of opinion pieces 10, 7, and 4 (the articles with the top three comments) are in the form of interrogative sentences, a rhetorical device arousing reading interest. For opinion piece 10 *(If we declare war, can we beat the Japanese?)* and opinion piece 7 (*Should we fight for the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands?*), incendiary keywords in the titles— "fight," "declare war," and "beat"—arouse audiences' deep thoughts on nationalism. Many comments on these articles demonstrates that these strategies work in this regard.

Online nationalist sentiments

Only counting the number of comments is insufficient to determine the strength of popular nationalist sentiments because one netizen's nationalist sentiments usually are different from those of another netizen. Therefore, I have conducted a sentiment analysis (aided by the ASAP, as discussed above) on these comments, the results of which are shown in Table 6.8. Figure 6.5 displays the data in a line graph, and Figure 6.6 shows the mean percentage values of comments for each level of nationalist sentiments.

No.	Very low	Low	Neutral	High	Very high
1	1.32%	2.01%	3.12%	80.97%	12.58%
2	0.00%	1.58%	10.59%	40.77%	47.06%
3	0.00%	2.87%	18.97%	71.42%	6.74%
4	0.00%	1.78%	6.76%	64.52%	26.95%
5	1.83%	1.33%	7.41%	77.41%	12.03%
6	0.00%	1.72%	17.65%	73.34%	7.29%
7	0.00%	0.00%	11.54%	48.04%	40.41%
8	0.00%	3.39%	13.62%	74.54%	8.45%
9	0.00%	0	17.48%	66.91%	15.61%
10	0.92%	2.47%	4.51%	68.11%	23.99%
11	0.00%	0.00%	5.71%	94.29%	0.00%
12	0.00%	2.71%	19.66%	70.44%	7.19%
13	0.00%	2.42%	15.31%	77.73%	4.53%
14	0.00%	0.63%	12.75%	64.39%	22.23%
15	0.00%	0.77%	6.59%	79.07%	13.57%
16	0.00%	0.00%	14.33%	75.26%	10.41%
17	0.66%	1.70%	13.59%	68.59%	15.46%
18	0.00%	1.40%	12.84%	74.50%	11.26%

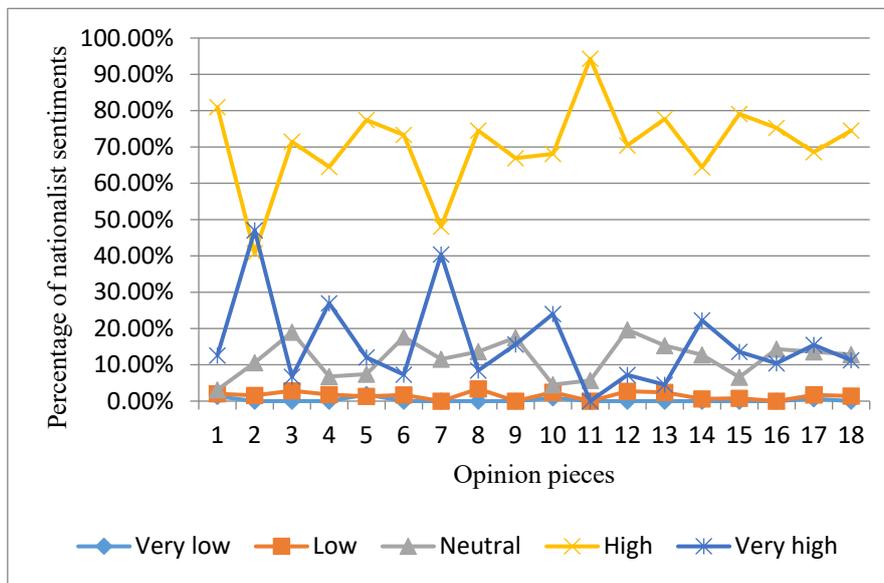Table 6.8 Percentages of comments on opinion pieces about the islands incident, according to

Figure 6.5 Percentage of comments on each opinion piece, according to the levels of nationalist sentiments

Figure 6.6 shows that nationalism in the comments at the low and very low levels occurs at the smallest percentages, and by far, the most score a high level of nationalist sentiment. This indicates that after reading the related opinion pieces, most audiences deployed a nationalist frame to make sense of the incident. While the "high" level is still regarded as within acceptable boundaries, the "very high" level is prone to lead to offline protests, potentially resulting in social and political chaos.[144] This level is relatively high at 15.88%, ranking second among the five levels. Nonetheless, online nationalist sentiments did not reach a point where violence emerges.

[143] The results are calculated in two decimal places.
[144] For details on the distinction between the levels "high" and "very high," see Appendix 3. In general, the threshold is when nationalist sentiments cross the boundary from rational and restrained to irrational sentiments that might spur violent protests and challenge the legitimacy of the authorities.
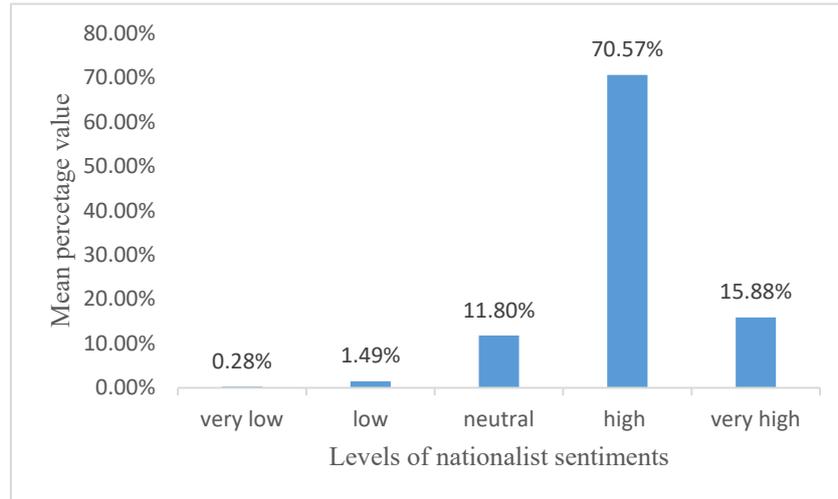
Figure 6.6 Mean percentage values of comments for each level of nationalist sentiments

The first and second massive demonstrations across the PRC in August and September 2012 led to a stronger emphasis on keeping calm towards the incident. Since 21 August 2012, Tencent has released a few opinion pieces calling for rationality (e.g., opinion piece 6: *Boycotting Japanese products: causing a no-win situation*). It suggests that the framing Tencent did in the opinion pieces had taken some effect within a period (27 August -14 September 2012), because, from opinion piece 8 to 13, the "very high" level of online nationalism was mostly below 10% (less than the mean at 15.88%). The only exception was opinion piece 10 that was over 20% (see Figure 6.5). Opinion piece 10 *(If we declare war, can we beat the Japanese?)* discussed the military powers of the PRC and Japan: it argued that while the PRC's military strength was better than Japan's, with support from the US for Japan, it would be difficult for the PRC to win the war. War was deemed an unfeasible option. However, the large number of comments at the "very high" level of national sentiments suggests that opinion piece 10, while supposedly aimed to calm down the audiences and decrease online nationalist sentiments, did the opposite for a large portion of its readers.

As demonstrated in Figure 6.5, from opinion piece 14 to 18 (published between 15–20 September 2012), the "very high" level of online nationalism was around the mean level (15.88%) but higher than the previous period (27 August 2012-14 September 2012) when the level was below 10%. Although the average "very high" level of nationalism increased (from below 10% to about 15.88%), it was still much lower than the "high" level (70.57%). The "high" level dominating online

nationalist discourses were safe for Tencent's communication.

To further understand nationalist sentiments in the comments through statistical analysis, I calculated the weighted values of each sentiment level. Then I calculate the sum of all levels of nationalist sentiments in each opinion piece. In the end, I normalized the weighted sum to compare the variation of total nationalist sentiment percentage with the development of the incident (see Table 6.9). The weighted sum normalization of online nationalist sentiments is depicted in Figure 6.7. It shows that the sentiment level decreased on 3 September 2012 (when opinion piece 11 was published),[145] even though the incident approached its climax. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 6.7, from 3 to 20 September 2012 (from the publishing date of opinion piece 11 to 18), the weighted sums of nationalist sentiment percentages were almost under 80%. [146] This signified that experiencing the climax of the incident, audiences' total online nationalism influenced by Tencent communication was kept at a controllable level, promising not to bring about serious troubles to Tencent and threaten the government.

No.	Very low	Low	Neutral	High	Very high	Weighted sum	Normalization of weight sum
1	-2.64%	-2.01%	0.00%	80.97%	25.16%	101.48%	76.13%
2	0.00%	-1.58%	0.00%	40.77%	94.12%	133.30%	100.00%
3	0.00%	-2.87%	0.00%	71.42%	13.48%	82.04%	61.54%
4	0.00%	-1.78%	0.00%	64.52%	53.90%	116.64%	87.50%
5	-3.65%	-1.33%	0.00%	77.41%	24.05%	96.48%	72.38%
6	0.00%	-1.72%	0.00%	73.34%	14.59%	86.21%	64.67%
7	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	48.04%	80.82%	128.87%	96.67%
8	0.00%	-3.39%	0.00%	74.54%	16.90%	88.05%	66.05%
9	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	66.91%	31.21%	98.12%	73.61%
10	-1.83%	-2.47%	0.00%	68.11%	47.99%	111.80%	83.86%
11	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	94.29%	0.00%	94.29%	70.73%
12	0.00%	-2.71%	0.00%	70.44%	14.38%	82.11%	61.60%
13	0.00%	-2.42%	0.00%	77.73%	9.07%	84.38%	63.30%
14	0.00%	-0.63%	0.00%	64.39%	44.46%	108.22%	81.18%
15	0.00%	-0.77%	0.00%	79.07%	27.13%	105.44%	79.10%
16	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	75.26%	20.83%	96.09%	72.08%
17	-1.32%	-1.70%	0.00%	68.59%	30.92%	96.50%	72.39%
18	0.00%	-1.40%	0.00%	74.50%	22.51%	95.61%	71.72%

Table 6.9 Weighted nationalist sentiment percentages, weighted sum, and normalization in the comments of opinion pieces

[145] As seen in Table 6.9, when opinion piece 10 was published on 1 September 2012, the normalization percentage was 83.86 %. After two days, the percentage influenced by opinion piece 11 went down to 70.73% (The exact publishing dates of the opinion pieces are stated in Table 6.4).
[146] The only exception is opinion piece 14 (published on 15 September 2012), and its weighted sum normalization percentage of 81.18%. However, it does not influence the level of nationalist sentiments during the whole period of the incident (from 3 to 20 September 2012).
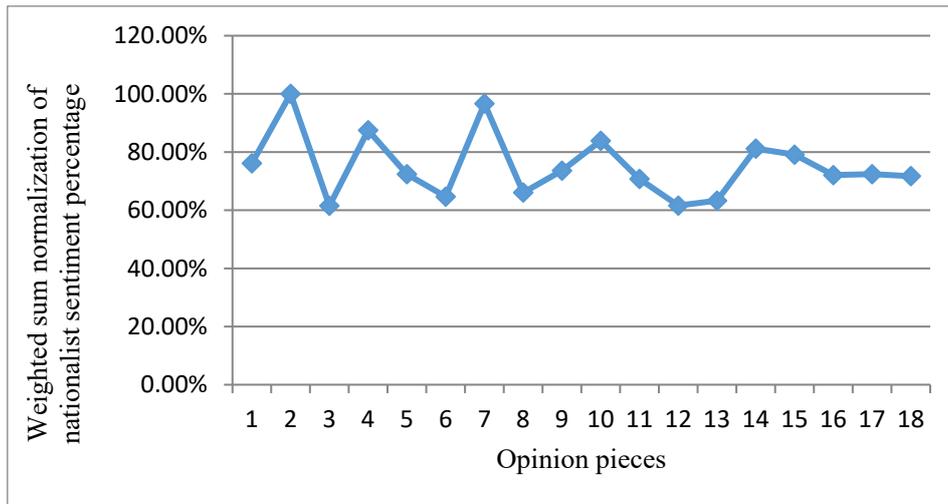
Figure 6.7 Weighted sum normalization of distributions of nationalist sentiments in the comments of opinion pieces

6.2.3 Online and Offline Interaction

It is interesting to examine if there is any interaction between online popular nationalism and offline demonstrations. For data on the offline nationalist demonstrations pertaining to the incident, I follow the study carried out by Wallace and Weiss (2015, 414-415). According to their study, two waves of demonstrations arose during the incident: a small wave around 19 August 2012, when the Japanese authorities detained activists from Hong Kong, and a big wave that took place from 11 to 23 September 2012 when the Japanese government signed the contract (See Figure 6.8).
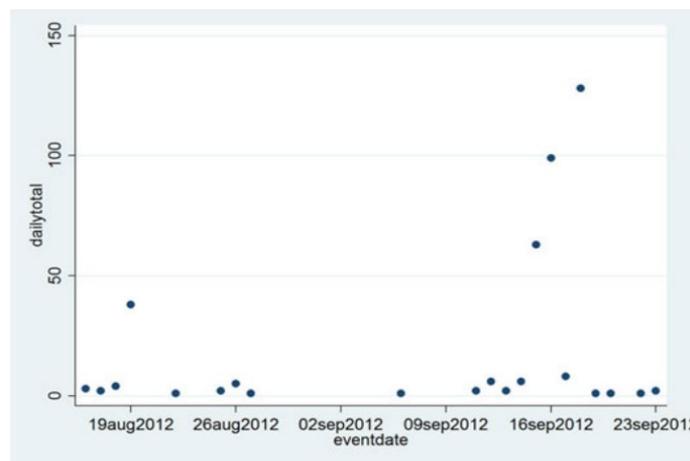

Figure 6.8 Daily count of anti-Japanese protests, August-September 2012, adopted by the author based on the data published by Wallace and Weiss (2015)

As discussed above, I marked the "very high" level of nationalist sentiments in the comments only when extreme nationalist sentiments were expressed with potential offline destructive activities in the streets.[147] I compared the peaks of the "very high" level with the peaks of the offline protests to see if there was a connection between online and offline expressions of nationalism.

Table 6.9, Figure 6.5, and Figure 6.6 show that the "very high" level of online nationalism reached its highest point in opinion piece 2 (47.06%, 16 July 2012) and opinion piece 7 (40.41%, 23 August 2012) compared to the mean value of the "very high" level (15.88%). This suggests that two waves of online nationalism existed. The first online wave was in July 2012 at the beginning/middle development of the incident. However, this first online wave did not bring about any offline activism. The second online wave on 23 August 2012 almost coincided with the first offline protest wave around 19 August 2012. On the Internet, Tencent started to frame opinion pieces with a restrictive nationalist view on 21 August 2012, so this was intended to dial back online nationalist sentiments to prevent offline collective activities. Since the second big offline protest wave was from 10 to 23 September, a related online wave was expected during the same period, and it emerged on 14 September 2012, but it was much weaker than the previous two waves (22.2% versus 47.06% on 16 July 2012 and 40.41% on 23 August 2012). The nationalist sentiment level decreased as the date approached the peak time of offline nationalist demonstration (10-23 September 2012). This suggests that media communication led by Tencent successfully calmed audiences down, which aided in decreasing nationalist sentiments in offline demonstrations.

In short, three waves of online nationalism and two waves of offline nationalism exist in the 2012 incident. The emerging dates of the second and third waves of online nationalism are close to that of the second wave of offline nationalism, suggesting that there could be certain interaction between online and offline nationalism. During the period of the last online wave, Tencent managed to dial back online nationalism by framing the opinion pieces in a restrained manner.

6.2.4 Discussion

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[147] Sentiments that call for violence and offline collective activities, such as demonstrations, are viewed at the "very high" level because this causes social instability and is normally censored.

Tencent reported and analyzed the 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident with its own opinion pieces that shaped online nationalist sentiments. Applying communication strategies, Tencent related the events with an agenda that instructed audiences on how to view and perform in the incident. Taking the nationalism expressed in the comments into account, Tencent switched its tone to a range that would not arouse violent offline protests. The results showed that Tencent did achieve this effect. For online and offline nationalism, the analysis suggested that they might have influenced each other to some extent.

In the whole communication process through Tencent's opinion pieces and audiences' responses in the comment sections, the Chinese government did not directly influence public nationalist sentiments. However, Tencent still have to follow the government's propaganda guidelines, so it had to find a balance between its audiences and the government. In other words, the government's power in mass communication should not be neglected.

Tencent: teaching "knowledge"

Foucault (1969/1972) indicates that discourse power creates knowledge. Tencent, a major news portal with a large audience, is seen as a media organization with discourse power that influences a broad audience by constructing certain knowledge that the audiences are eager to learn. By claiming to explain news with common sense, Tencent's opinion pieces teach audiences common sense as a kind of knowledge.

Overall, the results of this case study answer the research questions put forward at the beginning of this chapter. Regarding the first and second question sets,[148] I consider that the government has established the unification dream as a social demand in daily political propaganda with the help of mass media. This social demand sets up a common goal for the Chinese people to construct and strengthen a shared imagined community. However, as this goal is difficult to achieve within a short period, it can arouse unrest. Incidents like the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands crisis can arouse popular

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[148] The first question sets are: what was the social demand established by the government and media in the incident? How was it established? The second question sets are: what were Tencent's attitudes towards the incident? How did Tencent set the agenda to draw public attention? What frames did it use to narrate this incident and adjust audiences' nationalism?

nationalism to such a level that it erodes government legitimacy. In this process, media companies such as Tencent play a critical role in mitigating radical nationalist public opinion.

Tencent deployed a set of communication strategies to construct "knowledge" shaping online nationalist public opinion. First, it arranged a series of opinion pieces systematically to analyze the media event. The systematic analysis of the incident incentivizes audiences to follow up on the opinion pieces. However, they were not daily updated as regular news reporting would be. Tencent adjusted the publishing frequency according to the development of the incident. To be more specific, the publishing of the opinion pieces was slow in the beginning; and when the incident approached a climax, Tencent published more articles to set its agenda and cater to public demand.

Second, Tencent guided audiences by emphasizing mild nationalism with various frames. It used eight frames (see Table 6.6) to construct online popular nationalism. It emphasizes rational behavior, which complies with the government's demand for social stability: if media companies (such as Tencent) publish excessive seditious content, the CPD may challenge them, according to the communication "bottom line" pointed out by Zhao (1998). In addition, Tencent regarded the incident from the perspectives of Japan as well, as the other party involved in the conflict, and from the US and South Korea: South Korea had been in a similar conflict and was thus a model for behavior, whereas the US was seen as a (potential) ally to Japan. For instance, opinion piece 13 (Why are the Japanese not patriotic enough?) observed that compared to Chinese nationalism, Japanese nationalism was much more restrained during the incident. The Japanese attached more importance to their livelihood rather than to nationalism, so the argument went. This seemed to attempt to de-emphasize nationalism and persuade the audiences to express nationalist sentiments rationally. The varied perspectives made the "knowledge" look comprehensive.

Third, Tencent editors used several other communication strategies to construct "knowledge" within the established discourse of rational nationalism. For example, in the titles of the opinion pieces, they used interrogative questions and provocative words (such as "patriot," "war," and "fight for") to draw audiences' attention. Tencent editors structured the articles as a step-by-step explanation model to answer these questions: what is the (latest) event? Why does it happen? How is it related

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to the PRC? What are its positive and negative aspects? This was then followed by a summary of core "knowledge," i.e., a common-sense approach to the conflicts.

Fourth, my analysis shows that Tencent's attitudes towards popular nationalism varied at different stages of the incident. Generally, Tencent advocated rational expressions of nationalism in most opinion pieces. I evaluated two of the selected opinion pieces as "stimulative" towards nationalism. These two opinion pieces were published to draw audiences' attention in a relatively "safe" period. Yet, as popular nationalism became stronger (and as a result, massive street demonstrations emerged), Tencent attempted to calm down audiences and dial back nationalism by reemphasizing rational nationalism.

It is not difficult to see that Tencent's attitudes towards nationalism switched from restrictive to stimulative and restrictive again. At first glance, it seems as if Tencent's attitudes were partly contradictory by publishing stimulative opinion pieces. However, when Tencent employed a stimulative attitude, it did so subtly without directly calling for nationalism. It only showed the support for defending the islands (opinion piece 4) and drew a comparison with South Korea's defensive activities for the Dokdo Islands (opinion piece 5). Furthermore, audiences may not notice that Tencent had contradictory attitudes in different opinion pieces and feel confused about such attitudes. This was because Tencent organized all the opinion pieces in a series that was not designed with a close connection between each other as series stories.[149] Most audiences may not read the series as a whole and draw comparisons between contradictory attitudes in different opinion pieces.

To sum up, to a certain degree, Tencent's attitudes represented the authorities' attitudes, since as a media company, Tencent have the obligation to follow the party principles in publishing news articles. Meanwhile, Tencent remained a commercial company and, as such, sought audiences' attention by publishing on nationalism in an attractive but controllable way. This is the logic by which Chinese media companies compete in a media society.

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[149] They were published as events unfolded, so when more sub-events took occurred, time between articles became shorter.

News comment sections: a barometer of online popular sentiment

Regarding the third question set,[150] I have shown that online discussions in news comment sections of *Jianri Huati* reflected modest nationalism that would not raise extreme activism. Tencent helped the Chinese government maintain legitimacy. News comment sections serve as a barometer of online popular nationalism. As a research object in this case study, comment sections established a direct link between news opinion pieces and public opinion.

Stereotypical political views, including the general level of nationalism, may influence audiences' commenting ways, which further affects their expressions of online sentiments. Stroud et al. (2017) argue that political comments trigger ambiguous stereotypical reactions and people's stereotypical political attitudes influence how they click the opinion buttons (Like, Recommend, and Respect) in comment sections. As different buttons have different meanings to people, they indicate that to promote less partisan behavior in the news, "respect" buttons are more likely to be clicked than the other two (Stroud et al., 2017). In my case study, the examined comments form a discourse created wholly and freely by the audiences instead of being the result of some choices set up by news editors. Audiences' stereotypical political ideas on nationalism affect their comments on a general level, but the content of news opinion pieces they comment on influences how they express their nationalist sentiments in these comments very directly. Online popular nationalism in news comments is a mix of stereotypical nationalism from daily official propaganda and stimulated sentiments by how media present the events at hand.

To explore online popular nationalism, I identified two indicators: audiences' engagement in online discussions, measured by the number of comments on each opinion piece and their level of nationalist sentiments, identified by a sentiment analysis on the comment discourse. The highest number of comments emerged when the incident approached a climax, and these showed a high level of nationalist sentiments. Besides the incident development per se, the media effect played a decisive role in garnering attention and stimulating online nationalism. This media effect entails that during an important phase of the incident, Tencent published more opinion pieces to influence the

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[150] The third question set is: how did audiences react to the opinion pieces on the incident? To what extent was popular nationalism presented in the related comment sections? Did online nationalism reach an extent that aroused much offline activism? Did Tencent help the government maintain legitimacy?

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public agenda.

In my sentiment analysis, I have demonstrated that most audiences displayed a "high" level of nationalist sentiments. This level was deemed to fall within a controllable scope for the authorities. The "very high" level of sentiments that would give rise to violent nationalist behavior was much less. Thus, it ensured fewer challenges of online nationalism to the authorities.

Interaction between online and offline nationalism

Let us now turn to the last question.[151] There is certain time overlap between online and offline nationalism waves, as different manifestations of national sentiments. However, this does not necessarily imply causation. It has to be admitted that the reasons for the emergence of the offline protests were complicated: the influence of Internet news media is just one source of many. Social media, traditional media, and social interactions in real life also influence offline nationalism. Offline nationalism could incite online nationalism, as in some sense, most of those protests in the streets tend to be younger people, a demographic that is more active on the Internet and thus more prone to air their nationalist sentiments.

Although my examination of the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident suggests a correlation between online and offline nationalism, the extent to which the two influence each other still needs further research. Nevertheless, the role that Tencent played in shaping popular nationalism should not be neglected. My analysis also suggests that Tencent managed to maintain online nationalism to a "safe" level during the climax stage of the incident, which may have calmed down the nationalists in the streets to reduce offline nationalism. By doing so, "the Chinese Internet's acerbic nationalism is ultimately non-threatening to the party-state" (Denemark & Chubb, 2016, 75).

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter showcased the 2012 Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incident, an abrupt media event that ignited popular nationalism to fight for the Chinese nation's unification dream, a social demand hard to fulfil. If inciting excessive nationalism, the incident could weaken the authorities' legitimacy.

[151] The fourth question is: How did online nationalism interact with offline nationalism?

Media have motivations to help the authorities carefully appease public sentiments and confine the strength of online nationalism to a moderate level.

I examined two prominent aspects of mass communication on the incident: media communication strategies as exemplified by the major Chinese news portal Tencent (qq.com) and online expressions of popular nationalism in the comments of Tencent's opinion pieces. In addition, I probed the interaction between online and offline nationalism.

Drawing from Foucault's discourse analysis theory, I explore online news opinion pieces to understand media communication on the event and further explain how media companies such as Tencent used their "discourse power" to affect audiences' online nationalist expressions. As Zhao (1998) has noted, commercial mass media in the PRC, including news portals, have to follow two lines to edit and publish news content: one is to seek commercial profits, the ultimate goal of commercialized media companies; and the other is to follow the Party line, i.e., report the news in a politically correct way to maintain social order and help the Party bolster its legitimacy.

My analysis of this case study observed that Tencent presented the event in a way that did not only tell audiences about the nonfulfillment of the unification dream but also instruct them on how they should view and behave towards such an abrupt incident. It shared "knowledge" of nationalism with audiences to guide populace's behavior. Tencent used communication strategies to shape nationalist sentiments, reflecting in three aspects. The first was to set the public agenda by systematically releasing a series of opinion pieces that attracted public attention. The second was to apply a set of framing techniques. The third was to use news editing that highlighted Tencent's point of view.

In my analysis, I found that Tencent's editors largely adopted a restrictive nationalist attitude that was realized by adjusting the three elements of nationalism: national boundaries, collective memories, and people's engagement in the event. To be specific, they admitted the difference or conflict (national boundaries) between the PRC and Japan but seldom discussed Sino-Japanese conflicts of the past in a deep or heavy way to avoid evoking these events in the collective memories. Overall, Tencent opposed hawkish discourse, violence, and boycotting, and proposed expressing

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nationalism in a rational way to decrease part of public engagement in the event, especially when offline nationalism reflected in nationwide street demonstrations reached a high level.

Concerning online popular nationalism, I took the number of audiences' comments and the related opinions as indicators to scale the nationalist sentiment levels. The results revealed that during a specific period (reaching the climax of the incident), Tencent published opinion pieces at a higher frequency. It stands to reason that the motivation behind this was to satisfy the audiences' news consumption demand. Correspondingly, I found that the number of comments increased as well in this period. This suggested that Tencent had successfully set the public agenda.

For a further sentiment analysis of online nationalism, I did an automated, passive survey and devised specific levels of online nationalist sentiments. I found that nationalism in the climax period stayed at high but acceptable levels. This suggests that Tencent dialed back too strong nationalist sentiments. In addition, I probed the interaction between offline nationalism (street demonstrations) and online nationalism (online comments). It suggests that when the incident reached its climax, demonstrations in the streets increased, while online nationalist sentiments decreased. The highest spike of street demonstrations emerged when online nationalist sentiments only had a slight peak. This suggests that Tencent communication, in some sense, toned down audiences' strong nationalist sentiments.

In conclusion, although it was almost impossible to satisfy the social demand in the abrupt incident, the authorities still maintained legitimacy throughout. I contend that this was partly due to media companies such as Tencent successfully controlling online popular nationalism, prohibiting it from getting out of hand.

The applied method, the automated sentiment analysis program, used in the analysis of the comment sections, provides a new way to explore online nationalist sentiments with enough reliability and feasibility to process such big data. This paves the way for the analysis of online public discourse with large amounts of data, which will become a trend in political communication research.