Chinese Cyber Nationalism:

The 2012 Diaoyu Islands Dispute on Sina Weibo

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THESIS

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Hi, Mao, Tao, and Yao!

👋

This is for you.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara announced his intentions to purchase some privately-owned islets in a group of unpopulated islands in the East China Sea on behalf of the Japanese local government. This group of eight small uninhabited islands and rocks located in the East China Sea are subject to high contention among three nations, all of which claim ownership. The Chinese refer to the islands as the *Diaoyu* and hold themselves to be the rightful owners. Similarly, the Taiwanese declare the *Diayutai* as part of their nation; and the Japanese are attempting to purchase the islets, to which they refer as the *Senkaku* Islands. The dispute around ownership of these islets has become one of the most explosive national security conflicts in the world: Japan has been controlling them, while both China and Taiwan have been claiming them.

This dissertation refers to the islands in question as the *Diaoyu* because that is the term used within the studied text. Historically, the Diaoyu Islands disputes between China and Japan have triggered emotional reactions among Chinese, such as protests and conflicts provoked by the long-term dispute. Chinese activists from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China have attempted to land the islands, protest via street demonstrations, and publish critical books and magazines on the topic. These non-governmental campaigns and protests have been popular among all ranks of people in China. However, scholars have confirmed that on the official and diplomatic level, Beijing has restricted its words and deeds, indicating that China's leaders have no intention to escalate the islands dispute with Japan (Gries et al., 2016).

No matter how restrained Beijing's comments on the issue have been, the recent "island purchase" by the Tokyo governor still immediately stirred both Chinese and Japanese governments. The purchase also spurred the largest scale of anti-Japan protests since 1972, the year in which China-Japan relations normalized. Governor Ishihara stated that the purchase of these islands was intended to better protect the region: "What would other countries have to complain about?" (Dickie, 2012). Beijing responded by issuing diplomatic condemnation, but focused on the individual actions of Governor Ishihara while avoiding direct criticism of Japan. For instance, Xinhua, China's official news agency, stated that "…Ishihara's move, taken at a time when the 40th anniversary of the normalization of China-Japan diplomatic ties is drawing near, is to generate publicity and gain political capital in Japan…" (Xinhua, 2012). In regard to the islands dispute itself, the official commentary also says: "China has repeatedly proclaimed its stance concerning the Diaoyu Islands and warned that any unilateral action taken by the Japanese side would be illegal and invalid" (Xinhua, 2012).

Although Beijing responded mildly, the news media and Chinese citizenry reacted to the purchase with overt hostility. After the release of government commentary, many Chinese media outlets provided extensive coverage of the "islands purchase." Almost all major Chinese online news portals, including Sina, Tencent, NetEase, and Sohu, dedicated special columns to outline and report the news story with a full historic background of the islands dispute. In turn, the widespread media coverage and Beijing's diplomatic action raised strong sentiments among Chinese citizens, many of whom perceived the purchase as an insult from Japan. Activists

traveled to the islands and placed the Chinese national flag on the disputed land. Back on the mainland, protestors connected online, an action which culminated in street demonstrations.

The online discussions and calls for protests helped greatly to circulate, promote, and intensify the street demonstrations. Protests were reported in in 208 out of 287 prefectural cities in China (Wallace & Weiss, 2015). Demonstrations also broke out in 128 cities across the country on September 18 (Wallace & Weiss, 2015). The September 18 protests were timed to coincide with a historically significant day that symbolizes the long-term tension between China and Japan. On September 18, 1931, Japan invaded China in what is now known as The Mukden Incident. Many Chinese still refer to September 18 as "Chinese National Humiliation Day."

Popular nationalistic sentiment also pervades Chinese cyberspace. In recent years, nationalistic expressions have articulated a need to protect China's sovereignty in national confrontations with other countries (see Carins & Carlson, 2016; Feng & Yuan, 2014), consumer behaviors (Wang, 2006), sports (Wang, 2012), and calls for aggressive confrontations towards Taiwan, Japan, and the United States (see Feng & Yuan, 2014; Wu, 2007). The rapid and popular adoption of social media has allowed various social groups such as politicians, intellectuals, celebrities, and ordinary people to join the public discussion together with the government, the mass media, and other social members directly in real time. The Diaoyu Islands dispute, according to a data report released by Sina's Data Center, became the most popular topic on Sina Weibo (hereafter Weibo), China's largest microblogging service, overtaking the global appeal of the "Gangnam Style" video in September 2012 (Sina, 2012).

Cyber nationalism on social media has been emerging as a new social phenomenon in China as more people turn to social media to express their nationalistic emotions and demands. Such a phenomenon represents an intermingled consequence of the developments of nationalism,

the mediated space, and the transformation of social reality in contemporary Chinese society. Chinese cyber nationalism, an extension and a variation of nationalism with new characteristics in the expanding online space, has its roots in the long evolution of Chinese nationalism. Cyber nationalism also shares the essential core values and dimensions of nationalism in China.

The landscape of media in China has been transformed gradually yet dramatically from previous years. For instance, Chinese mass media previously served as the "mouthpiece" of the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP), and the party has long controlled the media on many levels. However, the current media environment has a new dynamic and process which appeals to other emergent players from sectors other than the CCP, such as marketization and the rise of mass society equipped by online technologies. Social media in China have evolved through several phases – from early internet forums, to social networking sites like Renren and Kaixin, to the most recent popular microblogging services.

1.1   Description of the Research

The dual rise of cyber nationalism and social media in China in 2012 prompted the research for this dissertation, for this phenomenon inspire more questions on both empirical and conceptual levels. In this dissertation, the dynamics of the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo have been closely examined by providing and comparing the representations of nationalistic discourses from various social players. Weibo had an estimated 167 million monthly users in September 2014 (Sina, 2014), including a large number of government organizations, officials, companies, celebrities, opinion leaders, and organic users. This dissertation notes the rising participation of media organizations, opinion leaders, and organic

users; and carefully considers their roles and discourses in the online discussion. The dissertation will also explore and demonstrate the role of Weibo in the islands dispute.

This dissertation is theoretically situated in the area of nationalism literature and Chinese media studies to understand the implications of the dual rise of cyber nationalism and social media in China. My research project reviews the earlier scholarly discussions on Chinese nationalism and examines the manifestations, motivations, and impact of Chinese cyber nationalism. Some scholars have explored cyber nationalism in China (e.g. Cairns & Carlson, 2016; Feng & Yuan, 2014; Hyun & Kim, 2015; Jiang, 2012; Wu, 2007); however, a comprehensive understanding of contemporary Chinese cyber nationalism in the online space has yet to be adequately addressed. The current dissertation research takes the advantage of the rich user-generated social data on Weibo to investigate how Chinese cyber nationalism has been manifested and (re)interpreted by various social players such as media organizations, opinion leaders, and organic users in the expanded discursive space on social media. It also extends the scholarship of Chinese cyber nationalism from online news or military websites and forums (see Wu, 2007) to social media platforms, focusing the examination of individual cases of nationalistic events in China as expressed by the general public in their daily conversations.

Guided by frame theory and networked framing, one major goal of this dissertation is to employ mixed research methods to distinguish and compare the different dimensions of Chinese cyber nationalism on social media, an analysis which has not yet been found in any existing literature. The concepts of frame (Entman, 1993; Tuchman, 1998) and networked framing (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013) provide direction to describe the power and structure of a communicating text in the networked environment. Traditionally, framing is defined as a process "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating

text" (Entman, 1993, p.52). Considering the shift in research paradigm needed to fit the new networked environment, Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) propose that "networked framing" conducted through "crowdsourcing practices" (p. 22), involving both elites and ordinary users. The concept of networked framing fits the current dissertation for examining Chinese cyber nationalism expressed on social media and the dynamics among different social players.

Previous studies on Chinese nationalism and the Diaoyu Islands dispute have examined how the state (Zhao, 1998), intellectuals (Nam, 2006; Zhao, 1997), and general nationalists (Downs & Saunders, 2012) expressed their nationalistic demands. Each study only concentrates on nationalism held within a particular social group, representing the specific interests of certain social players. None have yet empirically compared nationalism and nationalistic discourse among various social players in China. Very little is known about how different social groups expressed their nationalistic imaginations in the shared space to construct and adopt their core values of nationalism. It is critical for us to become better informed on how social transformation has brought divergence among Chinese social groups around nationalistic issues. The ways in which various social players form their opinions may indicate their self-identities and reflect an identification process in the society. The dissertation provides a better understanding of the patterns and manifestations of a variety of nationalisms from various social groups in China.

Furthermore, scholarly inquiries on social media platforms in China, especially Weibo, are far from sufficient to conceptualize social media as a unique online discourse space. "Weibo is China's Twitter" has been the most popular way to describe the platform in researches on Chinese social media (e.g., Jiang et al., 2015; Sui & Pingree, 2016; Xu, et al., 2015). Those studies neglect Weibo's position and uniqueness, which are rooted in and stem from the historical Chinese media structure. This dissertation aims to explore the dynamics of Weibo; and

also, to argue for its importance in understanding the rapidly-changing mediascape in contemporary Chinese society. It examines how social media in China, especially Sina Weibo during its prime time, serve as a public space for debates regarding national affairs.

The dissertation concentrates on the dual rise of cyber nationalism and social media in China. First, it will look at Chinese nationalism from a different historical perspective, focusing on its multiple dimensions, major subjects, and social players. Second, it will discuss the dynamics on Weibo in context of how the media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users construct the Diaoyu Islands dispute and how various social players mutually shape each other's discourse on Weibo. While it addresses those two parts, it is worth noting that Weibo itself may have (re)directed public opinion and (re)constructed those online discourses. The dissertation attempts to go one step further and investigate the role of such public debates and social media in contemporary social life, as demonstrated on Sina Weibo.

This dissertation is important and timely in three ways. First, guided by several theoretical perspectives and historical accounts, it offers new ways to conceptualize the changing media landscape in a transforming Chinese society. On the macro level, the dissertation delineates the development of media communication and the shifts and relationships of the state, the market, and the society; and argues that there is no single or dominating powerful player in the new media in China at present. Instead, the communication media system itself in China has been an ongoing configuring process. In particular, the social media space in China is becoming a contested space and its own field where various social players enter into rivalry with each other over different power dynamics. It leads future research on the mediated space in China to a dynamic perspective, which may better situate the Chinese media communication system within

its economic, political, social, and cultural contexts; and how the Chinese media system shifts

people's understanding of the relationships between society and the state.

Secondly, this dissertation adds to the communicative nationalism literature by providing

the findings on cyber nationalism from contemporary Chinese society. It demonstrates how

cyber nationalism has been constructed collectively by its users on social media; while at the

same time, cyber nationalism takes distinctive forms among various social groups on Chinese

social media. It implies that in a fast-transforming society, social stratification happens not only

on the economic and political levels, but also more sharply on a cultural level, represented by

individuals' daily conversations in which individuals express how they connect with the society

and the state, and derive their own identities in such connections. The promise of this analysis is

to illustrate a diversified online representation of different social actors in a transforming

Chinese society, even on the subject of nationalism, which most previous studies did not attempt

to investigate. The dissertation informs how divergent people's perceptions of national affairs

shift future research to pay more attention to how social phenomena, such as cultural differences,

divide Chinese society.

Third, guided by framing theory and using supervised machine learning as the method for

frame analysis, the dissertation seeks to understand a networked framing process in the Chinese

media landscape, given the efforts of various social groups. It provides future researchers with a

valuable methodology to better conduct frame analysis research. Methodologically, the

dissertation notices the disadvantages of both human coding and labelling and automated

analytical techniques; thus the design of the analytical framework is to overcome those

disadvantages. My dissertation combines both quantitative and qualitative frame analysis with a

big data research perspective. Using traditional content analysis and supervised topic modeling,

the dissertation is able to objectively identify the major concepts, arguments, and frames of each group on Weibo discussing the islands dispute. Those methods are also capable to guide future researches to discover the embedded meaning and hidden information of texts drawn from people's daily conversation in an in-depth interpretive manner, as in the qualitative frame analysis.

1.2 <u>Summary</u>

The dissertation is comprised of five chapters, including the introduction, literature review, methods, findings, discussion, and conclusion. Following this chapter, Chapter 2 provides a thorough review of the literature on Chinese nationalism and social media, and an overview of framing theory. It includes scholarly debates on communicative nationalism; the history, different dimensions and recent trends of Chinese traditional nationalism; and the development of Chinese cyber nationalism. Another part of the literature focuses on the complex structure of the Chinese media system, especially the distinct structural and ideological characteristics in different time periods. I argue that Weibo, as well as other social media platforms in China, has been constrained in interactions among the state, market, and society; but Weibo has grown to become a unique and segmented socio-technical discursive space. As frame theory serves as the theoretical background for this dissertation, an overview of frame theory is also presented in the literature review. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the research methodology. It explains how to assess each research question and how to identify and compare frames of Chinese cyber nationalism through exploratory big data research methods, such as supervised topic modeling. The description of the dataset and measurements for the dataset are also presented. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the dominant frames and the major elements of Chinese cyber nationalism that emerged from the discussion on Weibo. It also discusses how

those frames/elements were employed by different social actors, the media outlets, opinion

leaders, and organic users. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and addresses them with relevant

literature. It also reports the contributions of this study, as well as implications for future

research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Using exploratory mixed research methods to analyze user-generated social data, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore frames that emerge from the Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo. It further investigates how different social groups adopt and (re)negotiate among major frames in the context of the dual rise of cyber nationalism and social media in China. To begin, the current study is rooted in nationalism literature with regards to Chinese media studies to better understand the implications of such a dual rise.

In the previous chapter I emphasized developing scholarship on Chinese cyber nationalism in social media, especially the diversity of nationalism among various social players, because most social theories of communicative nationalism usually focus on the unity of people and homogeneity within a nation. Similarly, most recent researches on Sina Weibo tend to consider Weibo as a Chinese Twitter platform and neglect the different and diversified communities of users on Weibo. Beyond filling a gap in literature, the dissertation attempts to explore the dynamics of Weibo and argues its importance in understanding the rapidly-changing mediascape in contemporary Chinese society. A comprehensive review of major social theories of communicative nationalism and Chinese nationalism will be offered. I will show how Chinese cyber nationalism has developed within the unique, complex structure of the Chinese media system. This chapter also presents an overview of frame theory in communication, as that framework serves as the theoretical background.

2.1 Nationalism and Communication

At present, a body of literature about communicative nationalism informs us of the formation, origins, and definitions of nationalism. These existing studies specify ways in which

media and communication play an essential role in understanding nationalism and the building of a nation-state.

Many scholars of nationalism have focused their discussions on unity, homogeneity, and cohesion of a group or a population. In *National Identity*, Smith (1991) highlights nationalism in terms of several aspects that require a common consciousness among members of the group or nation to work on the realization of the national will (p.72). He later (2001) offers a working definition of nationalism as "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'" (p. 9). Deutsch proposes a strong statement that "…the essential aspect of the unity of a people…is the complementarity of relative efficiency of communication among individuals—sometimes that is in some ways similar to mutual rapport, but on a larger scale" (Deutsch, 1966, p. 188). Different from nation-statehood, for which sovereignty is used to achieve the identity of a group and a common identity, Deutsch finds a "people" as the core of building a nationality and the practice of its power is dependent on the well-balanced structure of values, habits, and memories through interaction with social communication over time (Deutsch, 1966, p.75). For him, "People are held together 'from within' by this communicative efficiency, the complementarity of the communicative facilities acquired by their members" (Deutsch, 1966, p. 98); thus, nationality becomes a function of such communicative competence and belonging.

Scholars have also identified the central importance of communication to nationalism. Some (see Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983) have argued that national identity is a consequence of a group's unity and cohesion expressed through communication. The printing revolution, specifically, accelerated communication among different political and cultural entities in early modern Europe, and in doing so, strengthened people's social consciousness. Ernest Gellner

addresses the importance of the social role of communication for creating modern nations.

Gellner (1983) argues that: "a society has emerged based on a high-powered technology and the

expectancy of sustained growth, which requires both a mobile division of labour, and sustained

frequent and precise communication between strangers involving a sharing of explicit meaning,

transmitted in a standard idiom and in writing when required." In this way, nationalism organizes

people "into large, centrally educated, culturally homogenous units" (Gellner, 1983, p.34-35).

Gellner (1983) considers culture as "the necessary shared medium" rooted in education and

literacy (p.37-8). Furthermore, when arguing the relationship between communication and

nationalism, he (1983) writes:

> "The media themselves, the pervasiveness and importance of abstract, centralized, standardized, one to many communication, which itself automatically engenders the core idea of nationalism, quite irrespective of what in particular is being put into the specific messages transmitted…The core message is that the language and style of the transmissions is important, that only he who can understand them, or can acquire such comprehension, is included in a moral and economic community, and that he who does not and cannot, is excluded." (p.127)

In regard to inclusivity, media function as boundary markers, and a nation-state is built

with a shared culture. A similar conceptualization of nationalism – putting the importance of

communication in forming the national identity – can be found in Benedict Anderson's work.

For him, nationalism is: "What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a

half-fortuitous but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive

relations, a technology of a communications, and the fatality of human linguistic diversity"

(1983, p. 46). The highlight of that definition is the recognition of the technology of

communications, which at the time was print, in forging an "imagined community." The

nationalist discourse was not invented at the same time, but was diffused (Calhoun, 1993). The

use of mediated communication works to construct a national sense: "It is imagined as a

community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." (Anderson, 1983, p. 46)

The discussions above suggest a perceivable line of arguments that places communication as the center of nationalism. At the same time, these social theories of communicative nationalism tend to focus on the unity of people and homogeneity within the nation. A major critique to this approach, as Calhoun (1993) points out, is their promotion of sameness instead of diversity by omitting differences among people. He (1993) argues that the solidarity of the nation consisting of different social groups may originate from "kinship and other forms of social (including economic) interconnection, from a common structure of political power, from shared language and culture" (p. 396). Calhoun (1993) further argues that nationalism promotes the identification of diverse individuals, and that the issue of nationalism concerns "what it means to be a member of that nation, how it is to be understood, and how it relates to other identities its members may also claim or be ascribed" (p.394).

2.2   Chinese Nationalism

Taking a closer examination in the literatures grappling with nationalism in China, scholars have also provided explanations for Chinese nationalism being evolving, diversified, and multifaceted, rather than representing a unified idea held by all Chinese people. As a modern concept, nationalism was introduced to China by the Chinese elites in the late nineteenth century in the hope to revitalize China and it played a central role in Chinese politics in the twentieth century. Chinese nationalism is specific and unique, but at the same time diversified. Previous studies have argued that there are different voices within Chinese nationalism (Zheng, 2009), and that Chinese nationalism is about how different forms of nationalism coexist in Chinese society

(Cabestan, 2005). This session seeks to sketch the major developments, motivations, various functions, and the many dimensions of Chinese nationalism.

2.2.1 <u>Historical Developments of Chinese Nationalism</u>

To better understand the current Chinese nationalism, it is critical to recognize the characteristics of Chinese nationalism throughout the country's history. Although Chinese cyber nationalism is different from traditional Chinese nationalism, as I will elaborate later, it preserves and shares the core values of traditional nationalism. Nationalism in China has experienced evolution across several stages with different characteristics. According to Zhao (2001), the first stage is from the Opium War (1839-1842) to the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), during which time the concept of nationalism was introduced and imported to China. Since the Opium War, foreign aggression became an urgent problem for China. Nationalist consciousness had emerged among intellectuals and later spread to urban populations. The second stage (1895-1919) occurred from the end of the First Sino-Japanese War to the early years of the Chinese Republic; the third stage (1919-1949) was marked by the founding of the Chinese Republic to the founding of People's Republic of China (hereafter PRC); the fourth stage (1949-1990) witnesses different forms of nationalism in PRC; and the fifth and final stage is the new nationalism (Zhao, 2004), a continuation of various forms of nationalism from the previous stage and the implementation of the great rejuvenation of China, since the 1990s. It is worth noting that new nationalism in China since the 1990s has been interpreted into different orientations and content. Meanwhile, the mainstream mass media have risen to significance in the resurgence of Chinese nationalism.

During the formative years of Chinese nationalism, scholars argue that both intellectuals and political elites constantly failed to synergize the Chinese traditions and Western thoughts

(see Pye, 1993; Zhao, 2004). The success of the Russian Revolution in 1917 offered a new model for radical intellectuals in China, the Marxist-Leninist socialism. The views of the intellectuals derived from this phase later have had huge impact on public opinion and the mass nationalism. Social movements, the May Fourth Movement and December 9 Movement in 1935, promoted nationalism to become the principal basis of state legitimation (Zhao, 2001). The May Fourth Movement helped the spread of Marxism and the founding of the CCP (Zhao, 2004). The impact of the December 9th Movement, a nationalistic response to Japanese aggression, was "monumental" (Zhao, 2001, p. 272). It helped CCP to rebuild its urban base, providing social conditions for CCP to construct a larger mass nationalism. The implementation of mass nationalism demonstrates the same pattern of how CCP won the support of the wide non-communist members in an apolitical manner in the larger society (Chen, 2007, p. 64). This development could be interpreted as a message of the Party's deeper political ambition to appeal to and serve the nation and all Chinese people. The CCP-led mass nationalism determined the emergence of the new Chinese nation-state through the mass mobilization of both urban and rural populations to defeat the Nationalist Part of China in the civil war and to forge a Chinese nation (Zhao, 2004).

Later, the founding of new China in 1949 signifies the completion of the nation-state building. Afterwards, the Chinese nationalism has faced two missions: to construct the new nation-state and to defend China's unity, dignity, and independence. Mao's revised communism and Chinese nationalism framework have promoted CCP's leadership and placed ideological support under its claims to legitimacy (Zhao, 2004, p.117). The leaders of CCP, from Mao

Zedong to Hu Jintao, all employed nationalism for their decision-making, regardless what ideological ideas or policies they were attempting to apply (Wu, 2007, p. 126).

A rising trend of Chinese nationalism has been observed since the implementation of the reform and open policy since the late 1970s. In the 1990s, the most important feature of Chinese nationalism has been highlighted by the patriotic education campaign orchestrated by CCP, which used patriotism to appeal nationalism to ensure loyalty among the people and maintain its legitimacy (Li, 2004; Zhao, 2004; Wu, 2007). The mass media played an important role in the promotion of state-sponsored nationalism. However, as mentioned earlier, this rising trend of Chinese nationalism does not mean nationalism has been the only voice in China. Social problems, struggles, and conflicts have emerged during the process of China's fast social transformation since the late 1970s, leading people to seek new frameworks to interpret those problems and find new schemes. Thus, several other social thoughts prevail in contemporary China such as conservatism, the new Left, political liberalism, and New Confucianism.

These different schools of thought are closely related to and affected by Western mainstream thoughts. Among them, the definitions, expiations, and theoretic frameworks of nationalism and populism primarily emerged from the West. As a response to Western attacks on the irrational aspect of Chinese nationalism, since the 1900s, Chinese nationalism also acquired a rational aspect from the intellectual discourses (Xu, 2007). Chinese nationalism encompasses many facets and dimensions; and they often overlap or contradict each other. The understanding of the development of Chinese nationalism is not only longitudinal, it has also been understood

in its content and multiple dimensions. The following section introduces the scholarly

discussions on the multifaceted Chinese nationalism.

2.2.2 <u>Dimensions of Chinese Nationalism</u>

Scholarly debates have been heated around the issues of Chinese nationalism, such as its

origins and content. The most conventional explanation of the origins of Chinese nationalism is

the "from-culturalism-to-nationalism" thesis, which emphasizes the primary Chinese identity as

cultural and China as a culturally-defined community; rather than a politically-defined nation-

state with a sense of a Chinese state or nation apart from its traditional culture (Townsend, 1992).

One weakness of this thesis is that it exaggerates both the influence and eclipse of culturalism

and the shortcoming of pre-modern nationalism in imperial times, same as triumph of

nationalism in modern times (Townsend, 1992). Townsend (1992) suggests that the Han nation

existed for centuries being a unique political and cultural community. Other research also argues

that pre-modern China was "a self-conscious political community" (Duara, 1996, p.31).

Scholars have been interested in classifying Chinese nationalism according to different

research purposes and perspectives and identifying different forms of nationalism by its subject.

Chinese nationalism never takes a single form, and there have been contesting views to debate its

structure. Scholars hold different approaches towards Chinese nationalism. The eternalist

perspective argues that Chinese nationalism is objective and eternal; thus, Chinese nationalism,

by "a synthetic combination of the best elements from the traditional and the modern, East and

West," helps to reconstruct Chinese identity (Lin & Galikowski, 1999, p.19). Meanwhile, the

instrumentalist view of Chinese nationalism considers it to be an expression of the interests of

the ruling elite (Zhao, 2004). Pye, for instance, has connected Chinese nationalism with the

China Party-state, for Chinese nationalism has been "reduced to merely the sum of current policy

preferences," which is against the idea of nationalism that all myths and symbols possess their own realm (Pye, 1993, p.128). Dittmer and Kim (1995), while addressing the importance of state sponsorship in constructing and enacting nationalism in China, argue that "the state, with its legitimate monopoly on violence and its controlling interest in terms of manipulating the national symbol system, plays a determining role in the construction and management of a national identity dynamic" (p. 244). The instrumentalist approach was prominent in understanding Chinese nationalism especially after the 1989 Tiananmen incident at which time scholars argue that the Chinese government pushed nationalism to gain legitimacy. However, such a view ignores how the emergence of Chinese nationalism could happen simultaneously from the top down as a state action, and from the bottom up as the will of the nation and people. For some scholars (see Feng & Yuan, 2014; Xu, 2007), nationalism provides an opportunity for ordinary people to join the conversation and participate building a civil society.

From different research perspectives, scholars have organized Chinese nationalism into various categories. Since modern Chinese history made Chinese nationalism a mixture of national revolution and social revolution, the content has been "situational" to the political market structured by national and social revolutions (Zhao, 2004, p.20). To compete in the political market and address nationhood, three forms of nationalism can be identified: ethnic nationalism, liberal nationalism, and state nationalism (Zhao, 2004). Specifically, ethnic nationalism stresses the cultural-ethnic identity; liberal nationalism declares the civil right of participation in the government; and state nationalism emphasizes the political-territorial convergence. Depending on the situational contexts, different political powers and social groups tend to select different types of nationalism connected to their political interests and reject other types of nationalism. In China, while the communist movement successfully restored national

unity and brought national freedom, state nationalism has to respond to challenges from ethnic nationalism and liberal nationalism (Zhao, 2004; Zheng, 2012). In doing so, a pragmatic nationalism has been adopted by most leaders of CCP in the post-Mao era (Zhao, 2004). They employ pragmatic nationalism to strengthen the legitimacy of the regime and maintain stability and unity in the country. The core strategy of pragmatic nationalism is to make economic growth a priority and liberal democracy secondary. Pragmatic nationalism has been used to enhance the loyalty of Chinese people to promote the state's interest. However, it is clear that, in China, nationalism is not only about national unity and emotions, it is also about various purposes and interests. As more pluralistic tolerance is exhibited in Chinese society, nationalistic discourses and voices have also been expressed by social groups with different interests.

A number of previous researches have also suggested that Chinese nationalism is multifaceted, and each of its dimensions is substantially distinctive from the others. In discussing Chinese foreign policy in the post-Deng era, Whiting (1995) suggests differentiating Chinese nationalism into three types: affirmative, assertive, and aggressive. Specifically, affirmative nationalism focuses "exclusively on 'us' as a positive in-group referent with pride in attributes and achievements" (p. 295). Affirmative nationalism has a "them" as a negative out-group, which confronts the benefits and identity of the in-group; and aggressive nationalism picks out a foreign nation as its enemy, which threatens the nation and necessitates action (Whiting, 1995, p. 295). Each type of nationalism functions differently in fostering patriotism, targeting attitudes, arousing anger, and mobilizing behaviors. When domestic politics and external factors post

challenges and threats to state legitimacy, all three types would converge to induce a "siege

mentality" (Whiting, 1995, p. 296) that fuels state nationalism (Xu, 2007, p. 95).

However, with some confidence and determination of China's rising international status,

the "siege mentality" could not fully capture Chinese nationalism. Xu (2007) further classifies

Chinese nationalism as official or nonofficial nationalism depending on its subject. The official

Chinese nationalism, Chinese government's responses to survive the legitimacy crisis, includes

three themes—sovereignty, territorial reunification, and the continued opening-up. Such official

nationalism requires loyalty, commitment, and a readiness for self-effacement. Individuals have

to faithfully follow the rules as their duties when it comes to national obligations. Each

individual's membership in the nation is dictated by fate. Such official nationalism is encouraged

by the party-state when it needs to treat the nation as a political unit and command people's

political loyalty (Xu, 2007, p. 101).

When this type of assertive official nationalism could go no further than protecting

China's greatness and sovereignty, various forms of nonofficial nationalism emerged since the

early 1990s. Nonofficial nationalism has helped to bring the patriotism discourse to date and

better specify a foreign threat to China in the post-Cold War era. Perceived foreign threat against

China ranges from the ideological legitimacy of the CCP, China's sovereignty, history, and

tradition, to its social and economic system. Nonofficial nationalist rhetoric combined both

affirmative and assertive interests, ranging from the past glory of China's national history and

national pride to perceived Western influence and the West's unfair treatment of China (Xu,

2007).

The interaction between official and nonofficial nationalism strengthens both in the state's

permissive radius. They are interrelated and overlapped, but they need to be separated (Xu,

2007). For instance, while the official nationalism is more concerned with state legitimacy, nonofficial nationalist discourses are more focused on the dignity and recognition of China by other nations. Such endeavor often stresses the tradition, authenticity such as Confucianism, and Chinese versus non-Chinese dichotomy. It rarely links to the party-state. Furthermore, the nonofficial nationalistic discourses may conflict with the official political rhetoric. Popular nationalist discourses employ traditional values and ethics to seek authenticity. They contradict the party-state claim of authority, addressing the communist revolution. Also, the "Chinese versus non-Chinese" boundary perceived among nonofficial nationalists is inconsistent with how the party distinguishes its class enemy.

Chinese nationalism has also been dichotomized into grassroots nationalism and elite nationalism. On one hand, grassroots nationalism denotes the feeling and actions started by the general public. Wu (2007) suggests it is characterized by four aspects. First, grassroots nationalism is dualistic, blending the ancestors' glorious victory and superiority and the successors' incompetence. Respect for common ancestors fosters a psychological mood of introspection, and has surpassed other determinants in Chinese people's reactions (Wu, 2007). Second, it is traditionalist, adhering to Chinese traditions and values. Third, grassroots nationalism is "assertive in form, but reactive in essence" (Shambaugh, 1996, p. 205). It easily spirals out of control when ignited in massive movements. Lastly, Wu argues (2007) that it is inherently "highly concerted" (p. 128), reinforced by the collective memory of past national pride and contemporary sufferings.

On the other hand, the elite nationalism in China particularly refers to the national discourses advocated by Chinese elite intellectuals. Elite nationalism has divided into two extreme camps – anti-traditionalist and anti-modernist (Wu, 2007). Pye (1996) notes that it

"vacillates between the extremes of xenophobic distrust and unqualified admiration of all things foreign" (p.90). This tendency was manifested and observed in the literary and artistic works by Chinese intellectuals. The anti-traditionalist camp demonized China's traditions and attributed China's contemporary sufferings to symbols of China's past glory, such as the Great Wall (Wu, 2007). However, the anti-modernist camp was mainly engaged in nationalistic writing in the 1990s, promoting cultural nationalism to fight against Western culture and claim the positive functions of Chinese tradition to maintain political order (Zhao, 1997). For some, the two camps of elite nationalism were not mutually exclusive (Wu, 2007). Wu (2007) also argues that, to a great extent, China's elite nationalism is detached from the general public. After becoming prominent in nationalistic writing, the elite nationalism only represents a tiny and inaccurate picture of the whole picture of China. Such detachment and inadequate representations have resulted in some unfavorable interpretations, such as nationalism as CCP's propaganda and the populist nationalism among intellectuals and the public (Wu, 2007).

While such a gap in perceptions between elite nationalism and grassroots nationalism has been noticed, nationalism opens up the discursive space for elite intellectuals to become more "congenial" (Xu, 2007, p.105) to state power. Chinese intellectuals have successfully mediated between the state and the general public. The intellectuals' role therefore involves influencing the formation of public opinion and public policies (Nam, 2006). Specifically, the intellectuals are able to spur public opinion to force the government to adapt its discourse, manufacture consensus around what is acceptable both to the state and to society, and transmit the official ideology in a top-down manner (Xu, 2007). Chinese intellectuals have also made a significant contribution to Chinese nationalism by providing the rational aspect from their theoretical discourses and a more favorable interpretation of nationalism. Their four major discourses are

concerned with regime legitimacy, identifying China's enemy, the participation of ordinary

people, and preserving "Chineseness" in the globalization era (Xu, 2007, p.107).

     The interplay of various forms of Chinese nationalism was observable after the early

1990s; and the role of mass media rose to significance during the same period. The state-led

nationalism and promotion of patriotism was omnipresent. A national conference in 1994

adopted a document titled Guidelines for Patriotic Education for all educational institutions from

kindergartens to universities, replacing old Marxist indoctrination with patriotic themes (Zhao,

2004, p.219). The state-led nationalism has been quite successful at the social level. Beijing's

unsuccessful bid to host the 2000 Olympic Games in 1993 has marked a fusion of official

patriotic discourse and public nationalist sentiment (Li, 2004). The mainstream media, with

scholars like Li Xiguang and Liu Kang, at that time tried to sensationalize Chinese nationalism.

After commenting on how mainstream international media demonized China, "demonization"

has quickly become a powerful and sensational theme and discourse for both Chinese authority

and the general public (Li, 2004). Mass media outlets create various nationalistic symbols and

make them their profit tools. Strategically seeking both political security and economic profit,

the mainstream media have found the safe zone between the official nationalistic discourses and

the grassroots nationalism among the general public with increased productions in publication,

television programs, and films. One of the most highly-discussed examples is the mass

circulation of nationalistic writing. A popular series of books themed "China can say No"

published in the mid-1990s plunged the interaction between intellectuals' nationalistic discourses

and grassroots nationalism into new perspectives (Li, 2004; Tok, 2010). Those publications

addressed the past sufferings and humiliations caused by the West and Japan, identity loss,

foreign countries' cultural and political intrusion, the need for a stronger government, and

China's position in the world. The popularity of those publications, television shows, and documentaries has manifested the important role of traditional mass media in the diffusion of various forms of nationalism in China since the 1990s.

2.3   Chinese Cyber Nationalism

One must notice that the Chinese media system has undergone multiple stages, which will be discussed later. Various powers and dynamics have competed to dominate at each stage. As part of the media system, Chinese cyber space has also configured and developed in such competition.

For decades, the tightly-controlled mass media in China have been the essential channel, if not the only one, for people to get information. The information gleaned from media, being deliberately and carefully packaged and filtered, often influences or controls people's emotions. For Chinese history and international affairs, many ordinary people can only rely on the information provided by the mass media (Cong, 2012). The advent of the internet and its related communication technologies constitute a very different communicative space from traditional mass media in terms of capacity, high speed, interactivity, and sociality. It changes the modes of interaction between media and people (see Hermida, 2013; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013, 2016; and Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). It offers all users opportunities to generate and disseminate their own content. In this way, it allows many producers and many receivers of diverse messages at once, contrasted against the broadcast model of few producers to more users (Poster, 1995). From a technological determinist view, some scholars have noticed that this kind of new media technologies may promote various dynamic identities, work against the solidarity of ethnic identity (Poster, 1995; Turkle, 1995), and create a "global village" (McLuhan, 1964). Negroponte (1995) also speculates that the old-fashioned physical nation-states would fade away

as a result of ICTs' prevalence, suggesting that "the role of the nation-state will change dramatically and there will be no more room for nationalism than there is for smallpox." (p.336) However, Castells (2011) has observed an opposite trend in which the global technology and network facilitate the anti-globalization movement.

The seemingly contested and conflicted combination of nationalism and the networked environment has created a unique discursive space for scholars to scrutinize the possibilities and interactions of ICTs and nationalism: nationalism is exclusive and cyber space is all-embracing (Wu, 2007). Previous research has outlined several forms of online technology's potential to become a catalyst for nationalism as follows: an information center, an organizational platform, and an execution vehicle for nationalistic activities (Wu, 2007). Online communication technology gradually provides a variety of tools for ordinary people to freely express their nationalistic feelings and other opinions, while other traditional mass media have not been easily accessible to them, especially in those pre-democratic societies.

After the internet was first introduced to China in the early 1990s, this new medium soon became a domain and a vehicle for nationalists to communicate and promote nationalistic causes. Taking advantage of online technology, such as chat rooms, forums, bulletin board systems, and websites, the cyber nationalists in China have been using the internet to emphasize China-related international affairs and attempt to reclaim China's historical glory in the present world order. Early cyber nationalistic organizations were founded by a group of tech-savvy hackers, volunteers, and enthusiasts (Wu, 2007). Other scholars (see Cai 2010; Liu, 2006; Yang, 2009; Zhao, 2004) have illustrated how the internet has been dramatically utilized by people for various kinds of mobilizations in social and political campaigns. The subversive power of the internet and the enduring and strong appeal of nationalism in China thus create possibilities for

people to engage in nationalistic conversations in cyber space (Gries et al., 2016). In such an expressive channel, people not only can communicate how they imagine the nation, but also share and exchange their imaginations and take actions in many events with other people.

Examining different incidents over time, Chinese cyber nationalism has undergone at least three major stages of evolution. The first stage followed soon after the 1999 U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade with the rigorous national enmity between China and the U.S. It marked the entry of Chinese nationalism into cyber space (Tok, 2010). While the U.S. envisioned its post-Cold War enemy in China, Chinese cyber nationalism has been characterized by strong anti-U.S. sentiments and thus founded a considerable group of supporters (Tok, 2010). In the second stage, Chinese cyber nationalism primarily targeted Japan – from 2003 to late 2008. Chinese cyber nationalism during this era was born out of the rising confidence in China's international reputation among Chinese nationalists. For them, the time had finally come to emphasize the long-standing historical issue between China and Japan. Japan, thus, has replaced the U.S. as the major target of the Chinese online community. For instance, the media agenda such as the century-old dispute on the sovereignty over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands has been reactivated by the online nationalist sentiment. The third stage, taking place at present, implies a new domain of Chinese cyber nationalism. Without a specific agenda, it may be considered the positive online responses as "a retreat from great power rivalries toward a form of new optimism and loud confidence over domestic sovereignty issues" (Tok, 2010, p. 29). Evidence from recent research demonstrates that current Chinese cyber nationalism includes a wide range of

nationalistic imaginations, diversified public opinions, and various efforts to participate in national politics (Feng & Yuan, 2014).

Being an evolving and ever-changing phenomenon, the cyber space has quickly turned into a new arena where nationalism is expressed, reshaped, and redefined. Many scholars have engaged in disentangling and updating the definition of Chinese cyber nationalism from multiple perspectives. Xu suggests that it functions as "a non-government sponsored ideology and movement that has originated, existed, and developed in China's online sphere" (Xu, 2007, p.155) after the internet was introduced to China in 1994. While nationalism played a role in influencing government's policy-making in China (Nam, 2006), cyber nationalism has the potential to become a powerful factor in this process. Specifically, scholars have observed that such emerging nationalism has increasingly impacted both governments' decisions in the Sino-Japan relations. Popular Japanese freelance writer Kato Yoshikazu suggests that in dealing with foreign affairs, China's domestic pressure originates more from an out-of-the-system (*tizhiwai*) cyber nationalism instead of traditional Chinese nationalism (Yoshikazu, 2010). Against the background of China's rapid development and intensified social transformation, the online technologies have greatly enabled citizens to acquire information and express their opinions online. The out-of-the-system cyber nationalism has originated in this context, and has become a collective nationalistic sentiment and political power (Yoshikazu, 2010).

Existing scholarship tends to polarize Chinese cyber nationalism into two major extremes. On one extreme, some researchers firmly believe that the Chinese state government, who controls cyber space in many ways, manipulates online nationalistic discourse. As a consequence, Chinese cyber nationalism is characterized by irrationality and parochialism in reactions to state manipulation (Zhao, 2004). On the other extreme, scholars insist that it has

grown out of counter-hegemonic spontaneous grassroots social movements, resisting political power and mainstream cultural values (Wu, 2007). As a result, the environment of cyber space has offered democratic potentials to host and settle civil disobedience (see Zhao, 1998; Saunders, 1998; Wu, 2007). Both perspectives have taken it for granted that online nationalists could be easily aroused by the shared set of traditional thinking of Chinese nationalism, focusing on the collective recognition of the common cultural tradition, such as China's glory or defeats across history.

Chinese cyber nationalism has exhibited its own characteristics, so it cannot be compared into such an oversimplified dichotomy. First, a commonly perceived aspect of Chinese nationalism is the promotional role of the state; and special attention has been paid to the "state-led nationalism" (Zhao, 1998). On the contrary, Chinese cyber nationalism is a non-government movement, whose structures, orientation, and operation are independent of the communist government in China (Wu, 2007). However, this does not mean that the Chinese government would set cyber nationalism free in the networked environments. In addition to its long-existed sophisticated systems of filtering and censorship, the regime would also protect and enhance its legitimacy by reinforcing its dominant discourse and guiding public opinion (*yuqing*) online. That is to say, Chinese cyber nationalism is a non-government movement within the state's permissive parameters. As traditional media now have presence online, the state's interests should still be found and articulated in the online nationalistic discourses.

Second, Chinese cyber nationalism is a grassroots movement, characterized by the large number of users (Cairns & Carlson, 2016; Feng & Yuan, 2014; Wu, 2007). As mentioned, for ordinary people in China, especially the underprivileged group affected by the side-effect of a rapid-growing economy, it would be hard to imagine for many of them to express their opinions

in a public space in the past. The internet gives them the only access to express opinions publicly and to participate in politics and national affairs. Chinese intellectuals have played a mediating role between the state and the general public in the discursive space for Chinese nationalism. It can be assumed that those elites and intellectuals may not break away from the regime's ideological underpinning. Also, the state has taken various actions to ensure that opinions from the elites, intellectuals, and online opinion leaders stay within its permissive radius (Buckley, 2013). Those elites and opinion leaders are usually easily identified; thus, the online environment does not exempt them from punishment if their opinions are against the state's interest (Buckley, 2013). Correspondingly, their expressions are expected to be vulnerable to manipulation, repression, and deletion. However, the anonymity of the internet further enables the massive ordinary users online to vent their complaints towards the harsh life encounters in current China. Collectively, such effect can be enormous. Cyber nationalism may turn into political forces for the policy makers and those active popular nationalists online become literally the political participants. While exploring cyber nationalism for social media users as a whole, it is also worth distinguishing and comparing it among different social players.

Third, Chinese cyber nationalism is a modern ideological movement, referring to the promotion of basic progressive, liberal, and democratic thoughts. Scholars studying the sentiments on Sina Weibo towards the Diaoyu Islands dispute have demonstrated culturally liberal values such as individualism, rights-orientation, and pluralism in the current movement online (Feng & Yuan, 2014). The values held by the popular nationalists on Weibo conflict with the values of historical nationalism in China, such as traditionalism, political conservatism, and economic sovereignty. Their research suggests that the top-down state-sponsored patriotism and spontaneous grassroots nationalism do not always converge (Feng & Yuan, 2014), which guides

the research direction to explore the testimonies of traditional nationalism online and the new dimensions of cyber nationalism.

Lastly, Chinese cyber nationalism is considered a reactive movement (Tok, 2010; Wu, 2007) driven by specific cases and sentiments. Chinese online nationalists react more to historical experiences and "internal" territorial sovereignty issues such as Xinjiang, Tibet, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, whereas they have paid little attention to the sovereign status with Russia, Mongolia, India, or Vietnam (Wu, 2007). Also, they are more reactive to China's relations with the powerful countries of the post-Cold War order, than to the Chinese sovereign on a daily basis.

With discussions of the multiple forms of Chinese nationalism and the characteristics of Chinese cyber nationalism, it is time to examine whether those historical accounts are still prevailing in the field. As more people have turned to social media to express their opinions on various issues to engage either the local community or international affairs, this project concerns cyber nationalism on social media, more specifically on Sina Weibo, to illustrate and map the representations of cyber nationalism at present. Current scholarship on Chinese cyber nationalism has employed many analytic perspectives and methodological approaches. Wu (2007) has offered a comprehensive and thought-provoking investigation; however, the links between each concept such as cyber, nationalism, and Chinese cyber nationalism are not closely connected. Previous studies are primarily case-sensitive and qualitative analysis on the online forums such as *qiangguo* or "Strengthening-China" forum (bbs.people.cn) or Tianya Forum. Studying user-generated online communication, Hyun and Kim (2015) have employed survey data to study online political expression, finding that such expression through news consumption

reinforces support for the existing sociopolitical system via nationalism on Weibo, which was not addressing Chinese cyber nationalism on social media *per se*.

In order to understand the dimensions of Chinese cyber nationalism on social media, the next section focuses on the literature of frame theory, which serves as the theoretical background, to explore what "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21) have emerged and become adopted by various social groups in the discussion of the islands dispute online.

2.4   **Theoretical Background: Framing and Networked Framing**

There is growing acknowledgement that the concept of frame has substantial prevalence in the social sciences. Frame theory is often used to understand media communication and human behaviors (see Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Scheufele, 1997). Digital technologies and social media change the way in which all actors, such as media and ordinary citizens, interact with news media (Xu & Feng, 2014). In the networked environment, frame theory requires research to consider and explore the updated forms of "networked framing" (Meraz & Papacharassi, 2013; 2016), which provides a better foundation to examine discussions on the social media platform.

Framing research has developed from two academic areas, psychology and sociology. In general, the psychological perspective focuses on how people depend upon expectations to make sense of their life experience on a daily basis (see Bateson, 1972). The sociological approach concerns how an issue is constructed and how the meaning is embedded in media (see Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). For instance, communication scholars assert that "news is a socially created product, not a reflection of an objective reality" (Shoemaker & Reese, 2011, p.251). They perceive that news is a socially constructed product, reflecting the practices of those who produce the news that are impacted by a variety of factors, such as politics and ideology. Against

this backdrop, media play an important role in interpreting and shaping public opinion (see Entman, 1993; Gamson and Modigliani, 1987; Lewis & Reese, 2007; Zhou & Moy, 2007). The concept of framing can serve as an ideal theoretical framework to examine the news-making mechanism that media use to produce content and, as a consequence, to influence people regarding how they make sense of the world around them.

Erving Goffman, who has been credited as one of the earliest frame theorists and analysts, introduces the study of framing from the sociologist aspect as mentioned above. For Goffman (1974), frames are first described as "strips" as well as "slices cut from the stream of ongoing activity" (p.10). He continues that reality is the definition of circumstances and frames are an important basis for people to transform the social reality to their subjective thoughts, which also means how people understand and interpret social reality (Goffman, 1974). Goffman (1974) claims that the frame, as the "schemata of interpretation," enables people "to locate, perceive, identify and label" (p. 21). To define framing, Gitlin's (1980) work focuses the role of presentation as "selection, emphasis, and exclusion" (p. 7), and emphasizes the purpose of interpretation as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation…symbol handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (p. 7). Gamson and Modigliani (1987) develop the idea of a media frame as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to unfolding a strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (p.143). Entman offers "a scattered conceptualization" (1993, p. 51), and he defines framing as

> "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p.52).

Besides defining framing, scholars have also noticed different framing processes, such as framing building and framing setting within journalists' practices. In doing so, they have intended to explore the power to frame the media's agenda by viewing framing as an extension of agenda-setting, in which several attributes are chosen for inclusion and exclusion (Meraz & Papacharssi, 2016). For Entman, framing basically deals with "selection" and "salience", and he argues that to frame is to "select aspects of a perceived reality" (1993, p. 52) and to make the information more "noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences" in the communicating messages (p. 53). Entman (1993) also suggests that journalistic frames are located in four places: media production, media representation, the audience, and the culture, all of which shape them during the process of mass communication in certain social contexts. After the process of media framing, audience framing happens when audiences consume media content to make sense of it and that content in turn influences their choices and behaviors (Entman, 1993). Tuchman (1978) brings the concept of "story frame," emphasizing that framing entails the rules for media to cover a story. To report news is usually to tell a story rather than to offer the truth or facts about what happened. When addressing the framing of mass media, Tuchman suggests that the mass media provide frames for general audiences to understand, explain, and engage in public events (Tuchman, 1978, p. ix). Gitlin (1980) writes that "media frames largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports" (p. 7). However, external elements also have impact during the framing process. Gamsom and Modigliani (1989) have observed that in addition to journalistic professionalism, cultural resonances and sponsor activities also influence the media discourse around nuclear power. Scheufele (1999) suggests that public opinion, especially elite discourse, has important impact on frames of new issues. Callaghan and Schnell (2001) find that

news media tend to reinterpret elite frames as well. Frames also "constrain public discourse and thus shape public opinion" (Lewis & Reese, 2009, p. 88).

A new stage characterized by the proliferation of information sources, fragmented audience of selective exposure, and minimal effects (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008) has called for a new framing research paradigm. The "transmission model of traditional news framing effects" has been giving way to a new model that is "more interactive, social constructivist, and 'bottom-up'" (Nisbet, 2010, p. 75). The networked environment has also shifted the center of framing research from traditional media and gatekeepers to ordinary media producers (Jiang et al., 2016).

While Entman's (1993) model addresses the cascading activation, focusing on competitions among media elites, Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) propose "networked framing" as the new model, in which networked framing occurs through "crowdsourcing practices" (p. 22) involving both elites and ordinary users. Their study (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013) illustrates how individuals, including influential elites and non-elite media outlets, became crowdsourced gatekeepers through Twitter conversations. They suggest that networked framing functioned alongside networked gatekeeping to assist the flow of information as a movement happens (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). The networked gatekeeping theory demonstrates the process by which the gatekeepers and the gated share and compete to control information (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009). The affordability of Twitter makes the crowdsourced elite visible, reserving traditional journalism in its sourcing practices. Such a negotiation process among different sources is usually invisible to the audience (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013).

Furthermore, networked framing addresses how algorithmic aggregations of a social media platform, like Twitter hashtags, affects the flow of information, enabling prominent topics to rise to the top (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). During the Egyptian uprising, for example, they

(Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013) argue that "the framing process unfolded on the front stage as those crowdsourced to prominence interacted with mainstream and nonmainstream media and diverse publics" (p. 22). Prior research (Jiang et al., 2016) points out that hashtags are "rarely employed as a framing device" (p. 3) on Weibo because of their infrequent use. However, topics become prominent via reposts (retweets) and comments (Sullivan, 2012). Weibo also promotes certain posts to users' timelines based on users' personal networks and topic preferences (Jiang et al., 2015). In this study, it is expected to discover the interactions between media organizations, public opinion leaders, and organic users in terms of how they emphasized and highlighted certain topics during the dispute.

Existing studies on the frames of Chinese nationalism have only concentrated on the analysis and comparison of media coverage about a specific event (e.g., Luther & Zhou, 2005; Yang, 2003). Yet to date, no research has examined Chinese nationalism on social media and acknowledged the impact of the dynamics between various social players such as elites and nonelites from the networked framing perspective. Informed by the literature on Chinese nationalism and the previous research projects on the island dispute (see Feng & Yuan, 2014), the first set of research questions examines and concerns the overall characteristics and representations of Chinese nationalism on Weibo:

RQ1: Who produced the top posts during the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo and what are the characteristics of these users?

RQ2: What are the most prominent frames of Chinese cyber nationalism that emerged during the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo?

RQ2a: What are the main elements of those frames?

2.5 <u>Chinese Social Media: A Segmented Public Space</u>

China's communication and media system has a long history of being the centralized instrument of the Communist party-state. The development of the Chinese media system has experienced at least three stages, each with distinct structural and ideological characteristics. A brief overview of each stage is presented below.

In the first period, the Socialist era before the 1970s, the media system witnessed the Party's media monopoly, where the Party's instrumental use of media as its ideological apparatus pervaded (Zhao, 2008). After the Cultural Revolution, for more than two decades from the late 1970s to the late 1990s, reforms in economic and organizational aspects "transformed China from a totalitarian, monolithic, drab, homogeneous, and closed regime to a more vibrant, colorful, heterogeneous, capitalist, and globalized society" (Chen, 2007, p1). These economic reforms also enlivened Chinese society with diverse new values and ideas. As a unique sector, the Chinese media industry strictly followed the market socialism model. During this period, the media industry remained the same as a state monopoly in ownership with rapid marketization (see Huang, 2007b; Zhao, 2008). As leanings towards liberalization in economic and renewed political control intrude into the media industries, the image of Chinese media in the reform era has become "messy, protracted and confusing" (Zhao, 2000a, p. 3). During regulated marketization, the same management mechanism directing the media system in China still

secures CCP's control of the basic structure of the press. In the 2000s, the development and restructuring of the media has been driven primarily by two main forces—government and capital dominate the duopoly of power. After marketization, the interplay of external and internal forces has pushed media merger and conglomeration into state policy. The media have given up their role as pure ideological brainwashers; but they "continue to be vital ideological managers on behalf of the party-state" (Lee, He, & Huang, 2006, p. 12). As with the advent of any other "new" communication technologies, the dramatic development of communication in China in the first half of the 2000s, especially the expanding capability of the Internet and mobile phone services, has become part of the technology of globalization and market integration (Huang, 2007b; Zhao, 2011). The rise of the internet in China has changed the media system controlled by the monopoly of state and market power to a comparatively open and decentralized system (Zhao, 2008).

China has been one of the regimes considering the internet a "dangerous tool" that may threaten the social and political order; thus, cyberspace is subject to government surveillance (Yang, 2009). The control of information technology is multilayered. First, the infrastructures of information technology, such as Internet service providers (ISP) and communication networks, have been regulated to serve the government's goals (Hu, 2011). Moreover, the radio and TV networks affiliated with the State Administration for Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) are becoming a new kind of ISP, contributing to the government's far-reaching policy of "networks convergence" (Hu, 2011, p. 3). Zheng (2008) argues that the Internet has simultaneously empowered the state and society, promoting "vertical and horizontal" communication. Even with the restructuring of the media systems and the dramatic boom of information technology, the Party-State alertly and swiftly makes corresponding adjustments within its own political system.

The fate of the overall media industry is still under the influence of the Party-State. The state continues to monopolize the ownership of Chinese media, representing the remnants of the old Soviet model (Chen, 2007).

However, this structure of the internet in China, as well as other decentralizing communication networking tools, does not mean people are powerless online. Scholars imply that Chinese internet users in many aspects, such as online activism and politically subversive discourse, are able to creatively tackle the pervasive surveillance, regulation, and control (see Meng, 2011; Yang, 2010; Zheng, 2007). The power of the internet is reflected not only in some large-scale social protests (Cai, 2010), in which new information technologies were used to mobilize previously unconnected groups, but also in other playful, prosaic, and entertaining forms (Yang, 2009). More importantly, the large number of online population, collectively, can have major impact on the policy-making process (Yang, 2014).

After these two eras of structural and ideological transformations in media communication, the current media system is a situation representing tripartite confrontations between government, capital, and the society. These power dynamics compete with each other, and such competition has created China's own microcosm of social media. As part of the media system in China, the tensions among the state, the capital market, and the society are still relevant and prevalent on Weibo. Moreover, some distinctive features of Weibo complicate those preexisting tensions, turning Weibo into a segmented public space in China.

Launched in August 2009, Weibo rapidly became the most popular social media platform and one of the most popular forms of political internet usage (Carins & Carlson, 2016) in China. The consumption of news and information on Weibo is unique from other mass media forms, giving users a wider array of sources to "follow." Users on social media have the freedom to

select their information source such as mainstream news media accounts, media professionals, and other peer users to follow; and information can be shared and re-shared (reposted) at any time (Weeks & Holbert, 2013). Prior study has suggested that new media created a segmented audience differentiated from a mass audience, and the segmented audience becomes more selective (Sabbah, 1985, p. 219). When the audience chooses its own sources, the segmentation deepens (Sabbah, 1985, p. 219). Ito (1991) has also observed that diversified and specialized information turned a mass society into a "segmented society" (p. 320). As a result, the audience is segmented by ideologies, values, tastes, and lifestyles (Ito, 1991, p. 320). Unlike other media sources, the choices of online information and communities are different, and such segmentation leads to certain bias (Peng, 2011). The bias fortifies differences of opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. On social media, the segmentation is further complicated by the social networks, communities, or subgroups users tend to join. The formation of online social groups usually depends on people's social networks or values held in the community. As a consequence, such social groups will affect individuals by group identity and culture (Peng, 2011, p. 5). Under the influence of an individual's social status, education, resources, and social networks, online interactions gradually and eventually differentiate online discourses. This dissertation explores such differentiation of discourses among certain social groups to demonstrate how an online public space has been segmented around nationalistic discourses.

Against this background, Weibo serves as an ideal model to explore segmentation among audiences and the diversity of nationalistic expressions in China. In the past years, official reports suggest that many factors including gender, education, age, and region would affect people's online behaviors and digital literacy (CNNIC, 2015). Digital literacy affects both the width of information and the depth of participation online (Peng, 2011). Online participation

requires using certain online tools, and such choices of tools have already created segmentations among people. A previous study notices differences among users based on the instant messaging tools they choose (CNNIC, 2006). More young and educated people use MSN Messenger than QQ (a Chinese instant messenger) in developed regions like Beijing or Shanghai (Peng, 2011). On Weibo, as reported by Sina, the majority of the users range in age from 17 to 33 years old, come from urban and more populated economically-developed regions, and are well-educated, with more than 76% of them having college education or higher (Weibo Data, 2015).

Earlier study characterizes the majority of online users as "middle social stratum" (Huang, 2008) by their shared political position in the stratified Chinese society. This middle social stratum connects the state power and social elites on one end, and the underprivileged urban poor and peasants on another end (Feng & Yuan, 2014; Huang, 2008). Guided by prior study (Feng & Yuan, 2014), the distinctive demographic features of Weibo users and their political position drive this project to specifically examine the middle social stratum's reactions rather than a broad definition characterizing all users in China. The middle social stratum is susceptible to the downsides of the state power, sympathetic to social injustice, and prompted to express about the less privileged social groups (Feng & Yuan, 2014; Huang, 2008). The majority of the general Weibo users in this dissertation are potential social members in this particular middle stratum; and their opinions reflect how this social stratum responds to issues from the state and less privileged social groups.

In addition to the ostensibly young, tech-savvy, and urban users on Weibo, the traditional news organizations, journalists, and influential opinion leaders have also been battling to disseminate information on Weibo. Numerous traditional news organizations and professionals in China have been forced by the competition among a greater diversity of information resources

(online news aggregators, citizen journalists, and individuals) to employ Weibo to disseminate and gather more information, solidify and expand their user base, and attract Weibo users to their own sites (Bolsover, 2011). The challenges the traditional media face within the social media outlets include declining readership to the cessation of publication, as well as losing agenda-setting power. Existing study has proven that an alternative online media outlet played a more important role in setting the agendas of mainstream media than the traditional media in China (Wu et al., 2013). The power of the previously monolithic traditional media in China is no longer a decisive player in the current media system, but has become one of the players competing for influences on Weibo. Moreover, all news media are verified and marked by a blue V to indicate the media organization's authenticity and creditability. By assigning the blue V to a media organization, Weibo promotes that media organization and attracts more traffic to its own platform.

Besides mutually boosting traditional media organizations and Weibo itself, there is another category of verified users on Weibo who play a critical role in spurring public opinion and Weibo's proliferation. For those individual users, a more profound and sophisticated mechanism derived from Sina's own blogger ranking system has been adopted and employed to forge a new type of opinion leadership among Weibo users, called "大V" in Chinese, or "Big V." Big V, for verified accounts, is the well-known nickname for the most influential users or opinion leaders on Weibo (Buckley, 2013), and can be easily identified by a yellow "V." The community of opinion leaders include online celebrities with millions of fans who would read, and discuss their news and opinions, and most of the news and opinions usually ridicule officials in China on Weibo (Buckley, 2013). However, the opinion leaders also include a large number of celebrities in the traditional realms, groups of elites in many professions, and active

governmental officials at all levels. The rise of Weibo has given those opinion leaders a powerful

and profitable platform—the most popular users are entertainment stars, and other popular users

turn their celebrity into careers like advertising, endorsements, and publications (Buckley, 2013).

It must be noted that most of the opinion leaders examined in this dissertation serve as

information sources, columnists, experts, or scholars in the discussion of the islands dispute, co-

existing and competing with other media outlets and organic users for prominence. Organic users

represent non-commercial and non-affiliated users (Huang et al., 2014), and the non-verified

users in the current research. Feng and Yuan (2014) observed the fragmented discourses of

national politics on the same island dispute from grassroots on Weibo, suggesting that many

opinions are hard to make visible to other people in the public space. Given this context, the

community of opinion leaders plays an essential role to collect fragmented opinions, then

repackage and reinterpret those opinions for their followers on Weibo, mediating between the

media, organic users, and other opinion leaders. Research on opinion leaders in China (Zeng &

Huang, 2012) suggests two major trends in examining opinion leaders – one explores the opinion

leaders on traditional media, while the other focuses on the discussion of opinion leaders online.

They point out that the first path is preoccupied with the assumption that only intellectuals are

considered opinion leaders, ignoring other possibilities. The latter trend only acknowledges the

new characteristics of opinion leaders in the online environment, failing to inform us how they

distinguish those from traditional opinion leaders or to examine how public participation

transforms within the opinion leader community (Zeng & Huang, 2012). The current research

advances the two paths by analyzing a wide range of opinion leaders, including both traditional

intellectuals and the new opinion leaders emerging online, and by acknowledging and exploring the differences among them.

Besides opinion leaders including celebrities and organizations, Weibo's verification mechanism affects a larger portion of its organic users as it opens the verification applications to the general public (Chen & She, 2012). The basic requirements for verification include a valid residential identification, a matching profile picture, a user name as the true name, and a certain number of followers. Weibo then reviews the information and approves the application. By the end of 2011, before the study period, the total number of verified opinion leaders on Weibo was 300,000 (Chen & She, 2012). Against this background, the community of opinion leaders on Weibo includes a wide range of users, such as entertainment celebrities, businessmen, media professionals, and self-promoted verified users, providing a way for users to identify trusted sources; and organic users' opinions can also be promoted to visibility for influentials to pay attention and then be reposted to a larger audience. Therefore, the categories and boundaries of all users defined by Weibo for its commercial purposes serves as the criterion to classify and compare the conversations in the current research. Prior study finds that influential individuals and alternative commercial media outlets outperformed official media in dominating the framing of Obama's DNC political discourse on Weibo (Jiang et al., 2015). To improve our understanding of each different user group's opinions on the islands dispute and whether they differentiated in the nationalistic discourses, I ask the following questions:

RQ3: How did media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users adopt and renegotiate the frames that emerged in the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Weibo?

With the social media boom on the global stage, Weibo has also attracted scholars to debate on the nature of the platform in the non-western context. From a sociological perspective,

many recent studies on Weibo either focus only on its censorship mechanism (See Benney, 2013; King et al, 2013) or on its power in social movement and mass incidents (see Tong & Zuo, 2014; Wen, 2013). Overall, the internet in China has been regarded as a contentious space in which various means of information control by the state and tactical resistance strategies from the society coexist. Such tension has recently been acknowledged and explored by scholars on Weibo in China (see Han, 2016; Sullivan, 2014; Yuan et al., 2013). From the commercial aspect, Weibo itself is a privately-owned product and a market-oriented online media company – Sina Corporation. The unit of Weibo alone was valued at about $5.1 billion in 2014, serving as one major profit source for the corporation (Chen & Gill, 2014). While struggling to maintain the balance between state censorship and resistance from society, Weibo also has to delicately operate to maximize its profit among other competitors in the field. I argue that as a media channel in China, Weibo is in the same position as many other media platforms since the marketization of media in the early 1990s: constrained by the interactions and mutual influence of state power, the market, and society and striving to neutralize those power dynamics. I also argue that Weibo, as a state-approved medium, has evolved as a unique social-techno space that can buffer, adjust, and sometimes even drive the direction of interplay among those power dynamics in Chinese society. As discussions on nationalistic topics such as the Diaoyu Islands in such unique space may provoke new perspectives for understanding Chinese cyber nationalism, the following question tackles the problem of the role of Weibo during the dispute:

RQ4: What roles did Sina Weibo play in the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute?

Given the magnitude of the islands dispute on both domestic and international levels to represent the core of Chinese nationalism, the dissertation will reveal the different dimensions of Chinese cyber nationalism in contemporary society. First, it aims to identify the prominent users

and core frames of the overall discussion on the islands dispute and the key arguments constructing nationalism on social media. Second, it highlights the shared concepts and elements, if any, among the different social groups, as well as contrasting the major differences and explaining the differences in terms of their degree of emphasis on the concepts within each group. Third, while rendering a cognitively-based mapping of nationalism on Weibo, it aims to determine whether and how the different political, social, and cultural values embedded in social networks online are reflected in the frames; and finally discuss the role of social media plays in cyber nationalism in contemporary China.

In particular, the current research addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Who produced the top posts during the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo and what are the characteristics of these users?

RQ2: What are the most prominent frames of Chinese cyber nationalism that emerged during the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo?

RQ2a: What are the main elements of those frames?

RQ3: How did media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users adopt and renegotiate the frames that emerged in the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Weibo?

RQ4: What roles did Sina Weibo play in the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute?

3. METHODS

To answer and address the aforementioned research questions, the analytical framework of this dissertation is guided by frame theory to identify and compare nationalism frames that emerge from social data. It applies exploratory mixed research methods, combining big data and traditional textual analysis, to investigate the emergent frames on the Diaoyu Islands dispute. It further seeks to scrutinize how various social groups adapt those frames in the dissection of this dispute on Chinese social media. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the Diaoyu Islands dispute and the justification for selecting the 2012 dispute as the case to study. Then I explain the data collection and sampling procedures for the project. Finally, I present my research questions and the methods employed for analysis.

3.1 <u>Case Selection</u>

The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands have brought both China and Japan into resentful dispute for more than a century. Currently, several governments are involved in the islands dispute with regard to ownership of the islands. Located in the East China Sea, the group of eight small unpopulated islands and rocks are called the Diaoyu Islands in China, the Senkaku Islands in Japan, and the Diaoyutai in Taiwan. The dispute has become one of the most explosive national security conflicts and a source of contention among China, Japan, and Taiwan. In this section, I provide an overview of the islands, the competing claims of ownership, and public responses to the Diaoyu Islands dispute in 2012.

3.1.1 <u>The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands</u>

The Diaoyu Islands in Chinese, or the Senkaku Islands in Japanese, are a group of small

islands or rocks, with a total of 6.3 km^2 area (Pan, 2007). The islands are located about 200

nautical miles east of China, 120 nautical miles northeast of Taiwan, and 200 miles southwest of

the Okinawa islands of Japan (Hollihan, 2014; Shaw, 1999). Consisting of eight tiny insular

formations, there are five islets and three barren rocks; none of them have been inhabited or had

any reported human economic activities (Pan, 2007). It has been rumored that the seabed

surrounding the islands carries enormous reserves of gas and petroleum of important value to

China and Japan, for both countries import a large portion of their energy resources (Hollihan,

2014). As long-term rivals in the region, China and Japan are both eager to control the natural

resources rather than allow them to be used by the opponent (Hollihan, 2014).

The islands are situated at the side of China's continental shelf, before the sea floor dives

into the Okinawa Trough, which is one of the deepest parts of the Pacific Ocean, approximately

7,500 feet (The Economist, 2012). The natural and geographical features of the islands have been

interpreted differently by both China and Japan. China's explanation of the geographic feature is

that "...the Okinawa Trough proves that the continental shelves of China and Japan are not

connected, that the Trough serves as the boundary between them, and that the Trough should not

be ignored ...." (Ji, 1995, p.10). Japan, however, claims that the trough is a mere incidental

depression (The Economist, 2012). Because they lie in the ocean, the territorial boundaries

between China and Japan are unclear.

The different interpretations of the geography only reinforce that the ownership of these islands is not straightforward. Also, the location of the islands makes them special to both China and Japan's national security and defense. To better contextualize the 2012 dispute, the next section will explore and summarize the history of the controversy and evidences provided by each of the governments in the dispute to justify their claims to ownership.

3.1.2 Competing Claims of Ownership

Japan's official position toward ownership of the islands has been found in official statements by the Okinawa government in the 1970s and a statement by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Hollihan, 2014). Based on those statements, Japan asserts that the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands were *terra nullis*, uninhabited land without owner, at the time they were claimed as part of Japanese territory in 1895. Fundamentally, the Japanese claim is based on the concept of "discovery occupation" (Shaw, 1999), the acquisition of territory through occupation if it was indeed *terra nullis*.

However, China and Taiwan have contested Japan's claim that the islands were *terra nullis*. They argue that the islands "were first discovered, named (as Diaoyu), and used by the Chinese as early as the fourteenth century" (Shaw, 1999, p.38) and thus the islands shall not be deemed *terra nullis*. Sufficient historical documents and maps show that during the five hundred years prior to 1895 those islands belonged to China and they were also combined into China's

coastal defense system in 1562 (Shaw, 1999, p.44). Japan disagrees with China's position,

asserting that the fact that the islands were mentioned in Chinese documents can't prove the

islands have been claimed. The Japanese statement asserted that Japan inspected the islands

during 1901 and 1902, and China recognized the islands as Japanese territory (Shaw, 1999, p.

35).

China and Taiwan disagree with the claim because Japan began controlling the islands

after they were taken as part of a Japanese imperial conquest based on an illegitimate treaty

forced on a weak China. As a matter of fact, the claims for the islands' control held by China and

Taiwan are also different. The 1943 Cairo Declaration states that "Japan shall be stripped of…all

territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese…shall be restored to the ROC (Taiwan)" (Shaw,

1999, p. 39). Another treaty signed between Taiwan and Japan states that "Japan has renounced

all right, title and claim to Taiwan…all treaties, conventions and agreements concluded before

December 9, 1941, between China and Japan have become null and void as a consequence of the

war" (Shaw, 1999, p. 40). Since the Chinese government did not sign either of the treaties, China

has never recognized their legitimacy and does not claim ownership based on them. Instead,

China claims that Taiwan is an indivisible part of China, while the political status of Taiwan has

been a contentious issue. China then bases its claim to the islands on the Potsdam Proclamation,

accepted by Japan, that Japan has no sovereignty over Taiwan (Hollihan, 2014).

The position of the United States has largely complicated the situation in determining the

ownership of the islands. After Japan's defeat in 1945, the U.S. governed the islands and then

returned the islands to Japan via the United States Okinawa Reversion Treaty between Japan and

the U.S. in 1971. The governments of both China and Taiwan rejected the treaty, and the U.S.

declares that "the U.S. action in transferring its rights of administration to Japan does not

constitute a transfer of underlying sovereignty nor can it affect the underlying claims of the

disputants" (Shaw, 1999, p.124). The U.S. continues to reaffirm its ambiguous posture, with the

purpose to avoid offending either Japan or China; however, as discussed earlier, Japan controls

the islands and the U.S. is pledged to defend Japan while under attack (Kato, 2013).

3.1.3   The 2012 Diaoyu Islands Dispute

Neither China, Japan, nor Taiwan paid any close attention to the islands before the 1969

discovery on the possibility of oil reserve in the East China Sea. Afterwards, the dispute was

quickly connected to nationalism and a series of diplomatic and popular protests have ensued

since the 1970s. Past dispute over the islands usually occurred when right-wing Japanese groups

claimed ownership by actions, such as building lighthouses to support Japan's sovereignty

claims (Downs & Saunders, 2012). To respond to these Japanese claims, Chinese in Hong Kong,

Taiwan, and overseas initiated a social movement called Baodiao Movement (*保钓运动*, literally

"Defend the Diaoyu Islands movement"), claiming Chinese sovereignty over the islands.

Activities during the early movement cycle include sailing to, landing on, and planting national

flags on the islands, street demonstrations, and petitions to governments to reduce economic cooperation with Japan. In mainland China, however, the government did not openly support the movement. Conversely, seeking to maintain Sino-Japanese relations, the government banned student demonstrations and sought to quash expressions of anti-Japanese sentiment (Downs & Saunders, 2012).

Entering the 2000s, official and non-government reactions to the islands dispute started to shift from those in the previous period. Activists from Hong Kong and Taiwan still attempted to travel to and land on those disputed islands to claim China's sovereignty over them. In mainland China, internet forums became an important venue to organize and mobilize activists to defend the islands. Seven activists from mainland China successfully landed on the islands in 2004, for the first time that Chinese people had landed on the Diaoyu Islands since the founding of the PRC in 1949 (Zhou & Pan, 2004). Large protests and demonstrations broke out after the Japan Coast Guard and fishing boats from Taiwan and China confronted each other in the nearby area in 2010 (ifeng, 2010). With its increased national power and international influence, the Chinese government became more involved and positive in those movements, reflected in its diplomatic and economic exchange with Japan. For instance, after the boat collision in 2010, China stopped exporting rare earth, used in products like hybrid cars and guided missiles, to Japan (The New York Times, 2010).

In 2012, the Diaoyu Islands dispute intensified and escalated into the largest scale of anti-Japanese demonstrations since 1972, the year in which the China-Japan relations normalized. There were two waves of protests; the second wave around the anniversary of the "September 18 Incident" became the largest protests and most popular topic on social media in China (See Sina, 2012; Wallace & Weiss, 2015).

There were several incidents leading up to the protests around September 18, mainly in reaction to the islands purchase by the Japanese government. In April 2012, Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara, also a right-wing populist, announced his idea of crowdsourcing money to buy the islands from their private owner (The Guardian, 2012). After the appeal for islands purchase circulated on nationalist websites in Japan, donations from the public were immediately raised. In China, the government protested formally and media outlets started discussing the islands purchase in detail. The intensive media coverage soon sparked nationalistic sentiments in China. Later in July, the Japan government and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda announced to nationalize the disputed islands. The Chinese government protested angrily; and China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin expressed that China's holy territory was not for sale to anyone (BBC, 2012). Several provocative symbolic actions, such as swimming ashore to the islands to wave Chinese and Taiwan flags, have taken place since then (Hollihan, 2014). Claiming to avoid escalation of those provocative acts, Japanese government decided to buy the islands. Instead, the purchase escalated tensions after ownership was transferred to the Japanese government. Anti-Japanese protests broke out in 208 out of 287 prefectural cities in China (Wallace & Weiss,

2015). Demonstrations took place in 128 cities across China on September 18 alone (Wallace & Weiss, 2015). On many occasions, September 18 has been referred as "Chinese National Humiliation Day," on which day the Mukden Incident took place in 1931, the starting point of Japan's full-scale invasion of China.

In the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute, intense and diversified sentiments have pervaded Chinese cyberspace. The proliferation of social media has allowed various social groups to join the public discussion together with the government, mass media, and other people directly in real time. The 2012 Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute, according to a data report released by Sina's Data Center, was the most popular topic on Weibo, defeating the global appeal of the popular video Gangnam Style in September 2012 (Sina, 2012).

Taken together, these aspects—the history, size, and scope of the islands dispute in 2012 on Weibo—make it an excellent case study due to the magnitude with which it manifests and represents Chinese cyber nationalism. Also, taking advantage of Weibo's user verification mechanism, this dissertation goes one step further to identify the most prominent users and investigate and compare how the islands dispute was framed collectively by various social players, including media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users. In the next section, I provide a description of data collection, the users, and the sampling procedures for the study.

3.2   **Data Collection**

The dissertation focuses on the discussion of the Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo

during August to October in 2012. Specifically, guided by frame theory and networked framing,

it examines how the media outlets, public opinion leaders, and organic users on Weibo

constructed the Diaoyu Islands dispute and how those social groups mutually shaped each

other's discourse on Weibo. This section explains the selection of data, sampling procedure, and

methods used for each research question.

3.2.1 **The Weibo Posts**

To conduct the analysis, the dataset for the dissertation includes postings containing the

keyword "钓鱼岛" in Chinese (The Diaoyu Islands; *diaoyudao*) during August 1 to October 31,

2012 on Sina Weibo. As mentioned earlier, the anti-Japanese protests peaked around September

18, 2012, the anniversary of the "September 18 Incident." Also, the topic was the most popular

and critical event on Weibo in September 2012. I chose to analyze Weibo posts from August to

October 2012 to acquire an integrated picture of the heated discussion leading up to, during, and

after the largest scale of demonstrations.

Launched in August 2009, Weibo has quickly become the most popular social media

platform and one of the most popular forms of political internet usage (see Carins & Carlson,

2016; Meng, 2011; Yuan et al., 2013) in China. The estimate of monthly active Weibo users was

167 million by September 2014 (Sina, 2014). Like Twitter, its counterpart in the west, Weibo

allows users to follow other users based on their own interests and the followees' updates will

show in the timeline. A regular Weibo post is limited to within 140 characters. Given that a

Chinese character can carry more meaning than a Roman alphabet character in English, Weibo

enables a post containing about five times more information than a tweet (Dugan, 2011). Also,

Weibo allows "Long Weibo," which converts a post exceeding the 140-character limit to a

picture. Normally, a user can post up to nine pictures in a single Weibo post.

Figure 1. Weibo interface

During the study period, there were about 108.4 million posts containing the keyword on

Weibo found by global search on the website. See Figure 2 for the distribution of all the posts

searched on the website. In total, 4.62 million posts have been retrieved from Weibo's search

function and Application Program Interface (hereafter API).

Figure 2. Distribution of all relevant posts
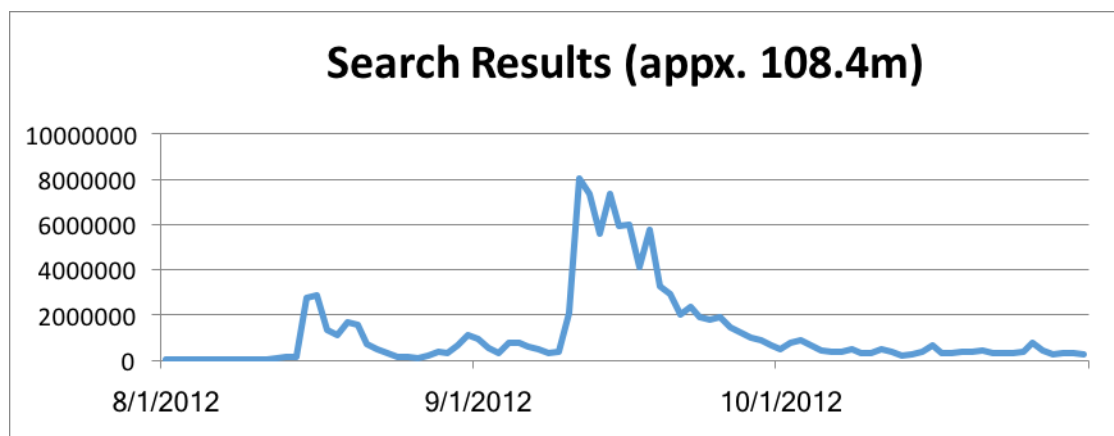
To construct the final analytical dataset, using the ratio of the actual number of postings

from Weibo search results to the total postings occurred in the time frame, a subset of 100,000

Weibo posts has been randomly selected from the 4.62 million tweets. Specifically, on August 1,

2012, there were 37,116 tweets containing the keyword from Weibo search and it takes

0.03424% of the 108.4 million tweets. As a result, for that particular day, 34 postings are

randomly selected for analysis. The same procedure was performed to all the remaining days in

the complete dataset to generate a daily Weibo count for analysis. The following figure (see

Figure 3) illustrates the proportionated data selected for the study, matching the flow of all actual

Weibo posts on each day during the study period.

Figure 3. Final dataset for analysis
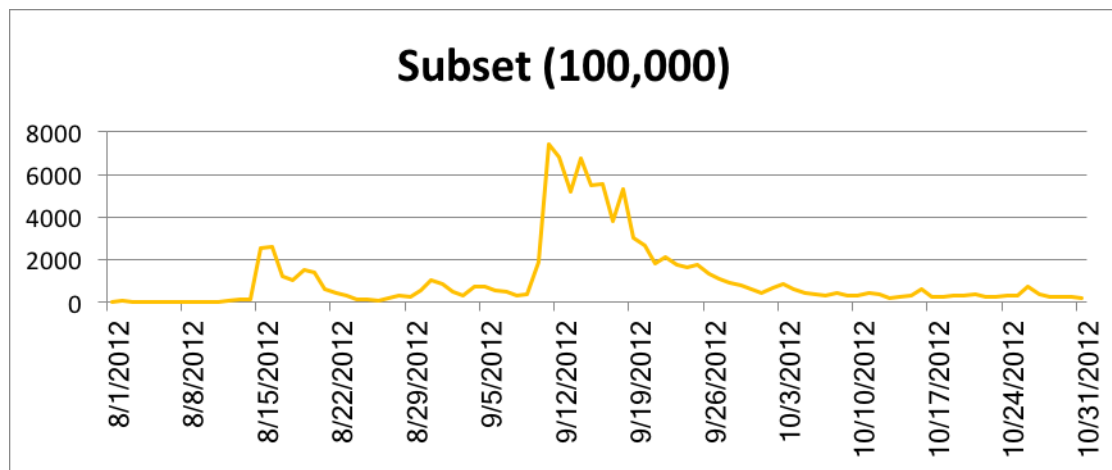
The final analytical dataset includes all original posts, comments, and reposts. Figure 4

illustrates the distribution of the overall traffic of the final dataset during the study period. All the

posts for the dissertation are stored in a Microsoft Excel file.

Figure 4. Distribution of all Weibo activities during Aug 1 to Oct 31, 2012
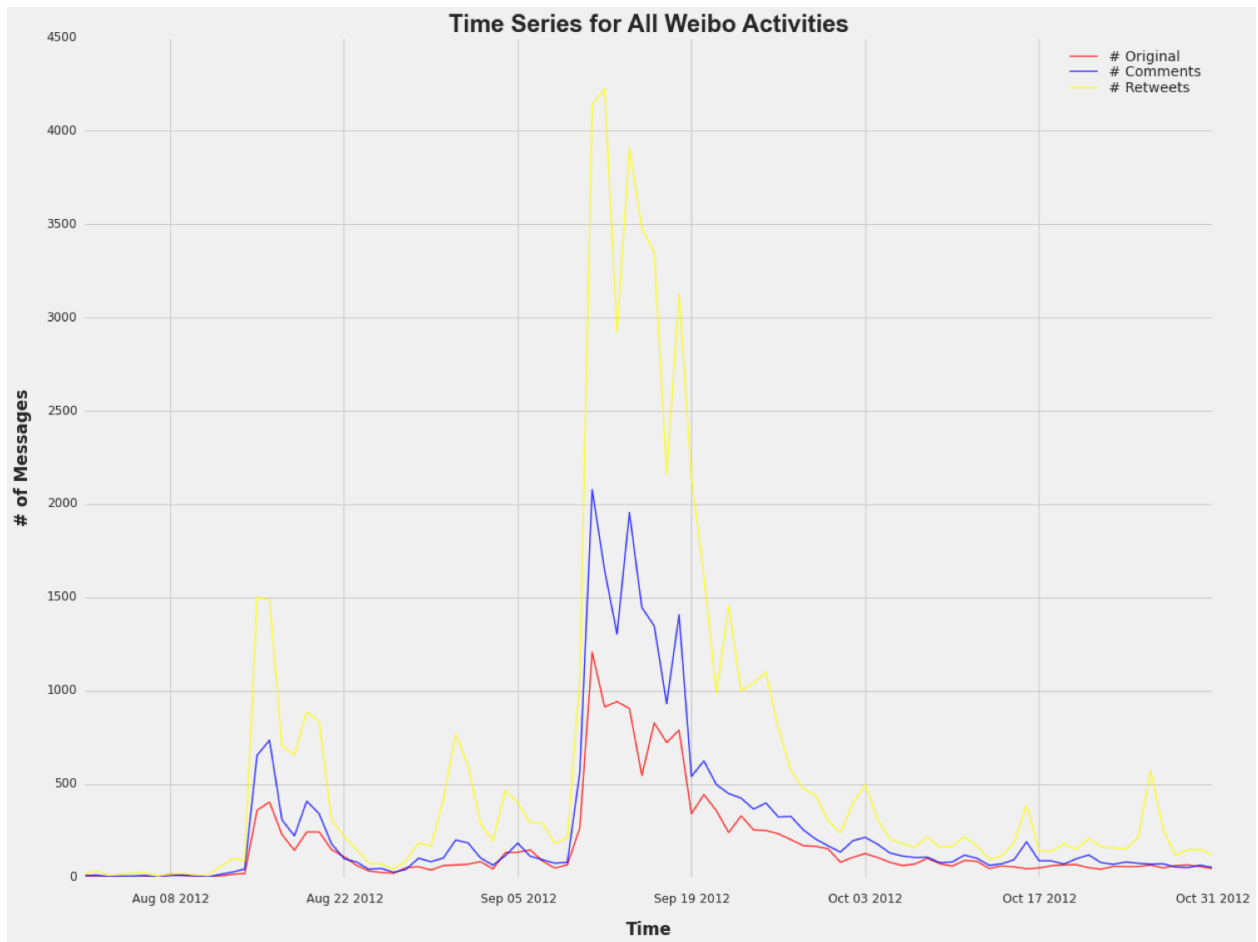
3.2.2 The Weibo Users

As mentioned, Weibo employs its own hierarchical mechanism to identify and rank all registered users (Weibo, 2015). The search API used for this dissertation is able to retrieve and provide the user type of each individual Weibo account in the dataset, indicating if one is a media outlet, an opinion leader, and an organic user at the time of data collection. In general,

there are verified and non-verified users identified by Weibo. On the interface, a "V" icon by the

user name indicates a verified user. Within this category, Weibo further differentiates the

verified users by the affiliations and characteristics of the accounts. For a verified organizational

user account, Weibo assigns a blue "V" next to the user name. For a verified individual user,

Weibo assigns a yellow "V" to the user name. The category of organic users represents non-

verified users. Figure 5 exemplifies the interface of the Weibo website. Indicated by the icons

assigned beside the user names, the first one represents a verified individual user, the opinion

leader in this study. The second account belongs to the organic user category, as no "V" is

assigned to the user name. The third account, suggested by the blue "V" next to the user name, is

a verified organization.

Figure 5. Weibo interface indicates different categories of users
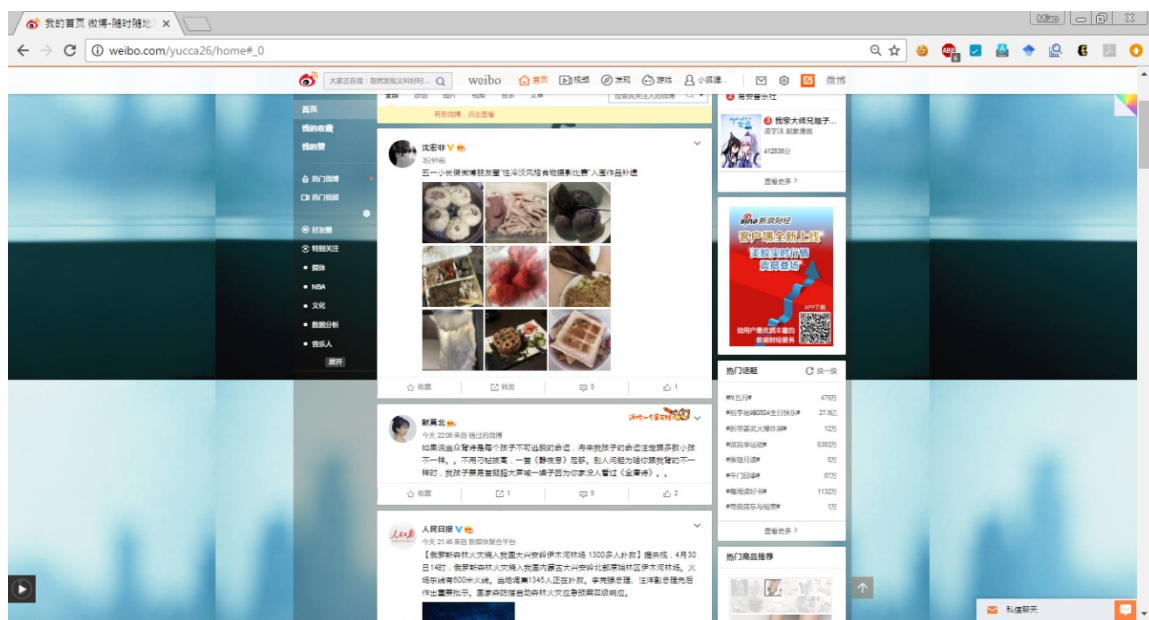
As the interface manipulates and promotes identification, Weibo uses those verified accounts to increase readership and traffic. In total, Weibo classifies users into 13 categories, such as media outlets, enterprise, schools, websites, applications, Weibo talents, and organic users. It classifies certain verified users, especially celebrities, into its "Hall of Fame" from various realms such as entertainment, sports, media, medical, and military personnel, the same as its previous system for celebrity bloggers. Such hierarchical classification of user accounts reinforces the influence of their offline status and drives traffic and readership to Weibo as a result. As Weibo's verification and ranking systems are influential and powerful in its daily business, the current research follows Weibo's user classifications to select user accounts and divide them into three groups. Figure 5 illustrates the user classification: media outlets are all the verified media accounts, indicated by a blue "V" on the interface and API. Opinion leaders are the verified and non-affiliated individual user accounts. Organic users are those accounts that are not organizational and verified user accounts in the dataset. After applying filters to the Excel file, the final analytical dataset includes 375 posts from media outlets, 6,130 from opinion leaders, and 65,375 from organic users. The following flowchart illustrates data preparation and data selection (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Data preparation and selection
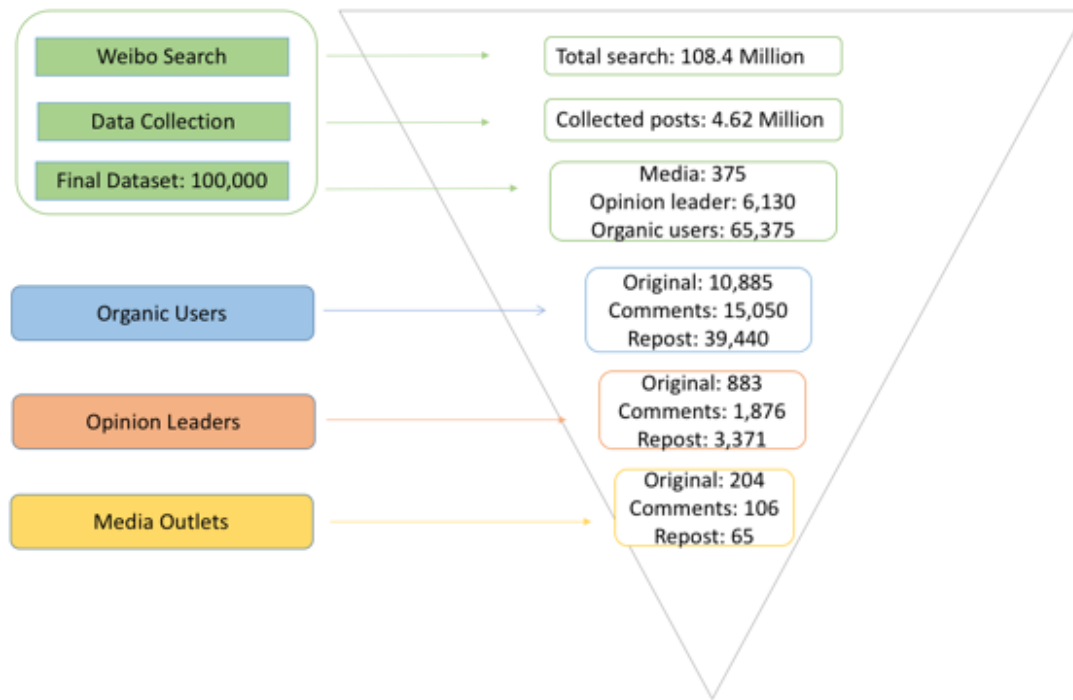
After identifying the data, an open-source tool for Chinese text segmentation Jieba

(GitHub, 2015) was applied for word tokenization because of the characteristics of the Chinese

language. In addition, stop words, including most nonsensical words in Chinese and single

characters from the selected posts, such as 啊，哦，的 (ah, oh, or 's) were removed. In this way,

the rest of the processed text will be further tagged in Jieba, creating labels for all nouns, verbs,

and adjectives from the final analytical dataset.

3.3 <u>Research Questions</u>

After explaining the case selection and data collection, this current section focuses on the

research questions and methods used to address them. Guided by networked framing, it starts

with RQ1 identifying the prominent users who produced the most popular and engaged posts during the dispute. One major goal of the dissertation is to explore and identify Chinese cyber nationalism frames adopted and negotiated by various social groups during the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Weibo. With little existing research on the frames of Chinese cyber nationalism, exploratory mixed research methods have been employed to address RQ2 and RQ3. Informed by the findings of the first three research questions, RQ4 concerning the roles of Weibo played in the discussion of the dispute thus further explores the implication of platformization of Chinese society.

RQ1: Who produced the top posts during the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo and what are the characteristics of these users?

The first research question asks the most prominent users of the discussion on Weibo. To address the question, the 50 top-ranked posts were chosen from the dataset, representing those with the highest combined number of reposts and comments. The authors of those posts are considered as "elite framers" who produced the most prominent frames (Jiang et al., 2015). The user categorization was based on Weibo's own verification and ranking system. I coded the affiliations of the media outlets and opinion leaders for the metadata, including real names, affiliation, verification type, and numbers of followers and followees. The users' verified offline identity provided by the API was also analyzed and sorted.

RQ2: What are the most prominent frames of Chinese cyber nationalism that emerged during the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Weibo?

RQ2a: What are the main elements of those frames?

As mentioned earlier, news content can be approached as "interpretive packages" wherein an issue is depicted in terms of a "central organising idea," which Gamson and Modigliani consider as a frame (1989). Researchers have conducted researches to identify frames by a wide range of techniques in many fields. Content analysis has been the most dominant technique (Burscher et al., 2014, also see Chong & Druckman, 2007; Hajer, 1995; Scheufele, 1999; van Eeten, 2007), and various methods have been applied to conduct content analysis (Matthes, 2009).

To examine the framing of texts, scholars distinguish between framing identification and framing coding. Framing identification focuses on the operations of locating and defining frames adopted in the texts, while framing coding is the annotation of frames previously defined as content-analytical variables (Burscher et al., 2014). Currently, most prominent frame operationalizations are manual coding with indicator questions and dictionary-based computer-assisted coding (Matthes, 2009). Manual coding using questions as indicators is reliable but not cost-effective. The availability of the significantly increased digital media data makes manual coding less desirable than computer-assisted coding. Dictionary-based computer-assisted coding uses earlier defined character strings and rules for the combination to code text into categories

(Burscher et al., 2014; Krippendorff, 2004). The disadvantages of computer-assisted coding include its time-consuming model-building process and compromised semantic validity. This dissertation utilizes an improved technique for analysis as an alternative framing coding approach to advance the advantages of both coding techniques and to overcome their shortcomings.

Guided by frame theory and networked framing, RQ2 aims to capture the overall features of the discussion on the islands dispute among all the users in the dataset. To identify frames, researchers have employed a wide range of analytical techniques in many fields, such as content analysis, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis (see Chong & Druckman, 2007; Hajer, 1995; Scheufele, 1999; van Eeten, 2007). However, scholars have not yet come to agreement on a unified technique to identify frames. Some argue that frames can be detected deductively or inductively (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), in other words, quantitatively or qualitatively (Shim et al., 2015). Each perspective has been criticized for its downside, despite remarkable contributions. In regard to the deductive approach, scholars declare that the frame is objectively identifiable using certain keywords or terms as indicators in the text. Researchers discover frames that have been operationalized before the analysis (de Vreese, 2005). Then the valence of those indicators (i.e., pro/anti) is measured; and arguments are categorized into those predefined frames. Some scholars argue that multiple levels of structures, such as syntactical, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures, should be considered for analysis (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Others find themes, metaphors, exemplars, and visualizations as framing devices (Gamson &

Mogdiliani, 1989; Nelson et al., 1997). The over-dependency on some particular terms and

keywords of the quantitative perspective may neglect the contexts and meaning of the arguments

in the text (Shim et al., 2015). On the other end, the inductive/qualitative approach identifies

frames implicitly, using subjective justification on the text (e.g., Hajer, 1995; Lewicki et al.,

2003; Shim et al., 2015). Without an a priori set of frames designed, frames would emerge

during the analysis of data. Research taking this approach has been criticized for the small

sample used and its lack of an objective and systematic way to operationalize frames and

replicate the studies (Hertog & McLeod, 2001; de Vreese, 2005; Shim et al., 2015).

Neither approach has supplied suitable applications to identify frames in the discussion of

Chinese nationalism. A few recent studies have sought the representations of Chinese cyber

nationalism on social media in China, and some researchers applied computational and big-data

approaches to analyze topics emerging from discussions on Weibo (see Cairns & Carlson, 2016;

Feng & Yuan, 2014; Jiang, 2012). One study (Feng & Yuan, 2014) has noticed this pattern of

sentiment and identified several other topics of discussion on the islands dispute, finding that a

wide range of public imaginations and various public opinions emerged on Weibo.

Due to the researchers' limited access to data on Chinese social media, the previous

research on nationalism on Weibo and other social media platforms is sparse. Acknowledged by

the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative approaches to framing analysis,

the dissertation utilizes a "manual-machine-manual" analytical framework to analyze the text,

which overcomes the drawbacks of both methods. To identify and summarize the emerging

frames of all Weibo posts, the method applied to address RQ2 is based on a Labeled LDA

(Latent Dirichlet Allocation) topic model. A Labeled LDA topic model is a technique a computer

learns to predict and determine content-analytical patterns of texts on a large scale from a set of

human-labelled documents. Such technique often has been carried out to analyze both

conventional texts, such as scientific abstracts and newspapers, and social media data (see Chang

et al., 2009; Griffiths & Steyvers, 2004; McCallum et al., 2007; Ramage et al., 2010). For

instance, Griffiths and Steyvers (2004) conduct research based on this technique to explore

scientific topics. Weng and colleagues (2010) use this model to investigate Twitter users'

concerns. Another study utilizes it to classify tweets according to their style, status, and social

characteristics on Twitter (Ramage et al., 2010). In addition, similar topic models have been

applied to Chinese texts extracted from social networking applications like Twitter (Gao et al.,

2012; Xu et al., 2011) and Sina Weibo (Feng & Yuan, 2014).

In communication research, LDA has been used to identify frames on various issues

(Alashri et al., 2016; Burscher et al., 2014; Jacobi et al., 2016). The collection of topics inferred

by the model resembles the categorization of frames. Jacobi and his colleagues (2016) suggest

that in the case where framing devices are equivalent to latent patterns of language use, LDA

captures these classifications in specific topics, and LDA results can also imply the frames used

in a corpus of texts. However, repeating a study by Gamson and Modigliani on nuclear issues

(1989) in part, the topics identified in their study do not conceive a "frame," as coherent

interpretative packages in what Gamson and Modigliani (1989) or Entman (1993) would use. Also, their study fails to represent explicit sentiment or valence, as no clear pro- or anti- topics were detected. To yield sufficiently valid results, the authors (Jacobi et al., 2016) call for combining machine learning and LDA to conduct frame analysis. While evaluating the outcomes of topic modeling for frame analysis, one study suggests that LDA is a viable method to identify frames if the documents are coded on a more detailed level of analysis than the article level, and with multiple topics that are not limited to a single-issue domain (van Atteveldt et al., 2014). Burscher et al. (2014) employ a SML approach, however, they limit to only four generic frames. They predict better performance to code for issue-specific frames, which would be more salient than a generic frame. In addition, the population of texts to analyze tends to be more uniform with issue-specific frames, which can potentially reduce the complexity of the classification problem (Burscher et al., 2014). Informed by these studies, the analytical design of the dissertation follows their recommendations by coding on the detailed level, the meaning of the post, for issue-specific frames.

A Labeled LDA topic model categorizes texts documents according to the learned latent meanings from human-labeled documents more than the literal meanings of the corpus (Ramage et al., 2010). In doing so, labeled LDA applys a SML technique that begins with identifying the statistical relations between the topics of a training set and the corresponding labels used to describe those topics. A precondition for the application of the model is a set of documents that are previously manually labeled for the content (Burscher et al., 2014), and such a set is called a

training set. Then the classifier is used to analyze the rest of the corpus based on a statistical

relationship calculated from the training set. The following paragraphs illustrate how those

procedures have been done for this study.

To address RQ2, two steps were involved to build the topic model for the analysis. First,

using stratified sampling strategy, 2,000 posts were randomly selected from the final analytical

dataset as the training set. A latent content analysis on the 2,000 posts was performed. Following

the prior study (Feng & Yuan, 2014), a total of 11 topic labels were modified from the content

analysis. The labels are indicators of the main meanings embedded in each post. In this study,

each content label represents the presence of a frame, indicated by co-occurrence of certain

words/concepts, and the frames are not mutually exclusive. One post can be assigned to more

than one topic, tagged with multiple labels. In doing so, after each document in the training set

was carefully labeled, the underlying meanings of each post can be inserted into the algorithms.

Second, using the classifier from the training set, a predictive model, which is a set of

probability rules based on the statistical relationship between the labels and the Weibo posts, was

generated. Then the Labeled LDA model was trained to allocate the rest of the posts to the 11

sets of labels from the last step to discover the main elements of frames for the study. This step

assisted to improve the effectiveness of the large-scale framing analysis.

For Step 1, the training set was created based on a previous project studying the same

subject matter. For the topics of Chinese cyber nationalism on social media, the prior study

(Feng & Yuan, 2014) captures the different stages of Chinese cyber nationalism, as mentioned in

the literature review section, and also reflect new dimensions of Chinese cyber nationalism that

are not noticed elsewhere. Consequently, 11 issue-specific topics were identified and modified

from their research and further coded in the training set to build the classifier, including 1)

adversarial sentiments and military actions towards Japan, 2) the narratives of Japan, 3) the roles

of the United States, 4) grassroots actions, 5) the roles of Hong Kong, 6) China's sovereignty and

territory, 7) the historical memories, 8) the official responses, 9) the roles of Taiwan, 10)

contemporary grievances, and 11) boycott and protest (Feng & Yuan, 2014). Topic 1 approaches

the dispute with strong adversarial sentiments and the appeal to military actions toward Japan.

Topic 2 suggests that the post is mainly focused on the narration of Japan's actions and positions

in the events and the consequences of such actions and positions in other affairs in East Asia.

Topic 3 relates to the roles of the United States in the events. Topic 4 focuses on the actions and

responses from grassroots activism. Topic 5 concerns the discussion on Hong Kong in the

dispute, mainly on the news coverage of the activists. Topic 6 demonstrates a strong will

expressed to defend China's sovereignty. Topic 7 relates to the historical memories rekindled by

the 2012 dispute. Topic 8 suggests a focus on the official responses and diplomatic demeanor of

the Chinese government. Similar to Topic 5, focusing on one major factor in the unfolding of the

news, Topic 9 is mainly on Taiwan's position and actions toward the dispute. Topic 10 covers

the grievances of users around social injustice and corruption in real life. Topic 11 pays

particular attention to the protests and boycott of Japan- and U.S.-made products in China. Each

post was analyzed for whether it focused on any of the aforementioned topics, identified by the presence of words and the latent meaning in the post. As mentioned earlier, it is possible for any post to contain one or more of these topics. In total, 2,000 posts in the training set were coded for the presence of topics, and the set of manually coded posts was applied to train the classifier for the next step.

Then, scikit-learn, a labeled LDA topic model package in Python, was used to conduct the analysis for the entire analytical dataset. The output also provides detailed information about those topics, such as word contribution to each topic and evaluation of those words/concepts, which answers RQ2a regarding the major elements of the frames. While the over-dependency on particular terms and keywords of the quantitative analysis was criticized for neglecting the contexts and meaning of the arguments (Shim et al., 2015), an in-depth qualitative analysis was carried out to further identify major frames that emerged from the evaluation of the topics. To address RQ2, such qualitative textual analysis was performed on all keywords from all topics and the top posts from each topic.

As mentioned in the previous sections, there is a gap in current scholarship in Chinese cyber nationalism, especially how Chinese cyber nationalism has been manifested and (re)interpreted by various social players. To approach addressing this gap, empirical evidence is presented and comparisons across major social groups on Weibo are made to answer the following research question:

RQ3: How did media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users adopt and renegotiate the frames that emerged in the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Weibo?

Another goal of the dissertation is to compare Chinese cyber nationalism by various social players on social media. While answering RQ2 helps us to understand the overall patterns of the islands dispute discussion on Weibo, RQ3 investigates how these frames were used by media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users. Two parts are examined to answer RQ3: a. What opinions do media outlets, opinion leaders, and other organic users express in the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Weibo? and b. How are the opinions of each user group similar and different in the 2012 dispute? Results from last step provide descriptive information on what frames each user group adopted. A discourse analysis was conducted to further address how these key frames were adopted within each user group.

Discourse analysis was widely used to examine the discourse of nationalism and national identity, especially on issues with both China and Japan involved (see Funaiole, 2015; Hagström & Hanssen 2016; Suzuki, 2015; Wu, 2007). Simply put, this research question seeks to understand how a Chinese cyber nationalism frame is spoken of in the Weibo posts by various social groups. Examining the posts embedded with each frame by each individual group, I look at what discourse of a cyber-nationalism frame emerge and adopted by social groups with their own purposes and interests.

Discourses can be defined as "ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provde ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society" (Hall, 1997, p. 4). Discourse can also be understood as "all spoken and written forms of language use as social practice" (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p.19). Fairclough (1995) points out that discourse analysis is to show "systematic links between texts, discourse practices and socio-cultural practices" (p.17). For him, the analysis "can give access to the detailed mechanism through which social contradictions evolve and are lived out, and the sometimes subtle shifts they undergo" (Fairclough, 1995, p.15). Fairclough views discourse as manifestations of the structures and relationships of the material world. In his framework, different discourses encompass different aspects of reality and they can be adopted for different reasons. Thus, the current research considers discourses as sites of struggle where different social groups understand the world around them and apply their particular understanding to it. He further suggests that discourse as "the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part. This process includes in addition to the text the process of production of which the text is a product and the process of interpretation for which the text is a resource" (Fairclough, 2013, p.20). Drawing on his argument, this justifies the choice of discourse analysis to identify the process of production by examining the ways in which the three different social groups adopted and renegotiated the three nationalism frames.

Previous studies have predominately examined the framing of Chinese nationalism in the traditional media (see Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad, 1998; Billings et al., 2011; Luther & Zhou, 2005). This dissertation illustrates the major frames that emerged from social media and how media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users in a social networking platform have framed nationalism through the discussion of the islands dispute. All posts from the media outlets and the top 1000 most engaged posts generated by opinion leaders and organic users are included for the discourse analysis. Besides content, the dissertation also discusses the role of social media plays in the dispute, and broader, in cyber nationalism in the contemporary China.

RQ4: What roles did Sina Weibo play in the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute?

Through labeled LDA, major topics of the islands dispute discussions on Weibo were identified. Then the topics, treated as major elements, were analyzed and aggregated into three frames. Then I further analyzed the frames adopted by each user group and the hierarchies of the concepts that emerged within the group. The last research question concerns the dynamics of Weibo and the platformization of contemporary Chinese society reflected on Weibo. The exploration of this research question synthesizes the current scholarship on Weibo, aiming to determine whether and how different political, social, and cultural values embedded in social networks online are reflected in the ways they construct the national self. It yields insights on how Weibo, as a platform, functions as a continuation of Chinese media reform and marketization; and at the same time serves as a field for multiple social forces to coexist and

compete.

This dissertation employs a mixed research methods approach to better understand what cyber nationalism topics and frames emerged in the discussion of the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo. It also attempts to investigate the role of social media, especially Weibo during its prime time, in the social transformation of contemporary China. The quantitative and qualitative analyses answer questions regarding the prominent users in the discussion, the major frames, and the differences among particular social players in the discussion of this national affair in the networked environment. The answers provide empirical guidance to better understand cyber nationalism in China. The dissertation also investigates ways to conceptualize the social media platform in China. It yields further insights into the research methodology for the better utilization of social media data. The following chapter, Chapter 4, will present the findings of the research questions.

4. FINDINGS

This dissertation concentrates on the dual rise of cyber nationalism and social media in China. Investigating the 2012 Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute on Sina Weibo, it addresses three issues. The first is the prominent users who dominated the most popular posts, the framing of the issue, and the overall frames of cyber nationalism that manifested on Weibo. The second is comparative, concerning the similarities and differences of cyber nationalism among various social groups. The third issue concerns the roles Weibo played in the islands dispute and further explores the platformization of contemporary Chinese society. The research draws on a sample of Weibo posts gathered between August to October 2012 that discussed the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. This section provides the major findings of the research questions.

4.1   Elite Framers

After identifying and studying the 50 most popular Weibo posts by their combined number of comments and reposts, I concluded that the individual user (74%, n=37) and commercial media (20%, n=10) accounts have dominated the framing of the Diaoyu Islands dispute on Weibo (see Table 1).

Table 1. Elite frames from the top 50 Posts

Rank	Screen name	User Name English	User Type	Followers	Comments	Reposts
1	邱震海	Zhenhai Qiu	Verified User	295094	647	1683
2	鞍钢郭明义	Mingyi Guo Ansteel	Verified User	21788425	431	1823
3	头条新闻	Breaking News	Media	39356986	806	926
4	人民网舆情监测室	Public Opinion at People's Daily	Media	96453	329	1257
5	大嘴韩乔生	Qiaosheng Han	Verified User	11467505	553	913
6	克里斯托夫-金	Christopher Jin	Verified User	239454	323	1128
7	孙秀城	Xiucheng Sun	Verified User	23340	388	950
8	郑洪升	Hongsheng Zheng	Verified User	286843	321	1010
9	薛蛮子	Manzi Xue	Verified User	11254477	236	1007
10	新浪军事	Sina Military	Media	4413454	545	599
11	奋壹	Fenyi	Verified User	264264	196	772
12	范炜	Wei Fan	Verified User	1076232	218	635
13	周鸿祎	Hongwei Zhou	Verified User	10336969	560	251
14	头条新闻	Breaking News	Media	39357039	374	429
15	郑洪升	Hongsheng Zheng	Verified User	286843	403	310
16	笑话有木有	Jokes	Organic User	2002959	43	439
17	股票投资人_毛哥	Stock investor Mao	Verified User	126880	302	163
18	全球时尚趣味	Global Fashion Fun	Organic User	2643641	81	368
19	吴法天	Fatian Wu	Verified User	366120	180	264
20	创意很简单	Simple Creativity	Organic User	3322785	31	390
21	自品牌头条	Own Breaking News	Organic User	632	13	397
22	新华社中国网事	Cyberworld China	Media	4513031	217	187
23	高清电影院	HD Theather	Organic User	1122029	72	321
24	中国时尚生活	China Fashin Life	Organic User	1393632	182	209

25	政经观察员范利祥	Lixiang Fan	Verified User	220203	115	260
26	老沉	Lao Chen	Verified User	7012801	162	202
27	不满18周岁禁止入内	Forbidden 18	Organic User	1229046	51	313
28	凤凰卫视	Phoenix Television	Media	7799044	137	204
29	潮流热门	Popular Fashion	Organic User	513411	31	292
30	环球时报	Global Times	Media	3278515	123	198
31	艺术系女流氓	Female Rogue in Art Dept	Organic User	1493164	42	262
32	全球美食点评	Global Food Review	Organic User	523673	29	262
33	成都商报	Chengdu Business Daily	Media	2544184	130	137
34	资深女流氓	Senoir Female Rogue	Organic User	969019	29	229
35	冰翼v	Ice Wing V	Organic User	597	116	120
36	育儿百科讲堂	Baby Wikipedia	Organic User	581751	55	180
37	潘长江	Changjiang Pan	Verified User	1519055	61	171
38	林熊猫	Panda Lin	Verified User	367997	42	182
39	上海潮流情报	Shanghai Fashion	Organic User	311467	25	195
40	福州圈吃喝玩乐	Fuzhou Circle	Verified User	1332871	10	202
41	占豪	Zhanhao	Verified User	417750	49	163
42	电脑报	Popular Computer Weekly	Media	661352	45	164
43	军迷俱乐部	Military Fan Club	Organic User	653088	38	170
44	gfmilier高芳	gfmilier Fang Gao	Verified User	2365	0	206
45	幽默搞笑家	Humor and Fun	Organic User	15154976	44	161
46	环球人物杂志	Global People Mag	Media	1267922	81	111
47	高考直通车	Gaokao Express	Campus	920577	81	110
48	翟明磊在云间	Minglei Zhai on the Cloud	Organic User	8674	44	144
49	新华社中国网事	Cyberworld China	Media	4513030	81	106
50	米尔军情网	Mier Military	Website	138941	31	155

Only three posts from the verified official media were identified in the top 50 posts. Among the three posts, one message ranked 4th was posted by People.com.cn, the online presence of The People's Daily, which is the official newspaper for the CCP and the largest newspaper in China. The message asks citizens to comply with the law and express their love for China with rationality. It was commented and reposted 1,586 times to the 96,453 followers. The other two messages were posted by Cyberworld China of the Xinhua News Agency with 4.5 million followers, ranked 22nd and 49th respectively. The post ranked 22nd expresses that public opinion, fueled by the strong adversarial sentiments from grassroots groups, can become the foundation of Chinese government resistance to Japan because "the Chinese countermeasures are rooted in the most extensive endorsement from all Chinese people, and will be understood and supported by people all over the world!" Another post from Xinhua, ranked 44th, was a news report on the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. That post urges Japan to face up to reality and cooperate with China to reach a mutual understanding and eliminate the existing and further negative impact on Sino-Japan relations.

Besides the three aforementioned posts from official media outlets, more than 70% (n=37) of the top 50 posts were from individual users. According to Weibo's categorization, 20 of those individual users are verified "Big V" users, representing users classified in the opinion leader category for the dissertation. The average number of followers for these Big V users is 3.5 million. The top post was from Zhenhai Qiu, who is a commentator and host for Hong Kong-based Phoenix Television. His post, ranked first in the top 50, received 647 comments and 1,683 reposts during the study period. Qiu complains about the way Japan treated journalists in the confrontation with Hong Kong activists sailing to defend the islands. He posts: "On the boat to defend our Diaoyu Islands, the position of the Phoenix correspondent is neutral, like war

correspondent in the war. It's common sense to distinguish war correspondents and soldiers on the battlefield. Doesn't Japan, a modern democratic country, understand it? If China had handled the Japanese journalist for reporting the Diaoyu Islands dispute as a political matter, how would Japan react? Japanese should learn the modern civilization first! Damn it!" Qiaosheng Han, a famous sports host for CCTV with 11 million followers, posted a message condemning the Japanese government and calling for immediate actions against Japan. Han's message ranked third among the top 50 posts, with 553 comments and 913 reposts. Well-known actor Changjiang Pan was the only celebrity in entertainment found in the top 50 posts; his account is followed by 1.5 million users. He posted to support Hong Kong activists who were traveling to the islands to declare China's sovereignty. Another three user accounts are associated with the media industry, one working in traditional media as a social activist, and the other two social media celebrities in commenting on video gaming and travel.

Among the posts from Big V users, eight are from users identified as businessmen, including angel investors, executives, and senior staff in technology companies. The most well-known account is Charles Xue, an entrepreneur and angel investor, known as Xue Manzi on Weibo. He had about 12 million followers on Weibo, making him one of the social media stars at the time of the study. Unlike the Big V users mentioned earlier, Xue's post focuses on the domestic crisis and the urgent need for social reform. He expresses his worry after seeing how the street demonstration initiated by the islands dispute can escalate to a domestic disaster. Another well-known businessman in this category is Hongwei Zhou. Zhou has been CEO of Qihoo 360 Technology, a company that develops the major mobile antivirus product in China. In Zhou's post, he states that "the Diaoyu Islands belong to China, and 360 Technology belongs to China too. One of our investors is Han Chinese." Other posts from accounts associated with the

business background were also highly engaged by Weibo users, even with fabricated jokes on Weibo.

The other five user accounts in the Big V category are intellectuals, including writers and scholars, with an average number of 290,000 followers. The message ranked 7th was posted by Christopher Jin, and was commented and reposted 1,451 times. He criticized that the pursuit of gold medals in the London 2012 Olympics wouldn't boost national pride; instead it revealed the softness of Chinese nationalism. "Japan is tougher, and China is soft. China can only respond when Japan initiates a war." The other four posts offered solutions to the islands dispute and calling for rational patriotism in reacting to the dispute. For instance, the post ranked 9th says, "I suggest the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Defense cooperate to solve the dispute at all costs. It's time to end the dispute and Japan deserves it. However, I am strongly against those immature behaviors like provoking anti-Japanese sentiment and boycotting Japanese products." The posts from these intellectuals were all among the top 20 posts in the dataset.

Among the individual user accounts, 17 posts were from organic users on Weibo. The posts by organic users are characterized by unverified news stories that express "the Diaoyu Islands belong to China" or vulgar jokes about Japanese. Even in the discussion and repost of news stories from media sources, their posts are deemed playful stories with individualized responses. For example, the original post presents the economic facts about the islands; the widely circulated repost, ranked as the top 32nd post, calls people to defend the islands because each Chinese has his or her own share in the oil around them. The top posts from organic users are not "original" as labeled. For instance, the most engaged message in this category is an internet meme, but many users may have picked up the post by this particular user. One of the

reasons behind the rapid and wide diffusion of those messages is the large numbers of the users' followers. The average number of comments and reposts combined is 316, however, the average number of followers for those organic users is 1.8 million. The number of followers ranges from 15,154,976 to 597. For the organic users who have large numbers of followers, it is very likely that those accounts have been managed by some marketing groups on Weibo. Or it is possible that the organic user accounts pay to purchase bots or zombie followers to increase their numbers of followers.

Seven commercial media sources generated 8 posts among the top 50 messages during the study period. The average number of followers of these accounts is 11 million. Specifically, four of them were from media verified as digital/new media channels, such as Sina Military (Sina's official military channel account, with 4.5 million followers) or Breaking News (Sina's news and information center, followed by 39.3 million users). Two messages were posted by new media organizations owned by the People's Daily, Global Times, and Global People, followed by 3.3 million and 1.3 million users respectively. Two posts were generated by traditional commercial media outlets on Weibo, the Phoenix Television and the Chengdu Business Daily. Among the eight posts, seven of them were developing news stories on the islands dispute, and all of them presented strong implications for making war with Japan. For instance, the post ranked 4th had the headline, "General Zhang says China has to prepare to war for the dispute." One message complained about the difficulties of purchasing train tickets from 12306, China Rail's official website. The post reads, "12306, a magical website, even harder to access than the Diaoyu Islands. Our very own online ticketing website, won the first place of National Science and Technology Progress Award, makes buying a train ticket like winning the lottery!" This is the only post among the top 50 messages that drew a parallel between the territorial dispute and

issues in real life, as a metaphor to address contemporary life difficulties Chinese people encounter.

To sum up, the exploration on the elite framers suggests that rather than official media outlets, individual users and alternative commercial media accounts have dominated the framing of the discussion around the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Weibo. The next section focuses on RQ2a, the major elements of the prominent frames, discovered through a Labeled LDA for all the posts selected in this study.

4.2   <u>Major Elements of the Prominent Frames</u>

RQ2 addresses the overall frames of cyber nationalism that have emerged from the islands dispute discussions on Weibo. Before answering it, RQ2a must be answered first to reveal the topics forming the major elements of those frames. That said, RQ2a seeks to explore the major elements of the cyber nationalism frames. For this purpose, the dissertation considers each topic as an element in a frame. To answer this question, a Labeled LDA was used to categorize the analytical dataset, composed of 65,375 Weibo posts. Following a previous study (Feng & Yuan, 2014), a set of 11 topics was employed to train the classifier and applied to the complete dataset. Figure 7 demonstrates the overall distribution of each topic, averaged by the number of topics detected each day during the study period. For any single post, multiple topics can be labeled to that post. Correspondingly, a keyword can appear in multiple topics.

Figure 7. Overall distribution of all topics
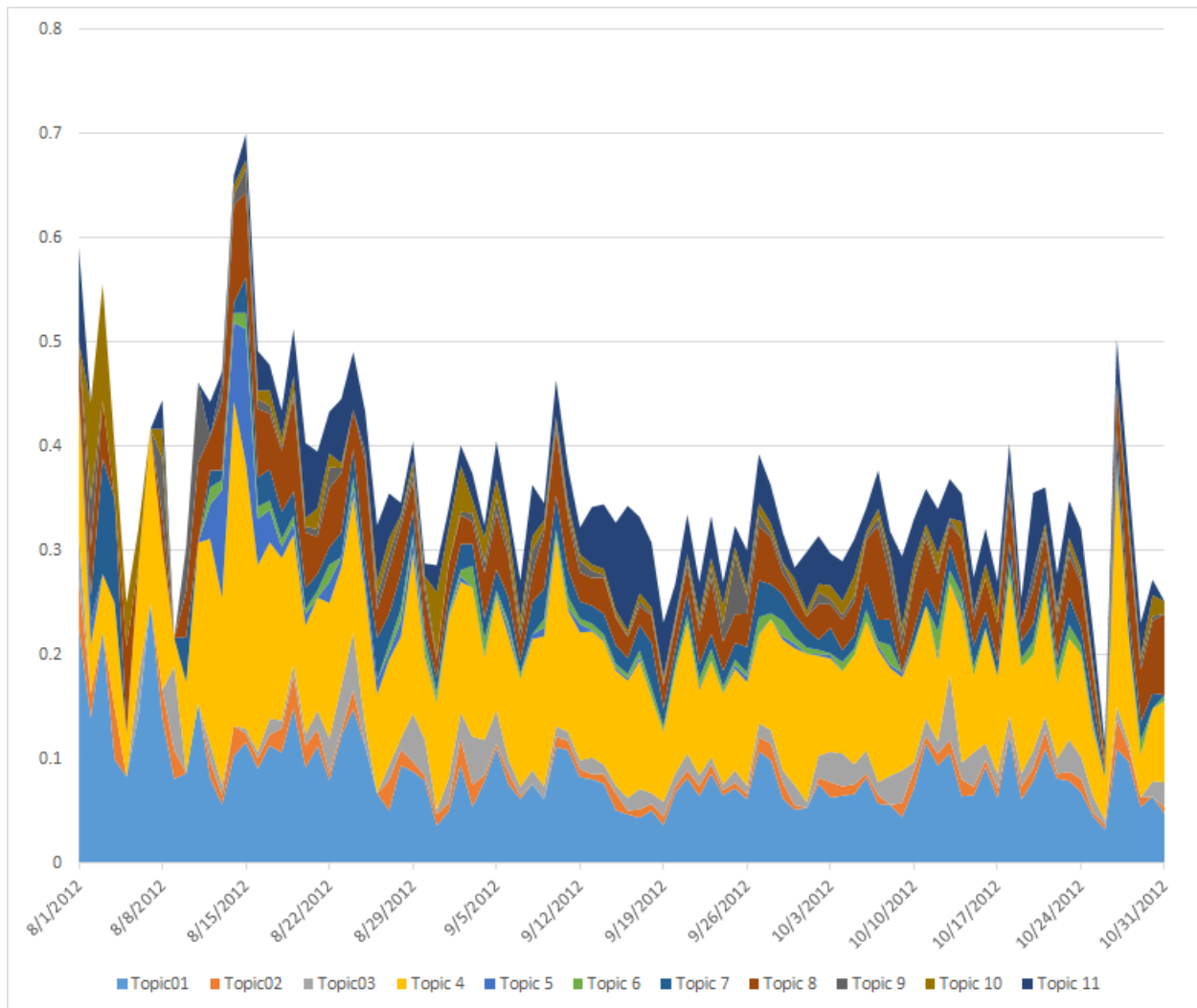
As shown in Figure 8, Topic 1 includes Weibo posts that expressed strong adversarial

sentiments and calls for military actions against Japan. The major words that indicate this topic

are: sink (chenmo), fight (da), military force (wuli), strategy (zhanlue), the Department of

National Defense (guofangbu), Japan (riben), spearhead (xiantoubudui), destroy (taping), aircraft

carrier (hangmu), People's Liberation Army (jiefangjun), WWI (yizhan), warship (junjian), Japs

(ribenguizi), blood and iron (tiexue), and launch (fashe). In total, there were 5,489 posts that fit

in Topic 1. As indicated on the figure, this topic peaks on the day of September 11, with 569

posts.

One example below represents the majority posts in this topic group:

"#Defending the Diaoyu Islands# Japan's purpose is to war. Down with Japan! Let's eliminate them
from the earth!"*("#保卫钓鱼岛#日本的目的就是战争，打倒日本，把他们赶出地球。")*

Figure 8. Topic 1
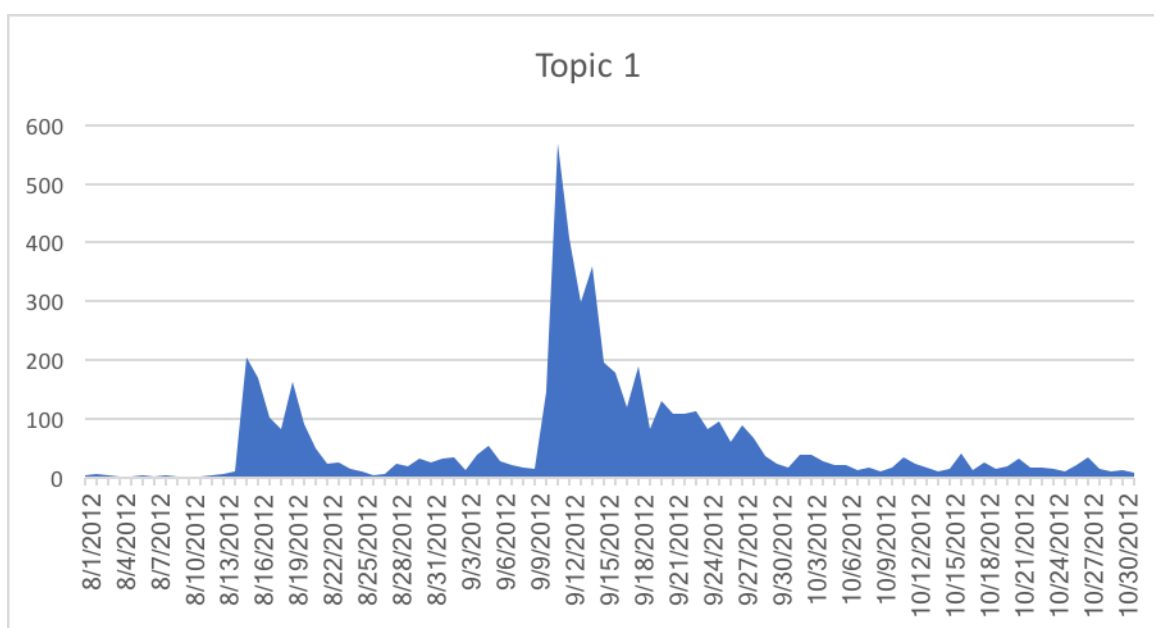
671 posts were labeled under Topic 2, and this topic group includes the narratives about

Japan in the islands-related news coverage and in popular culture such as Japanese pornography.

Figure 9 demonstrates the flow of Topic 2 over time; on September 15, the number of posts

reached its peak at 63. The most suggestive words in this topic group include: settle with

(shoushi), embark (dengshang), Ultraman (aoteman), Tokyo, negotiate (tanpan), Sola Aoi

(cangjingkong), Chinese government (zhongguozhengfu), the right wing (youyi), landing on the

(Diaoyu) islands, currency, purchase (mai), illegal (feifa), investigation group (diaochatuan), and

politics (zhengzhi). For instance, one post contains a piece of news report in this topic group:

> "'Tokyo Investigation Group Arrived Sea Area of the Diaoyu Islands' At 6 a.m., NHK reported that the Tokyo government rented a salvage ship arrived the sea area of the Diaoyu Islands, and then started illegal investigation on our Diaoyu Islands." *("【日本东京都调查团抵达钓鱼岛海域】日本广播协会（NHK）今晨 6 时报道，日本东京都政府租用的海难救助船"航洋丸"号已于北京时间今晨 4 时左右抵达钓鱼岛海域，随后将开始对我钓鱼岛进行非法调查。")*

Figure 9. Topic 2
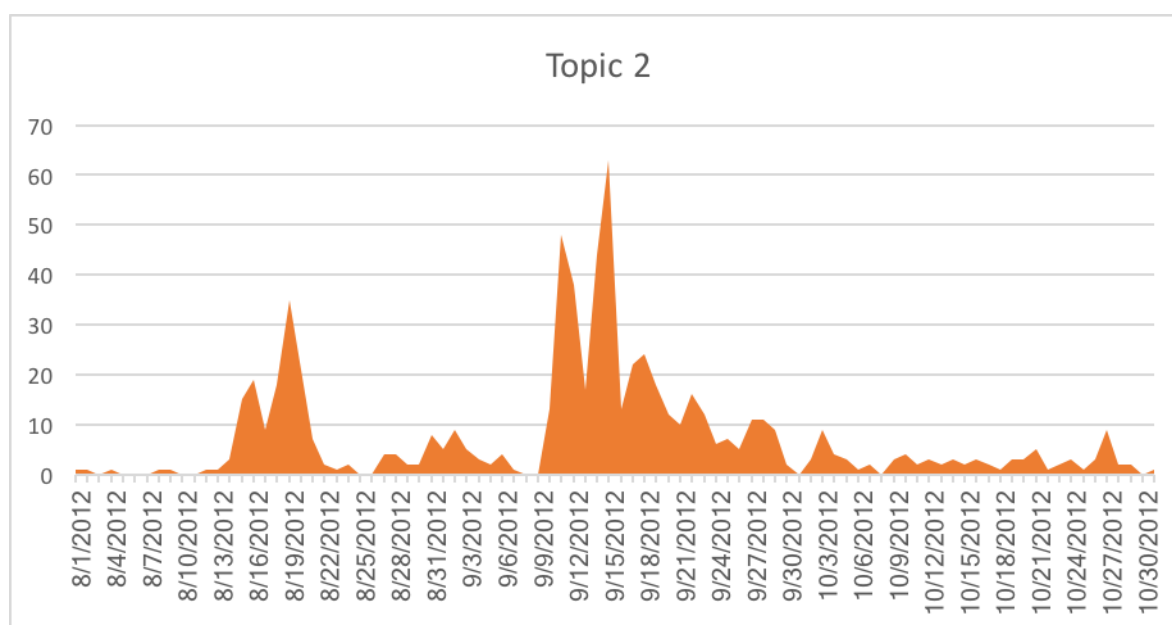
In total, there were 921 posts labeled under Topic 3. This topic peaked on September 13

with 60 posts, as shown in Figure 10. This topic group features posts that primarily discussed the

roles played by the United States in the most recent islands dispute and U.S. positions regarding

the situation of the Asia Pacific region. The keywords include: The United States (meiguo), the

U.S. Army (meijun), America and Japan (meiri), battle group (zhandouqun), security (anbao),

politics (zhengzhi), military (junshi), advertisement (guanggao), foreign media (waimei), the United States Secretary of Defense (meifangzhang), war (zhanzheng), the South China Sea (nanhai), warship (hangmu) and cost (daijia). The following example best represents the posts belong to this topic group:

"Do the Diaoyu Islands have anything to do with the U.S.? What the hell is the US-Japan alliance?" *("钓鱼岛跟美国有毛关系啊？还来个日美联盟！")*

Figure 10. Topic 3
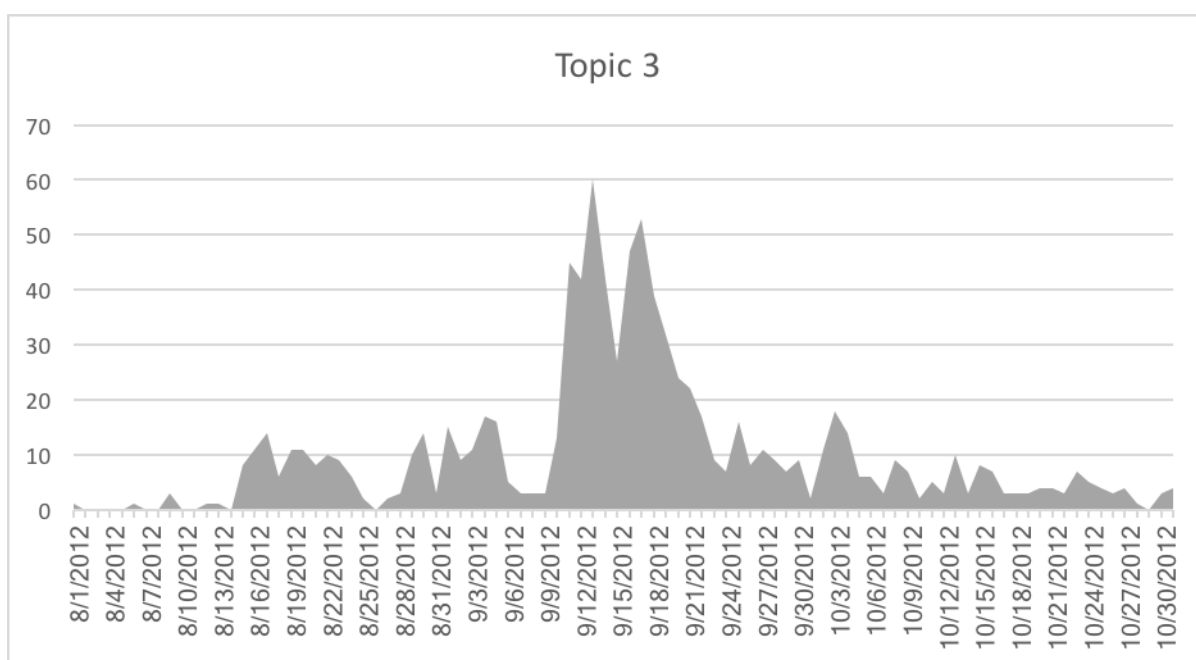
Among all the topics, Topic 4 was the most highly-identified topic, with 8,477 posts discussing it. As demonstrated in Figure 11, the number of Topic 4 posts reached its climax on September 11, with 610 posts labeled under this category. Posts in Topic 4 focused on discussion of grassroots responses and movements related to the unfolding events. The most representative words are: (China's) National Day (guoqingjie), defending the Diaoyu Islands (baodiao),

purchase (mai), Hong Kong (xianggang), small cities (xiaocheng), leading enterprise (longtouqiye), Chinese nation (zhonghuaminzu), Taobao, bully (qifu), and unite (tuanjieqilai). The following example best illustrates the posts labeled as Topic 4:

> "If every Chinese citizen donates one yuan renminbi, in totally, we can use the 1.4 billion yuan to purchase Japan and build a super toilet for us. It also helps pollution in China. Let's unite and compete the islands purchase by the National Day! – The Diaoyu Islands belong to us, if Japan wants to purchase our islands, why can't we?" *("呼吁中国公民每人捐出一元钱，总共14亿买下日本整个岛，在这里整个设计个超大厕所集中使用，，这样也可以在一定程度上减少国内的环境污染，希望国民团结一心，在国庆来临之前完成购岛计划！！！——既然钓鱼岛坚定是我们的，日本等于自说自话要掏钱买我们的岛，那我们为什么不可以这样做呀！！")*

Figure 11. Topic 4
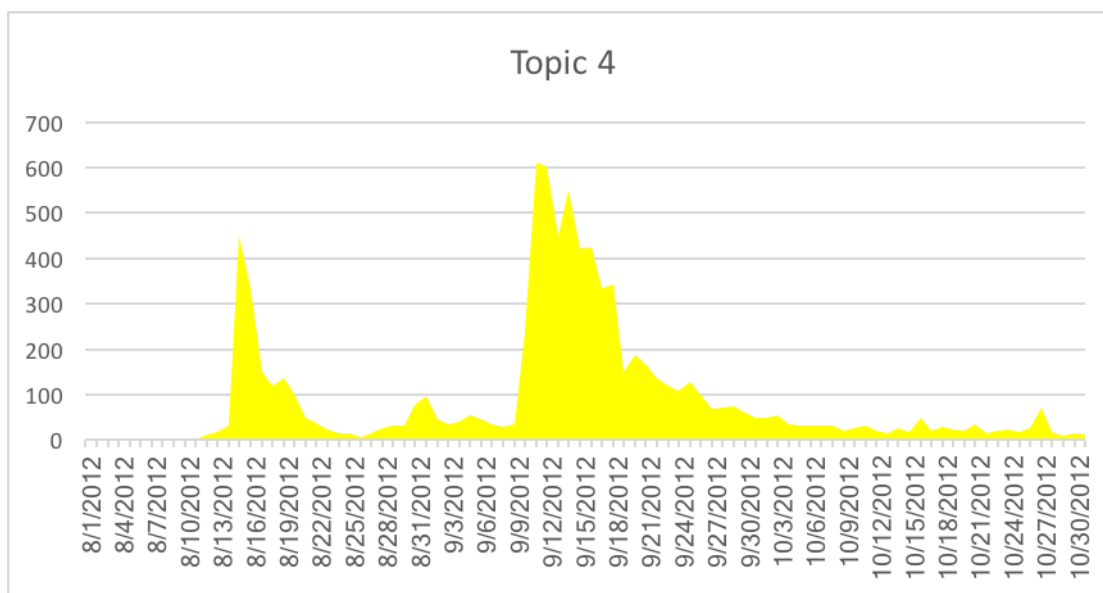
Figure 12 illustrates the overall trend of Topic 5, including 662 posts in all. On the day of August 15, 2012 alone, there were 227 posts. Posts belonging to this topic group mainly focused on the role of Hong Kong in the unfolding of the events, primarily on how Japan handled activities by Hong Kong activists. Keywords that indicate this topic include: Hong Kong (xianggang), defending the Diaoyu Islands (baodiao), landing (dengshang), ignore (moshi), success (chenggong), people (renshi), arrest (jubu), prevent (zulan), warriors (yongshi), awesome

(geili), and proud (guangrong). For instance, the following post exemplified the posts belonging

to this topic group:

"[Live Update] According to Phoenix Infonews, the Japan Coast Guard controlled the area near the Diaoyu Islands, and three of the seven Hong Kong activists landing the islands are under arrest." *("【动态】凤凰卫视资讯台最新消息：日本保安厅人员已在钓鱼岛各个角落进行布控，7 名已经登岛的香港保钓人士中 3 名被日方控制。")*

Figure 12. Topic 5
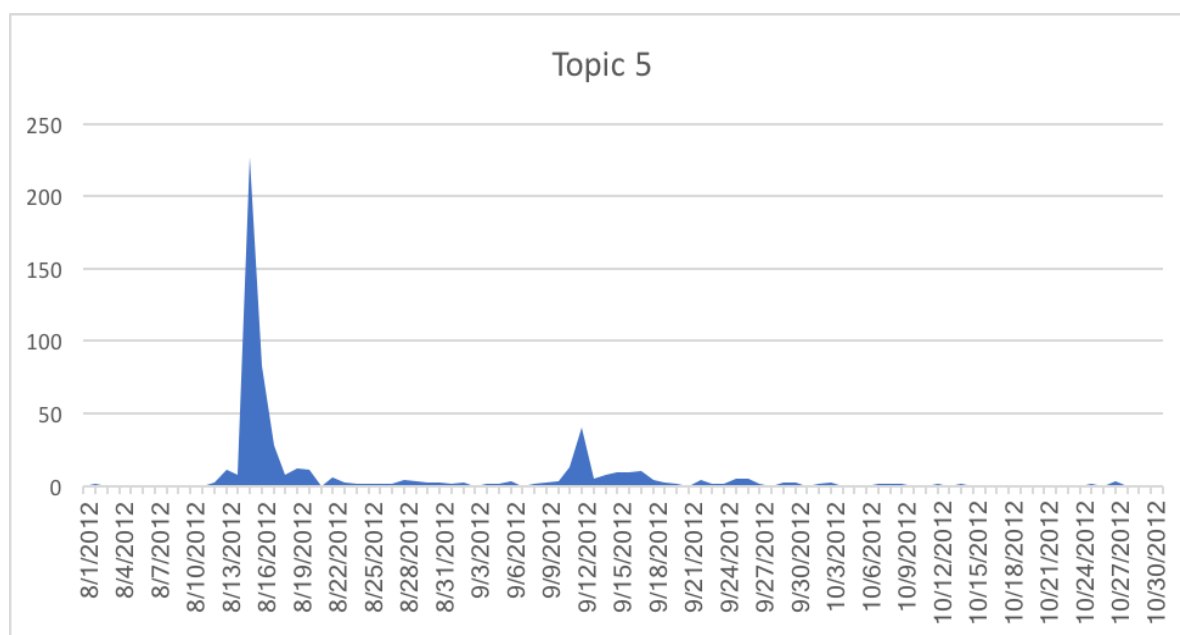
Topic 6 mainly covers the discussion around Weibo users' perceptions of China's

sovereignty and territory in the islands dispute and in other territorial conflicts with countries in

the Asian Pacific region. It also includes islands disputes with other countries. Figure 13

illustrates the overall distribution of the 517 posts in Topic 6, which peaked on September 11.

The most indicative words are: sovereignty (zhuquan), the Philippines (feilubin), territory

(lingtu), invade (qinzhan), Heilongjiang (Heilongjiang), call (huhuan), fatal (zhiming), the South

China Sea (nanhai), hero (yingxiong), rescue (yingjiu), success (chenggong), graveyard

(muyuan), control (kongzhi), and alliance (lianshou). The following post is an example from this topic:

> "If I become rich, I will purchase the Diaoyu Islands and Scarborough Shoal; and give one to Japan and one to the Philippines." *("我要是有钱了，就把钓鱼岛和黄岩岛买下来。一个送给日本，一个送给菲律宾。")*

Figure 13. Topic 6
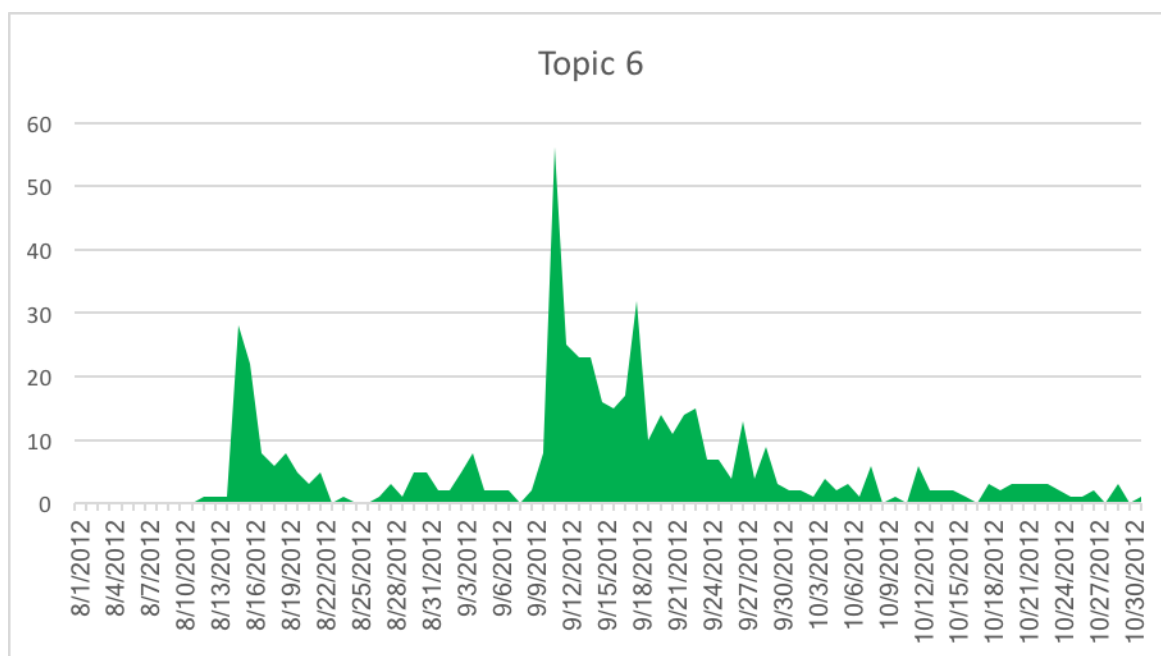
Topic 7 contains 1,524 posts related to the historical memories of Chinese people evoked by the islands dispute. As manifested in Figure 14, the number of posts peaked with 159 posts on September 18, the day which has been referred to as "Chinese National Humiliation Day" by Chinese people on many occasions. The most representative words are: September 18 (jiuyiba), history (lishi), territory (lingtu), national humiliation (guochi), Treaty of Shimonoseki (maguantiaoyue), anti-Japanese (kangri), provoke (jiqi), never forget (wuwang), anniversary (zhounian), the War of Resistance against Japan (kangrizhanzheng), Cairo Declaration (kailuoxuanyan), and surrender (touxiang). One exemplary post of this topic group follows:

"September 18 is approaching! Do you still remember national humiliation? If there's a war between China and Japan, are you willing to go to the front? The Diaoyu Islands belong to China! You and I are willing to go to the front to kill enemies!" *("九一八快到了！你还记得国耻吗？假如中日开战，你愿意赴前线吗？钓鱼岛是我们的！你我都愿意第一个上前线杀敌！")*

Figure 14. Topic 7
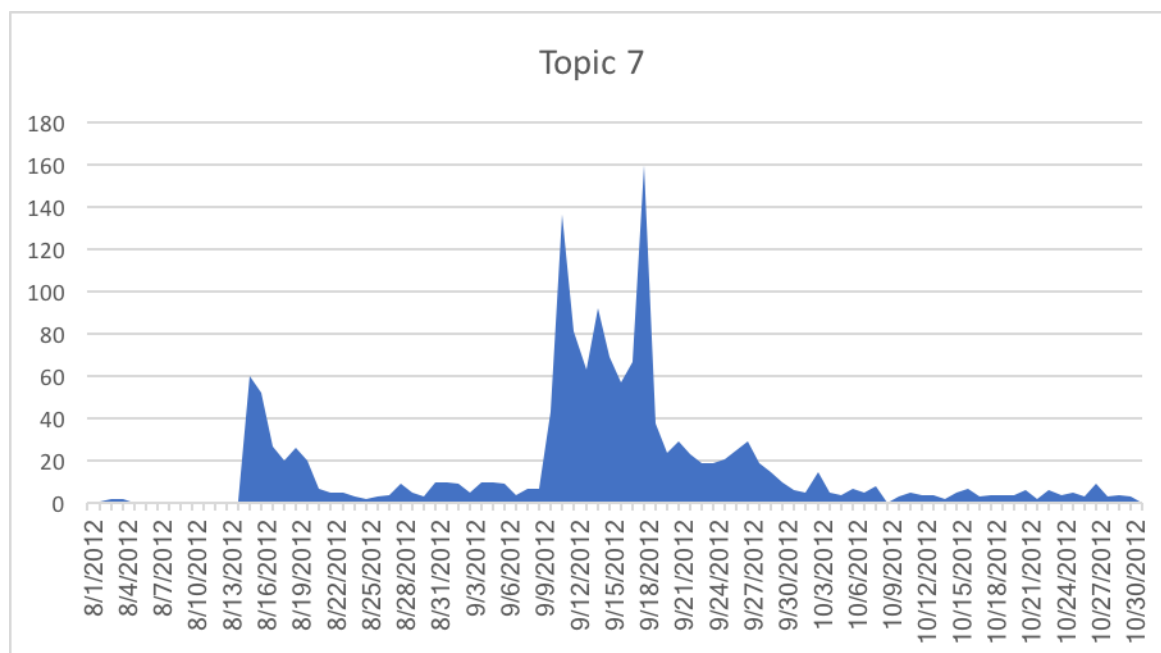
Topic 8 captures posts mainly focusing on the discussion of official responses and diplomatic efforts of the Chinese government. There were 2,607 posts labeled as representing Topic 8 (Figure15). The major words in this topic are: government (zhengfu), CCTV news (xinwenlianbo), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (waijiaobu), downhearted (xinhuiyileng), fishery administration (yuzheng), China Sea (zhongguohai), settle with (shoushi), nation (guojia), sea area (haiyu), outcry (qiangliekangyi), statement (koujing), act (caiquxingdong), imagine (huanxiang), shut up (bizui), protest (kangyi), official (guanfang), and illegal (feifa). The following post is an example of posts from this topic group:

"# What is the position of China on earth?# Gang Qin, Spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated on 15th, China has been watching the development of the event closely, demanding that Japanese side should do no risk the people and properties from Chinese side. The position of China on the Diaoyu Islands issue is clear and firm." *("#中方到底什么立场呀？# 中国外交部发言人秦刚 15 日表示，中方正在密切关注事态的发展，要求日方不能有任何危及中方人员、财产安全的作法。中方在钓鱼岛问题上的立场是明确和坚定的。")*

Figure 15. Topic 8
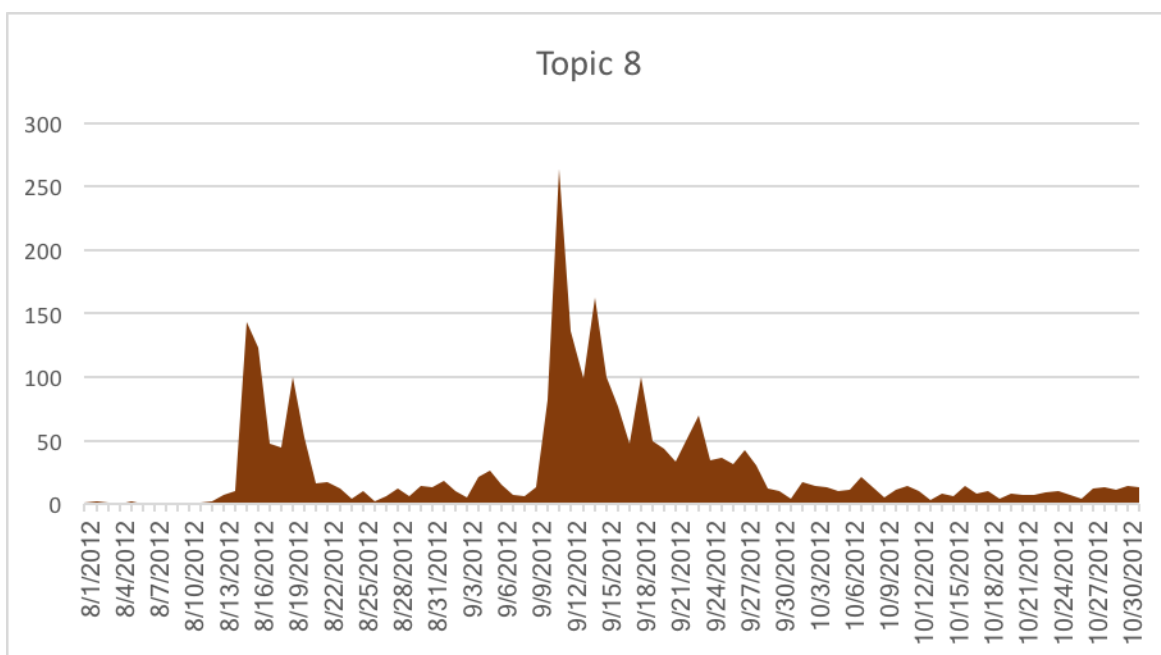
Topic 9 mainly describes the positions and responses of Taiwan to the dispute, and how Weibo users expressed their sentiments and attitudes towards Taiwan and its leadership. There were 543 posts labeled under this topic group (see Figure 16). The key words related to this topic are: Taiwan, both sides of the Taiwan Straits (liang'an), Taiwan Affairs Office (guotaiban), instigate (cedong), mainland China (dalu), same feeling (tonggan), fisherman (yumin), outrage (fenkai), Taiwan and Japan (tairi), Ma Ying-jeou (mayingjiu), and vessels (jianting). The following example represents posts within this topic:

"[Taiwanese authority: Yingjiu Ma declared "not an inch back on the sovereignty of Diaoyu Islands"] "Office of the President" of Taiwan stated on 14th, Yingjiu Ma declared that the Taiwanese authority 'would not an inch back' on the sovereignty of Diaoyu Islands." Taiwan would evaluate and choose

the most viable and efficient way to demonstrate the sovereignty.http://t.cn/zWYQNIP" ("【*台当局：马英九已宣示"钓鱼岛主权一寸不让"】台湾"总统府"14日表示，马英九已宣示，台湾当局对钓鱼岛主权"一寸都不能让步"，台湾会评估选择最可行、有效方式宣示主权。http://t.cn/zWYQNIP*")

Figure 16. Topic 9
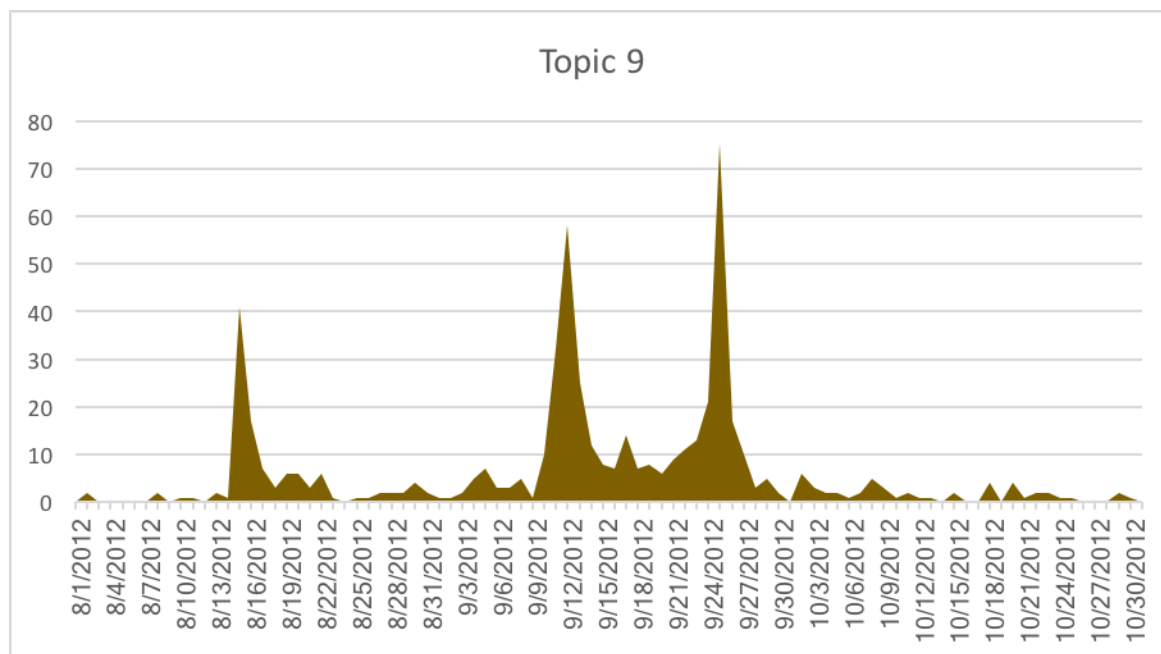
Topic 10 is composed of Weibo posts that primarily expressed the online users' grievance and complaints towards social injustice and corruption in contemporary Chinese society. There was a total number of 623 posts during the study period linked to this topic (see Figure 17). The most indicative keywords are: city inspectors (chengguan), happiness (xingfu), officials (guanyuan), ways to die (sifa), keys (yaoshi), housing price (fangjia), police (jingcha), the people (laobaixing), beat (ouda), and armed police (wujing). Below is an example of posts from this topic group:

"I heard that the city inspection has armed forces now? Are they going to recapture Taiwan? The South China Sea? The Diaoyu Islands? Or are they only there to cope with the ordinary people?"
("据说城管成立武装部了？是要去收复台湾？南海？还是钓鱼岛？还是为了发生冲突的时候对付老百姓？")

Figure 17. Topic 10
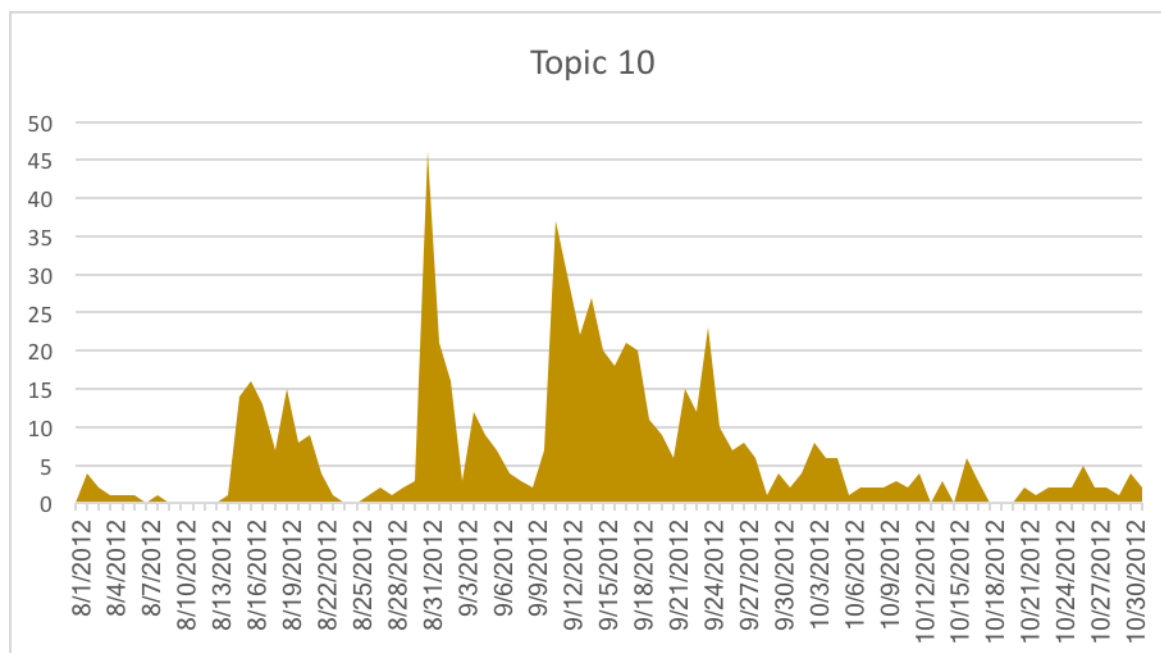
Topic 11 focused on the boycott of Japanese products and on protests and vandalism during the study period. A total 3,837 posts were primarily identified under Topic 11, and the number of daily posts peaked on September 16, with 453 posts on that day (see Figure 18). Prominent key words in this topic are: Japanese products (rihuo), boycott (dizhi), vandalism (dazaqiang), patriotism (aiguo), Panasonic (songxia), cars (che), Toyota (fengtian), rational (lixing), protest (kangyi), countrymen (tongbao), motherland (zuguo), Canon (jianeng), and brands (pinpai). The following example best illustrates this topic:

"It is said that series of large scale anti-Japanese protests broke out in several cities recently. Japanese run shops were damaged, Japanese made cars were turned upside down and Japanese individuals were attacked. The Diaoyu Islands incident pulled out the hate between two nations once again. Feel bad when memorizing Nanjing! Nanjing! that just finished reading. Feel even worse about the suitcase made in Japan bought just yesterday. [tears] Will quietly boycott Japanese goods from now on! Hopefully the friends around will also do the same!" *("据说这段时间陆续有几个城市开始大规模抵日游行，有地还砸了日本店，搞翻了日本车，打了日本人…… 钓鱼岛事件又一次把民族仇恨抽拉出来…… 想起刚看完的《南京！南京！》，心里又莫名发堵！可更让我堵的是，昨天刚买了个日产箱子……[泪] 现在开始，默默抵制日货！希望身边的朋友一起加入！")*

Figure 18. Topic 11
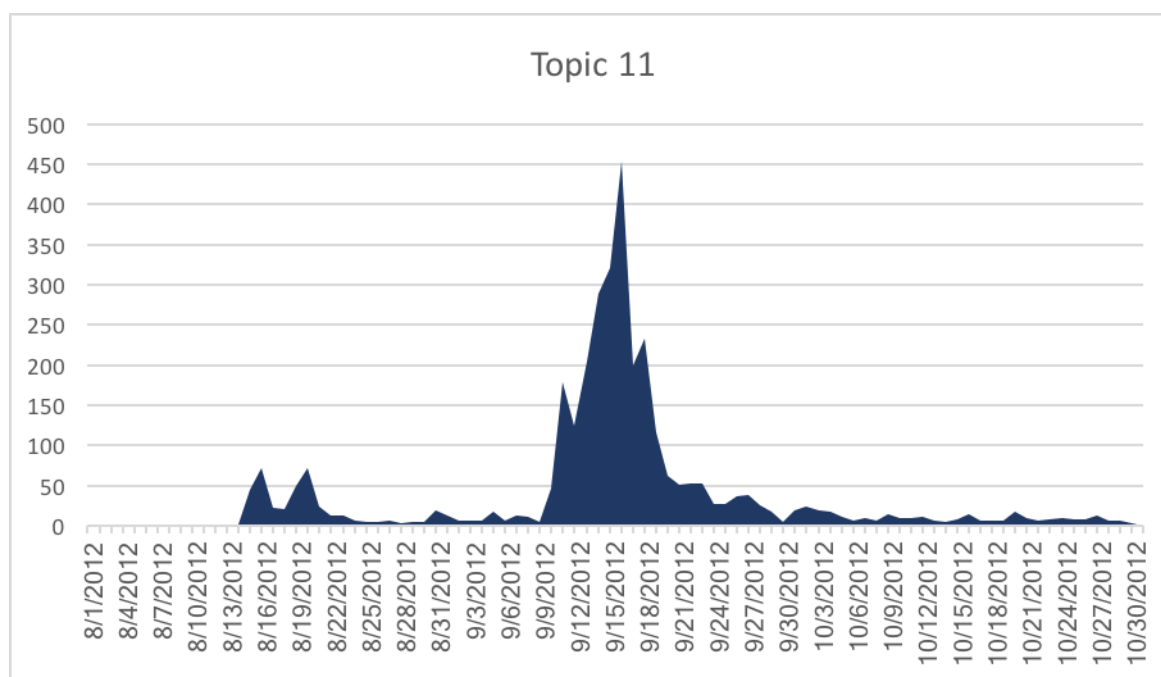
4.3   Major Frames of Chinese Cyber Nationalism on Weibo

The previous section has presented the findings of RQ2a and explained the major elements of the prominent cyber nationalism frames that emerged on Sina Weibo in the discussion of the islands dispute. This section attempts to answer RQ2, identifying and explaining the major frames. Therefore, as discussed in the previous chapter, based on those elements, a typology of topics was further developed inductively to organize the topics into three sets of topics that were

identified as the major frames of cyber nationalism across all user groups. Recall that I argued earlier that current Chinese cyber nationalism shares certain content and dimensions with conventional Chinese nationalism, while it also has evolved as a new phenomenon with its own features. These frames are named after their conventional counterparts as in previous literature; however, they have been endowed with new and unique characteristics on Weibo and thus help to better understand Weibo's roles in contemporary Chinese society.

The evaluations of all major discussion topics show that three prominent frames have emerged: 1. the *nonofficial nationalism frame* – containing five topics highlighting a wide range of sentiments expressed by Weibo users and all grassroots reactions and actions (Topics 4, 5, 7, 10, and 11); 2. the *official nationalism frame* was embedded in posts containing two topics highlighting official and governmental responses to the dispute and how users understood and reacted to such official responses (Topics 6 and 8); and 3. the *relational nationalism frame* found in four topics emphasizing China as a modern state and its positions in bilateral relationship with Japan, the United States, and Taiwan (Topics 1, 2, 3, and 9). The topic consolidation is based on relationships between the topics mentioned above, and also based on the literature on the dimensions of Chinese nationalism. If the topics have a set of shared features or support the same dimension of Chinese nationalism, they are grouped together. For instance, there are three topics that address how China functions as a modern state and how users perceive China within international contexts. Closer examination of those topics and posts led to discovery of an overarching frame. After further cleaning and word combination, Table 2 lists the top keywords associated with each frame. Those keywords are the keywords from each topic that belong to the frame.

Table 2. Top keywords in each frame

Frame NR			Frame OR			Frame RR		
Keyword (En)	Keyword	Freq.	Keyword (En)	Keyword	Freq.	Keyword(En)	Keyword	Freq.
China	中国	5465	China	中国	1607	Japan	日本	4372
Japan	日本	4100	Japan	日本	1231	China	中国	2972
People	人民	3712	Government	政府	1181	The U.S.	美国	1644
Defend Diaoyu Islands	保钓	1853	Sovereignty	主权	581	People	人民	1405
Boycott	抵制	1835	Territory	领土	495	Taiwan	台湾	828
Japanese goods	日货	1530	Boat	船	475	Japs	小日本	826
Patriotism	爱国	1448	Sea	海域	369	Anger	怒	779
Japs	小日本	1442	Chinese govt	中国政府	558	War	战争	639
Buy	买	1089	Nation	国家	345	Defend Diaoyu Islands	保钓	568
Smash	打砸抢	1083	Strongly protest	强烈抗议	437	Protest	抗议	513
Protest	抗议	771	Japanese govt	日本政府	411	Chinese govt	中国政府	464
Territory	领土	713	Issue	问题	306	Nation	国家	459
Event	事件	653	China Sea	中国海	427	Issue	问题	447
Rational	理性	633	MFA	外交部	224	Land the islands	登岛	431
Hong Kong	香港	607	Defend Diaoyu Islands	保钓	221	Dispute	争议	350
Issue	问题	577	Cruise	巡航	196	Sovereignty	主权	349
Land	登上	561	Defend	捍卫	136	Boat	船	336
Support	支持	555	Islands	岛屿	234	Territory	领土	328
Repost	转发	545	Absolute	坚决	142	Sino-Japan	中日	312
Do	做	518	Illegal	非法	135	Sea	海域	258

Overall, 58.5% (n=15,123) of the posts with any frame were identified with a nonofficial nationalism frame, about 12% (n=3,124) with an official nationalism frame, and 29.5% (n=7,624) with a relational nationalism frame (see Table 2). Just over 90% (91%, n=23,450) were generated from organic users, 9% from opinion leaders, and 0.06% (n=168) from verified media accounts.

Table 3. Frames and sources

User Type	Frame NN	Frame ON	Frame RN
Media	46	68	54
Opinion Leader	1291	277	685
Organic	13764	2801	6885
Grand Total	15123	3124	7624

Among the three selected user types, the quantitative analysis also revealed that use of the frame in their posts is different for each group. Table 3 illustrates the distribution of each frame in the posts generated by each user group. For media outlets on Weibo, 40.4% (n=68) of the posts were labeled as the official nationalism frame, 27% (n=46) with the nonofficial nationalism frame, and 32.1% (n=56) with the relational nationalism frame. For the opinion leader category, 57.3% (n=1,291) of posts were identified with the nonofficial nationalism frame, 30.4% (n=685) with the relational frame, and 12.3% (n=277) with the official nationalism frame. Similarly, among posts generated by organic users, 60.5% (n=13,764) of them focused on the nonofficial nationalism frame, 30.2% (n=6,885) with a relational nationalism frame, and only 9% (n=2,801) with the official nationalism frame. This suggests that the three user groups have different focuses and orientations in their discussion of the islands dispute. The nonofficial nationalism frame is the most popular frame in the posts generated by both organic users and opinion leaders,

whereas the media outlets place more emphasis of their discussion on the official nationalism frame. About 30% of posts generated by each group were identified with the relational nationalism frame.

Table 4. Distribution of frames among user groups

Type of User	No. of posts	Frame NN	Frame ON	Frame RN
Media	168	27.4%	40.4%	32.1%
Opinion Leader	2253	57.3%	12.3%	30.4%
Organic	23450	60.5%	9.2%	30.2%

The quantitative analyses described the distribution of frames in the posts composed by media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users through the labeled LDA. In the next section, the differences and similarities of each group's approaches, emphases on frame elements, and tonality will be examined to help us better understand how the nationalism frames were adopted and renegotiated among the different publics on Weibo.

4.4   Frames: Adoption and Renegotiation among Weibo Users

Having analyzed the elite framers, the major elements/topics of the prominent frames, and frame distributions among different types of social players on Weibo, this section turns to the qualitative analysis. It presents the three frames and findings from the discourse analysis detailing the way in which each user group adopted the frames, such as their focuses, approaches, and tonality. To conduct the qualitative analysis, considering the size of posts

generated from each group, all posts from the media outlets and 1000 most engaged posts from both opinion leaders and organic users have been examined.

4.4.1 <u>The Nonofficial Nationalism Frame</u>

The findings suggest that the nonofficial nationalism frame is the most prominent frame embedded in the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Weibo, with a total number of 15,123 times classified, taking up 58.5% of all the posts across the three user groups. In particular, this frame has been identified as the most popular frame among organic users and opinion leaders. This section starts with the analysis of posts generated by organic users, who contributed over 90% of their posts discussing the islands dispute using the nonofficial nationalism frame.

4.4.1.1 <u>Organic Users</u>

As mentioned earlier, for many ordinary Chinese people, expressing their own opinions and emotions is fairly difficult, if not completely impossible. However, the proliferation of internet use – especially social media platforms – in recent years has enabled people to openly voice their opinions. The affordances of microblogging platforms, Weibo in this case, made self-presentation possible for ordinary people and have provided everyone a space to express and interact with other individuals. In regard to the islands dispute, the expression and exchange of emotions among users transformed this online space into a highly sentimental forum during the anti-Japanese movements.

One of the most posted and reposted messages was "The Diaoyu Islands belong to China!" consistent with the street demonstration slogan. The slogan was usually followed by expression of the organic users' extreme hatred toward Japan for its invasion and constant confrontation with China, saying they would fight with Japan and Japanese at any cost.

Additionally, they expressed the determination to defend China's territorial integrity and

sovereignty along the unfolding of the events.

> "#Diaoyu Islands belong to China# I stand for it! Come and fight me if you disagree! We Chinese are not afraid of Japs!" ("*#钓鱼岛是中国的#我选择钓鱼岛是中国的！不服来战！小日本窝们大天朝才不怕你们！*")

> "Diaoyu Islands belong to China! Forever! Japan needs to deal with me before trying to buy them!Baka!" ("*钓鱼岛是中国的！永远是！日本想购买，先把我收了吧！巴嘎！*")

> "#Diaoyu Islands belong to China# Diaoyu Islands belong to China. Chinese government and Chinese people will never give a single square feet away!" ("*#钓鱼岛是中国的# 钓鱼岛是中国的，中国政府和人民绝不会退让半步！*")

The slogan was also promoted to prominence by relay-like chain messages, calling to be

reposted by "Chinese people," among Weibo users. For instance, a message often includes

"Repost if you are Chinese!" or "If you don't repost, you are not qualified to be a Chinese!" This

strategy represents a unique characteristic of microblogging platforms because of the

repost/retweet function. Consequently, to a certain extent, this type of messages helps to

reinforce national identity on social media in its early stage. For instance,

> "Chinese people repost it, passing the positive energy, beat Japs [Zhang Wen shouted out at Golden Eagle film festival: Diaoyu Islands belong to China]" ("*中国人转起来，传递正能量，消灭小日本【金鹰节'文章'高呼：钓鱼岛是中国的】*")

> "Diaoyu Islands belong to China [Exciting] 1.3 billion Chinese people follow it!" ("*钓鱼岛是中国的！！！[给力] 13 亿人民跟上！http://t.cn/zWTa7NX*")

Previous researches have addressed the focus of traditional nonofficial nationalism rhetoric

in China on China's past glory, national history, national pride, and the perceived Western

influence with its unfair treatment of China (Wu, 2007; Xu, 2007). In additional to the hatred

emotions towards Japan, a strong sense of cultural supremacy was embedded in those posts. As

the majority of Weibo users tend to be young and educated adults, they are likely to be familiar

with Japanese popular culture, especially Japanese anime and pornography. In the discussion of

islands dispute online, organic users quickly created messages combining the slogan and their perception of Japanese cultural products to express their emotions. Unlike the adversarial sentiment towards Japan, this line of argument on Japanese culture is presented in a light and playful tone, suffused with jokes and satirical terms. For instance, the following examples both claim that the Diaoyu Islands belong to China, but the well-known Japanese pornography actresses belong to all of them and the world.

> "The Diaoyu Islands belong to China! Sola Aoi belongs to the world!" *("钓鱼岛是中国的，苍老师是世界的！")*
> "The Diaoyu Islands belong to China! Maria Ozawa belongs to us." *("钓鱼岛是中国的，小泽玛利亚是大家的..".)*

On Weibo, writing duanzi (段子), in other words, "jokes" in traditional Chinese cross talk, has been a keen interest for many users, especially those punsters on Weibo. Gradually, duanzi becomes a popular form of content on Weibo on many occasions. Duanzi usually appears in the form of exaggerated fake and fabricated news stories and urban tales, many with sexual or political implications. The repost/retweet function largely promotes the circulation of those duanzi, especially during major events. The slogan "The Diaoyu Islands belong to China!" was also written into duanzi, and some claim that the Japanese also agree with it. For instance, one duanzi – ranked in the top 50 posts for its comments and reposts – was posted as an original post more than 2,000 times during the study period. It features the story of a Japanese, who is living in an affluent residential area in Shanghai, claiming that the Diaoyu Islands belong to China before buying groceries. It exemplifies how the daily necessity of a Japanese subordinates the Chinese ownership over the islands.

> "Just head an amusing story from a colleague. A friend of his lives in Gubei, where many Japanese people also stay. One day he went to the grocery market doing some shopping. He heard a Japanese nearby trying to buy some meat. Instead of asking for price at first, the Japanese guy was talking this way, 'Diaoyu Islands belong to China. May I buy some meat?'" ("刚才听到同事说的一件事，笑死

我了。有朋友住古北，那边住的小日本比较多，有天去菜场买菜，听到一小日本在旁边要买肉，首先不是问多少钱，而是说：钓鱼岛是中国的，我买肉。"）

Such cultural supremacy was also found in the messages claiming Japan's ownership of the disputed islands, but further claiming China's ownership of Japan. Those posts express many organic users' long-standing desire to defeat and occupy Japan, and their confidence and arrogance in perceiving the future of those two countries. For example, one post says:

> "On the city bus, a primary school kid, while eating green onion cakes, shouted in excitement: Diaoyu Islands belong to Japan!!! Japan belongs to China!!! [snicker][snicker][snicker] ps: all school kids on the bus were discussing Japan." *("公交车上，一小学生吃着葱油饼，眉飞色舞的高呼:钓鱼岛是日本的!!!日本是中国的!!![偷笑][偷笑][偷笑] ps:一车的小学生都在探讨日本。")*

Furthermore, the cultural supremacy of China was also manifested in posts that address China's past glory history and national pride. As many researchers argue that traditional nonofficial or grassroots nationalism could be easily aroused by the shared set of thinking recognizing common roots (Xu, 2007), such discourse has been discovered on social media as well. Weibo functions to collect, organize, and present online users' historical memories provoked by the islands dispute. To comment on the dispute and express their determination to protect the disputed islands, many users' posts included a remark from Han Dynasty (bc 204–220 ad), from which the Chinese people derive their characters and identity (Feng & Yuan, 2014; Wu, 2007). The original message states that "anyone who dares to offend the mighty Han Empire, is doomed to be exterminated, no matter how far he lives." Weibo users adopted this message and quickly modified it into different versions to convey their feelings of pride in the nation's history. They also firmly believe that it strengthens their determination to protect the sovereignty and integrity of China's territory. For instance, the next two examples state the Han nationalism in the hot-blooded declaration of protecting China at any cost.

> "#Diaoyu Islands belong to China# On sovereignty and territory issues, people will not softly step back, nation will not just sit without doing anything. All those who offend we China will be

terminated, no matter how faraway they are!" *("#钓鱼岛是中国的# 面对主权和领土问题，人民不会软弱退让，国家更不会坐以待毙。犯我华夏者，虽远必诛！")*

"A small island country, slightly bigger than Hainan island, is so arrogant like this. Diaoyu Islands belong to China. All those who offend we China will be terminated, no matter how faraway they are!" *("一个小小岛国，只不过比海南岛大一点就嚣张，钓鱼岛是中国的，犯华夏天威者虽远必诛!")*

Besides strongly recognizing the historical national pride and glory in the past, Weibo users also circulate the perceived humiliation created by the Japanese invasion. Chinese defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 was "a crucial catalyst for radicalism" (Zhao, 2001) and Chinese nationalism started taking forms thereafter. China suffered its greatest humiliation in history after being invaded by Japan, and Spence (1991) argues that the defeat was a "dark conclusion to the brightest hope of the era of self-strengthening" (p.223-24). Those messages reinforce the lesson learned from history to remind people never to forget that humiliation; and more importantly, to fight for China's sovereignty and to restore national dignity. In the discussion of the dispute, warning of the lessons from history usually takes the following form:

"#Today in history# Today in 1894, the Qing government lost the battle of the Yellow Sea, the most fierce and decisive one in the Sino-Japanese war. Qing government was eventually forced to cede territory and pay indemnities to Japan. Diaoyu Islands were since illegally occupied. During the battle of the Yellow Sea, Shichang Deng, a naval general from Guangzhou, launched a suicide attack using his sinking ship towards the Japanese enemy. However, this attempt was not successful and both his ship and his life was lost in the sea. He shouted at his last moment: 'I determine to kill the enemies for my country. Today I die at sea to fulfill my responsibility. No reason for me to live any longer.'"("#历史上的今天#1894 年今天，清政府在中日甲午战争最激烈的黄海大战中失利，此战决定战争走势，日本最终逼迫清廷割地赔款，钓鱼岛因此被其非法侵占。海战中，广州籍将领邓世昌在舰船将沉之际，驾船撞向日舰，欲与之同归于尽，终坠海殉国。邓死前大呼：'我立志杀敌报国，今死于海，义也，何求生为!'")

While historical memory operates as an important vehicle of cyber nationalism on Weibo, the nonofficial nationalist sentiments among organic users are not unified. Besides praising China's glory in history, complaints of contemporary grievances and dissatisfactions also emerged from the discussion while talking about the dispute. The concerns of the grievances on

Weibo include people's dissatisfaction toward government bureaucracy, corruption and social injustice, and their economic conditions and insecurity in daily life.

Most of the complaints focused on economic situations, especially the high-speed growth of housing prices and living expenses in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai. Again, some duanzi are also found in satirizing life conditions of the young generation, in particular, those patriots who are struggling for life in the large Chinese cities. The following post depicts a young guy who, while living in a basement in Beijing, deeply concerned with national affairs such as China's next move and the Diaoyu Islands problem, the police attempted to interrogate him for his temporary residency permit.

> "In a dim and damp basement in Beijing, a skinny young man was checking the military section of Phoenix Net, holding a pack of cigarette bought with two coins. He was frowning hard and lost in deep thoughts: what should be the next step for our country? How to break the blockade from the US? How to take Taiwan back? How to protect the Nansha and Diaoyu Islands? How to defeat the enemies of China? Lots of challenges were waiting his thinking and decisions. Then he heard kicks on the door from outside, 'Open it! Police! Show your temporary residency permit!'" ("*阴暗潮湿的北京某地下室，一瘦弱青年一手拿了2块钱一包的烟，一边看着凤凰网军事频道，愁眉紧锁的他陷入了沉思：国家下一步该怎么走？如何突破美国封锁？如何收复台湾？如何保住南沙钓鱼岛？如何剿灭反华势力？一个个难题需要他思索，抉择。此时，传来踹门的咣咣声：开门！警察查暂住证!*")

The duanzi above illustrates the conflicts between enthusiastic political participation and life reality, and also between a young but poor patriot and law enforcement agencies. Besides police, the city inspectors, usually officers of city-level management handling local issues, have become another major target for Weibo users to vent their distrust and dissatisfaction toward the government. Conflicts between those officers and defenseless people such as residents and street merchants were consistently narrated as violent and brutal. The city inspector phenomenon has gradually become a symbol that manifests the tensions between the state apparatus and people in everyday life. Weibo's timeliness has largely promoted the possibilities of those posts going viral in such conflicts. In the islands dispute discussion, the city inspectors and policemen were seen

as capable of handling the dispute between Japan, for their violence and ruthlessness, only if they could act as they have been acting against ordinary people.

"Japanese policemen landed on the Diaoyu Islands. Chinese policemen then showed their power as well, killing a Chinese farmer." ("*日本警察登上了钓鱼岛，中国警察也不示弱，随后击毙了一位中国农民！"*)

"[A woman argued with urban management people in Xiamen] A house owner fiercely argued with urban management people and armed police from four vehicles, won applause from surrounding watchers: 'Chinese communist party is only 90 years old. Our house was built 100 years ago. Do we need an ownership certificate for it? If the properties of civilians cannot be protected, can we say that Chinese society value human rights? You sent four vehicles with police, armed police and urban management people, to deal with civilians. Why not go and take back the Diaoyu Islands if you are so powerful?'" ("*【厦门女子舌战城管】一房主激辩四车城管和武警，旁观者热烈鼓掌：中国共产党才九十岁，我们家房子一百多年，需要产权证吗...老百姓财产都得不到保护，能说中国是人权社会吗...对付老百姓你们出动四部车子，警察、武警、城管全部出动，那么厉害去收复钓鱼岛啊!'"*)

The listed posts exemplify the tension between the city inspectors and a homeowner, and also tensions between the party state policy and the property rights of ordinary people. Many posts demand that the city inspectors recapture and defend the Diaoyu Islands in the same way that they treat ordinary Chinese people—brutally and mercilessly. Furthermore, in several posts that embedded the nonofficial nationalism frame, the tensions extend to all life areas that people encounter every day such as food safety, environmental pollution, and social welfare issues. The following post summarizes the mixed feeling of China's post glory and national pride and daily frustration and grievances.

"Experts claimed that Chinese national rejuvenation has been 62% completed. The ratio looks pretty and is golden indeed. In West Han dynasty, during Emperor Wu times, confronters were to be punished no matter how far away they were. In Tang and Song dynasties, goods were abundant and people were rich, lots of countries sent ambassadors to show respect and submission. Nowadays? Huangyan Island and Diaoyu Islands is still in the argument, low payment, high pricing, poor benefits, bad environment, low level of happiness, poisonous formula and drugs here and there. Where does the rejuvenation come from?" ("*专家称中华民族复兴任务已完成 62%，这比例看上去就挺美，细想原来是黄金分割啊。西汉汉武帝时，犯我强汉者，虽远必诛。盛唐隆宋，物阜民丰，万国来朝。现在呢，黄岩岛、钓鱼岛主权归属问题纷争不断，工资低，物价高，福利差，自然环境差，幸福感低，毒奶毒药层出不穷，不知道从哪门子来的复兴？"*)

Under the nonofficial nationalism frame, besides the wide variety of emotions from organic users observed on Weibo, there is also a dawning realization of the need to take urgent and drastic actions. Organic users' action perspective ranges primarily from online protest and street demonstrations to product boycotts provoked by the dispute.

As demonstrated earlier, a major element (Topic 4) of this frame focuses on grassroots responses. Social media like Weibo have enabled a wide range of civic participation among disparate individuals. However, as researchers suggest, many of the grassroots movements and actions identified took place only online (Christensen, 2011; Morozov, 2011), as merely symbolic actions. This kind of superficial engagement culture has also been confirmed and observed on Weibo. While the government was seen as soft and ambiguous on the islands dispute, Weibo users started to "engage" in more individualized symbolic actions. Most of the symbolic actions in this dataset were unrealistic calls to land the islands or donate to purchase the islands as the Japanese islands purchase, and other activities online such as planting the flag of China or signing a complaint on Weibo. For instance, one popular message on donation says,

"It will take Japan 166 million RMB to buy the Diaoyu Islands, which are 6.344 square kilometers. It means 2.6 RMB per square meter. Japan takes 377835 square kilometers, and will cost only 9.8866 billion RMB if calculated using the same price level. Chinese people can each donate 9 RMB to help the purchase of Japan. ---Here came the same fabulous replies: Take 10 RMB, and keep the change!"*("日本要花 1.66 亿人民币买钓鱼岛，钓鱼岛 6.344 平方公里，就等于 2.6 元每平方米，而日本 377,835 平方公里，照这个价格日本只要 98.866 亿人民币就可以买下，中国人民可以每人 9 元捐款助我国买下日本。——楼下齐齐神回复：十元，不用找了！")*

In addition to these symbolic actions, Weibo also functions as a space to discuss and engineer a series of actions to boycott Japanese products. Many users believe that if Chinese people boycott products from a specific country, the action would largely impact and hit that country's economy. Such boycotts have been found and documented elsewhere, such as previous anti-Japanese movements (see Feng & Yuan, 2014; Liu, 2005) or boycotting Carrefour and other French goods in 2008 to retaliate against France's support of Tibet independence (Ma, 2015). In

the 2012 dispute, many organic users believe the Japanese economy is highly dependent on the

Chinese market, and a long-term boycott of Japanese merchandise would lead to the collapse of

Japan's overall national power. Accordingly, boycotting Japanese products is an obligation of

every Chinese, and even reposting can affect it. For instance, the following example represents

one kind of careful calculations on Weibo that boycotting Japanese products serves as an

important factor to crush Japan's economy.

> "Diaoyu Islands are ours! Support boycotting Japanese goods, it is your responsibility even without any rewards! Japan is greatly relying on China at this time, particularly rely on the Chinese market. Thousands of Japanese companies will be dying if Chinese refused to buy anything Japanese for a month. The Japanese economy will be exploding if it extends to one year. It is a test to your patriotic heart in boycotting Japanese goods! Maybe every time you repost this one, it will cost the Japanese one yen!" ("*钓鱼岛是我们的！支持抵制日货，就算没有回报，这也是你的义务！ 日本对中国的依赖程度现在很重，特别是对中国市场的依赖，如果中国人一个月不买日货，日本将有数千家企业面临破产，如果一年不买日货，日本经济将面临崩溃！抵制日货考验的就是你那颗爱国心！也许你发布一次就牵动日本经济一日元！*")

Again, not all Weibo users express such extreme desire to crack down on Japan by

boycotting its products and damaging its economy. Overall, they don't reject the idea of

boycotting and retaliating, but some people approach it with a milder attitude because they

realize part of China's economy is also dependent on Japan. For them, it is more important to

boycott Japanese products and avoid traveling to Japan than to destroy the Japan-made

merchandise owned by their fellow Chinese people and boycott the Sino-Japan joint ventures.

> "[Boycott Japanese goods with rationality: stop smashing Japanese goods, save bought Japanese goods, refuse to import Japanese goods, buy goods from Japanese joint venture companies with caution. Stop selling strategic resources to Japan, cancel Japan targeting tourism!] It will hurt both China and Japan, but China is way more tolerable than Japan. As long as China starts its economic sanctions, Japanese tax will definitely decrease. The Japanese government will be heavier in debts. The financial crisis will inevitably break out. Japanese will pay a high price. RMB in your hands is the weapon to fight against Japan! #Diaoyu Islands#" (*"【理性抵制日货：禁止打砸日货，爱惜已购日货。杜绝进口日货，慎购合资日货。停售战略资源，取消赴日旅游！】对中日双方都有伤害，但中国承受能力远高于日本。一旦中方启动经济制裁，日本税收必然下降，政府债务继续恶化，经济危机必将爆发，日将付出惨痛代价！手中的人民币就是抗日武器！#钓鱼岛#"*)

As events developed over time, exhortations to boycott Japanese products and sanction

Japanese economy were soon disapproved and later opposed with strong counterarguments.

Many organic users criticized those users who enthusiastically participated in the boycott,

describing them as "retarded" and easily manipulated. Many users voiced their strong

disapproval and characterized those boycotting Japanese products as the real national

humiliation. For instance,

> "Those pure stupid asses who stir the national hatred, shouting to boycott Japanese goods are our real national humiliation." *("煽动民族仇恨，动不动抵制日货的纯傻逼才是我们的国耻。")*

> "Patriotic traitors smash the Japanese goods owned by their fellow compatriots, attack Chinese employees from Japanese companies, slander the rational patriotic voices in the cyberspace without limit. Can the Japanese goods bought by compatriots using their money be smashed easily while the Japanese AV actress Sora Aoi can be accepted without boarder? Will it make them heroes by chasing Japanese on Chinese streets? Show your power to fight Japanese on Tokyo streets, and tear the Yasukuni shrine apart as well. Our country is called China (disassemble it), right?" *("爱国贼行径包括打砸自己同胞的日本产品，对日资企业的中国雇员围攻，对网络理性爱国声音的无底线的诋毁。日本 AV 女优苍井空可以无国界地接受，同胞花血汗钱买的日货咋就可以肆意损毁？在中国街头追打日本人算神马英雄，有本事到东京街头打去啊，捎带脚再将靖国神社拆了——不是咱国英文外号叫拆那吗？")*

Furthermore, many users refuse and resist the boycott movement and shift their hatred to

Japan toward their own government and people. In their posts, they state that they loathe those

Chinese idiots who only blame Japan in the dispute, and hope they will realize the core of the

problem. They point out that the unresolved matters in Chinese society are not initiated by

Japanese. For them, the Chinese government is responsible for contemporary societal issues such

as corruption, food safety, and pollution in China. The following post is an example of how the

target shifts from boycotting Japanese goods to denounce the Chinese government.

> "It is not Japanese who collect heavy tax right now, it is not Japanese who work as urban management people that hit and smash sellers on the street, it is not Japanese who tear civilian houses apart by force, it is not Japanese who beat civilians walking on the streets to death. It is not Japanese who work as corrupted civil servants in high ranks, it is not Japanese who produce poisonous food, air, vaccines, tracks and swimming pools, it is not Japanese who bloom the real estate markets to confine you in small cabinets, it is not Japanese who make the education, health care and retirement plan unaffordable for you. You do not want to fight these evils around you but those Japanese far away?" *("现在的重税不是交给日本人，街上打砸小贩的城管不是日本人，强拆民宅的也不是*

日本人，随意打死在街上自由行走的平民更不是日本人。身在高位的贪官不是日本人，制造毒食品、毒空气、毒疫苗、毒跑道、毒泳池的人也不是日本人，把房价炒上天，让你蜗居的也不是日本人，让你上不起学，看不起病，养不起老的更不是日本人。身边的恶不去抵制，却去抵制远在天边的日本人？")

"September 15th, 2012, Saturday, is a day to remember, in which a terrible and ridiculous chaos occurred in many big cities. I don't think it fair to blame those street rats and brainless fools furiously. Any contingency plans for such a big chaos? Any emergent reactions during the incident? Any apologies or reviews after the incident? Is China a country without a government or a leader? Or the governors just simply did not want to do anything about it?" ("*公元 2012 年 9 月 15 日，星期六，这是一个值得纪念的日子，一场可怕可笑的混乱，席卷许多大城市。把谴责的怒火都烧向街头混混，和无知脑残，我以为是不公平的。发生这么大事，事先没有预案？事中没有应急反应？事后没有向国人的道歉检讨？中国难道没有执政者，或者没有国家元首，抑或，根本不作为？")*

4.4.1.2 **Media Outlets**

The media outlets contributed about 27% of their posts using the nonofficial nationalism frame. Their focuses were discovered through the adoption of the protest slogan, the constant and immediate news coverage of the events, and reflections on the protests. A shift of news coverage has also been noted through the event timeline: when the government starts losing control of the street protest, rationality in patriotism becomes more powerful.

"The Diaoyu Islands belong to China!" has also been found in several posts generated by media outlets only in reference to the government publication. While organic users utilized the slogan with strong anti-Japanese sentiments, the media outlets haven't adopted that theme emerging in their coverage. In their posts, the slogan is only found in scattered news reports which relate to a white paper published by the State Council Information Office and reactions to the white paper. One of the exemplary reactions is an interview with a Japanese scholar on how the white paper published by the Chinese government can help Japanese people to understand China's view and the truth of islands dispute. For instance,

"[Japanese scholar said that the Diaoyu Islands white paper would help Japanese people to learn the truth] A famous Japanese professor of law said, the <Diaoyu Islands are inherent territory of China> published by China would help it to confirm its absolute sovereignty of Diaoyu Islands in international laws on one hand. On the other hand, it would also help the Japanese people to

understand China's viewpoint and have a better idea about the history of the conflict and the real ownership of Diaoyu Islands." ("*【日本学者称钓鱼岛白皮书利于日本民众了解真相】日本某著名法学教授称，中国发表《钓鱼岛是中国的固有领土》一方面有利于在国际法上确认中国对钓鱼岛拥有绝对主权。另一方面，它也有助于日本民众了解中国的主张，更有机会知道关于钓鱼岛问题的来龙去脉和钓鱼岛的真正归属。http://t.cn/zlyMFmw ")*

Within the nonofficial nationalism frame, the media outlets have devoted the news coverage on grassroots' actions/reactions towards the dispute. Unlike the organic users who utilized Weibo to express strong emotions, media outlets used Weibo as a news dissemination channel to update the development of events, especially the action related to the islands purchase initiated by Japan and the defense of the islands by Hong Kong activists. In the beginning, the media updated the islands purchase closely, primarily citing Japanese sources. Step by step, such media coverage moved toward cultivating and promoting anti-Japanese sentiments.

In particular, a peak in posts on the Hong Kong activists was observed after the Japanese arrest of those activists in mid-August 2012. While those media outlets constructed the news around the islands dispute, Weibo also has activated a responsive space for other users to comment and react to the news. Within this frame, the news stories on Hong Kong activists and how Japan treats those grassroots activists have been the major topic for media outlets and other users to collaborate in understanding and reshaping such news stories. During this period, the media outlets try to blame the escalation of tensions on the Japanese side.

"[Highly alerted Japan may send its Self-Defense Forces in reaction to Chinese ships trying to protect Diaoyu Islands] Yongming Jin, director of the research center of the law of the sea in Shanghai academy of social sciences, said to reporters that, facing determined Russia and nationalism overwhelmed Korea, Japan could not push the situation towards a beneficial direction and would gain nothing. In this case, it is possible to imagine that Japan would enforce its control to the Diaoyu Islands it already took previously." ("*【日方对两岸三地保钓船严阵以待 或出动自卫队】上海社科院海洋法研究中心主任金永明13日对记者说，面对强硬的俄罗斯、民族情绪激烈的韩国，日本无法使问题向有利于自己的方向发展，无利可图。在这种情况下，可以想象日本必然会加大对它原本已经控制的钓鱼岛的控制力度。")*

"[Phoenix television: Diaoyu Islands protecting boats from Hongkong would go to Diaoyu Islands again on September 18th to show sovereignty] Hongkong Diaoyu Islands protecting committee claimed that the main repair work of Kai Feng II, which was hit and damaged while showing sovereignty in Diaoyu Islands in August, had been completed. It was planned to head to Diaoyu

Islands to show sovereignty again on September 18th." ("【凤凰卫视：香港保钓船 9 月 18 日将再往钓鱼岛宣示主权】香港保钓委员会表示，8 月到钓鱼岛宣誓主权期间被撞毁的"启丰二号"已经完成基本的安全维修，香港保钓船"启丰二号"计划将于 9 月 18 日再次前往钓鱼岛宣示主权。")

Media outlets on Weibo also provide a platform for users to immediately interact with the media and other users. Part of the organic users' posts express their profound resentment and disapproval of the state's mild diplomatic rhetoric and manner toward Japan. Instead of reposting, many organic users and opinion leaders adopted the news content to make it their own. Because the islands are so distant, it is impossible for general publics to produce news content covering events on the islands. In China, only traditional and mainstream media are permitted to obtain and publicize firsthand news content to the public; thus, they have been the most reliable and only source of information. Consequently, when online media outlets distribute news content on Weibo, they potentiate interactions between users and themselves instantly. Sometimes, users only include the headlines from news with their own opinions, emotions, and comments to post as news on their timelines. Weibo enables news content to be produced by both media and other publics collectively, which has been less possible in journalistic practices among other mainstream media in China. Following posts exemplify the users' anger toward Japan and glorification of the Hong Kong activists and how they reconstruct the news content.

"[Fury! Live scene of Hongkong Diaoyu Islands protectors in chains from Okinawa] Although in chains, they were still trying to shout 'Protect Diaoyu Islands! Diaoyu Islands are the inherent territory of China!' They were then forced into cars by the Japanese police. Can anyone remain soft any longer after seeing this?" ("【愤怒！香港"保钓"人士被押冲绳现场】他们被拷着手铐，下船后还努力高吼"保卫钓鱼岛，钓鱼岛是中国领土！"，然后被日本警方强行塞进车内。此情此景，还能再软弱下去吗？")

"[7 heroes protecting Diaoyu Islands insisted to drive their boat back to China: Diaoyu Islands protecting boat means something special!] Why did Diaoyu Islands "protectors" returned to China in two batches? Chinese Embassy Councilor from Tokyo said that Kai Feng II has a special meaning as a Diaoyu Islands protecting boat. Its crews also strongly asked to drive it back to China. So 7 crews were assigned to this work. (China News)" ("【另 7 名保钓英雄坚持开船回祖国：保钓船有特殊

意义！】为何"保钓"人员分成两拨回国？我驻东京大使馆参事表示，保钓船"启丰二号"有特殊意义，且船员强烈要求开船回国,故安排 7 名船员驾原船归国。"）

Starting in mid-September 2012, large-scale and violent anti-Japanese street demonstrations erupted across China, in 208 cities (Wallace & Weiss, 2015). The domestic protesters smashed and burned Japanese cars and protested in front of Japanese stores and factories (Wee & Duncan, 2012; Shirouzu, 2012). The 2012 movements have been considered the largest scale of anti-Japanese protests in China's history. The media outlets, unlike the organic users, show no intention to mobilize the audience to participate in protests at any time. In their coverage, they addressed the protests targeted at the Japanese islands purchase; no further information was given.

"[Chinese citizens continued to protest in front of the Japanese embassy in China (pictures)] On 13th, Chinese citizens continued to protest against the actions of Japanese government on the Diaoyu Islands incident in front of the Japanese embassy in China. More than 2000 people had joined this protest by 17:30. The protest started in the morning and never paused ever since. Protestors raised the banners saying words such as "The Diaoyu Islands belong to China" and also sang the Chinese national anthem." (" *【中国民众继续在日本驻华大使馆门前抗议（组图）】中国民众 13 日继续在日本驻华大使馆门前，抗议日本政府在钓鱼岛问题上的做法。截至 17 时 30 分，抗议者已超过 2000 人次。抗议活动从上午开始，始终没有间断。抗议者高举"钓鱼岛是中国的"等字样的标语牌，高唱中国国歌。"*）

"Xinhua Agency: China will continue to react to fight back. Japan will pay a high price for its wrong judgement; Chinese people protested against the Japanese "purchase" of Diaoyu Islands in multiple regions such as Beijing, Guangdong and Shandong; Japanese media: Prime minister Noda asked the Japanese Self-Defense forces to get prepared for all situations." (*"新华社：中方将继续出台反制措施 日本误判代价沉重；北京广东山东等地民众抗议日本"购买"钓鱼岛；日媒：首相野田要求自卫队做好万全准备"*）

However, the media outlets on Weibo have offered more coverage of protests outside of mainland China, such as in Hong Kong, Taiwan and foreign countries. The strategy was the same as they used to contribute coverage on activists from Hong Kong or Taiwan in more detail than protests in mainland China, especially after the domestic protests became violent. The following examples suggest that on the day the domestic protests peaked, the media chose to post more messages on the protests by Chinese people in Canada and England.

"On September 18ᵗʰ, a protest named "never forget 918, protect Chinese territory Diaoyu Islands" was held on the Beautiful China Square in Vancouver City. Protestors signed on the banner asking to protect Diaoyu Islands. It would then be sent to the Japanese Embassy in Canada. It was reported that many people were yet to come to sign due to school or work duties. The protest would end at 8 pm. More people were expected to come and sign to show their support at late times. ("*9 月 18 日一场名为"勿忘九一八，保卫中国领土钓鱼岛"的抗议活动在万锦市锦绣中华广场举行，在场人士在保钓横幅上签名，联名书将递交给日本驻加拿大使馆。据悉,很多人因在上班或上学还没来得及去签名,活动晚八点结束,预计晚些时候会有更多人前往支持签。http://t.cn/zlziHI6 "*)

"[iseeuk] On September 18ᵗʰ of 2012, 81st anniversary of "918" incident, British Chinese held a procession in London to memorize it and protect the Diaoyu Islands, as a peaceful and rational way to protest against the Japanese government's "nationalization" to the Chinese territory Diaoyu Islands. The crowd lodged a protest in front of the Japanese Embassy. Response from the Japanese side was yet to be made about the protest." ("*【英闻】2012 年 9 月 18 日，英国华人华侨在"九一八"事变81 周年之际，在伦敦举行纪念"九一八"、保卫钓鱼岛的游行，以和平理性的方式抗议日本政府对中国领土钓鱼岛及其附属岛屿进行所谓"国有化"。队伍到日本驻英大使馆前递交了抗议书。日本就此事无回应。"*)

Functioning as a sentimental discursive and mobilizing space for its organic users, Weibo also serves as a venue for users to reflect and resist those mobs of enraged nationalists and extreme actions, especially for the media organizations at the same time. When the domestic protests escalated out of control, the most notable counterargument was the urgent need for "rational patriotism" appealed by the media outlets and opinion leaders in an attempt to turn public opinion around. Several official media outlets commented on the boycott of Japanese goods and the violence in the street demonstrations by calling for "rational patriotism" among Chinese people. For instance, the following post cites a scholar to illustrate the problem of boycotting Japanese products.

"[Scholar: boycotting Japanese goods will not solve the territory conflict] Vice dean of Institute of Contemporary International Relations at Tsinghua University said that "boycotting Japanese goods" is not a rational action. People need to first understand that why Diaoyu Islands belong to China, after which facts and reasoning can be then discussed. The Japanese people do not know the truth, which is not the policy of China. He pointed out that there are no 'pure Japanese goods' any longer and the most important thing is to strengthen the national defensive forces." ("*【学者：抵制日货难解领土问题】清华大学当代国际关系研究院副院长认为，"抵制日货"不是理性的做法，民众先要了解钓鱼岛为什么属于中国，然后可以摆事实、讲道理。日本民众并不明白真实情况，且这也不是中国的政策。他认为，现在已没有"纯粹日货"，而最重要的是增强国防力量。"*)

The government official media have voiced the needs of "rational patriotism" as well. People's Daily online published a commentary on "how to defend the Diaoyu Islands." Without mentioning the street demonstration developments, it expressed regrets on the perceived irrational actions during the protest. One strategy for the media outlets on Weibo is to cite foreign media coverage to speak to the domestic audience. It took advantage of Japanese or other international media reports to imply that anti-Japanese movements should be deemed as violence, and warned that the subversive power of such violence would eventually lead to the instability of Chinese society.

> "[People's Daily Online Commentary: how do we protect Diaoyu Islands?] Japan related protests took place in multiple locations nationwide today. Some irrational actions during the protests made people feel sorry and sad. Some ill-willed Japanese media claimed that the protests against Japan turned into ruffianism and also predicted that they would cause turbulence to the Chinese society. They also provided excuses for the propaganda from people like Shintaro Ishihara." ("*【人民网评：我们怎样保卫钓鱼岛？】今天，国内许多地方发生了涉日游行活动。其中，一些非理性的行为让人感到遗憾。有日本媒体幸灾乐祸地称中国抗日陷入"暴徒化"，并预测会给中国社会带来动荡。这也让石原之流找到了鼓动的口实。*")

Taken together, the nonofficial nationalism frame used by the media outlets is manifested in their coverage from the activists defending the islands in the beginning, to criticizing the nationalists on the street, to calling for rational patriotism in the end. In their coverage of protests, they paid more attention to reactions outside China than to domestic protests. Also, they utilized foreign coverage on the violent ultra-nationalists participating in the protests to advocate for rationality in one's love for country.

4.4.1.3 Opinion Leaders

Overall, more than half of the posts generated by opinion leaders embedded the nonofficial nationalism frame. Their posts concentrated on three major areas: the grassroots re/actions including the boycott of Japanese products, the history, and the grievances in contemporary life. The opinion leaders on Weibo disseminated, interpreted, and reconstructed

information from various sources. This section analyzes how opinion leaders approached the nonofficial nationalism frame during this dispute.

The national historical memory plays a crucial role in opinion leaders' construction of the nonofficial nationalistic discourse. Initially, the opinion leaders employed August 15, the 67th anniversary of the Victory over Japan Day, on which Imperial Japan surrendered in WWII, as a reference to China's national history to stimulate sentiments among their followers on Weibo. The platform facilitates amplified information creation and diffusion as a result of cooperation between opinion leaders and the media. For instance, mentioning WWII, opinion leaders adopted and reposted a commentary from the official media to invite the memory construction collectively to further reinforce anti-Japanese emotions. Their posts primarily demonstrate the determination to eliminate Japan. For instance, one post says,

> "Remember August 15, strengthen the Chinese nation and down with the Jap's militarism!" *("铭记815，强壮我中华民族，打倒小日本的军国主义！")*

Furthermore, Chinese supremacy, as shown in the organic users' posts over Japan, have been documented in the opinion leaders' posts. Several similar discursive strategies were identified, ranging from jokes on Japanese actresses, to the imagined literation of Japan, to the blatant declaration to eliminate Japan.

The role of opinion leaders' posts exceeded the wider articulation and distribution of hostility towards Japan when they utilized Weibo to advocate and mobilize people to action. The arrest of Hong Kong activists by Japanese on August 15 was a turning point where the opinion leaders started turning public opinions into actions. Situating their discussion within historical nationalist sentiments, their posts praised the Hong Kong activists as national heroes, and calling all people in mainland China out to protect the islands.

"It's the 67th anniversary of the Victory over Japan Day! Meanwhile, Hong Kong activists are going to land the Diaoyu Islands. Where are the Mainland Chinese people?" ("*今天是日本无条件投降六十七年! 同时也是香港保钓准备登岛日，大陆十三亿人为什么不千舟竞发钓鱼岛呢！*")

"Where are the Mainland Chinese? Are there only a few Chinese people who can defend the islands?" ("*大陆的中华儿女哪儿去啦？难道中国只有这几位好样的中华儿女？！*")

At the same time, they turned to remind the Chinese government of its responsibility, questioning the absence of state measures to assist and continue the islands protection initiated by the grassroots.

"I want to ask: where is the party's army?" ("*试问：党的解放军在干嘛呢？*")

Down with the Japanese militarism! Free Hong Kong activists! Damn Japs! Where is the PLA? I suggest the government send every one of us a gun and I will fight for the islands myself! ("*打倒日本军国主义！立即放人！还我香港同胞！该死的小日本! 无耻之徒，中国人民解放军哪里去了？要不 ZF 一个人给我们发一把枪，给 10 个手榴弹，我们自己去。*")

As landing the islands seems too impractical for Chinese people, the opinion leaders used Weibo to talk, negotiate, and formulate actions within their ability. A campaign to boycott Japanese products emerged among Weibo users. Same as the confidence in China's economy found in some organic users' posts, the opinion leaders claimed that China's economy is growing steadily and independently without Japan/Japanese goods. Besides boycotting Japanese products, they told people that the U.S. is responsible for the islands dispute, and it's of equal importance to boycott American products. They further urged Chinese people not to work for any Japanese companies, stating that the Chinese government should compensate for quitting their jobs. One feature of their advocacy for the boycott was that they conceived it as a more cost-effective strategy than starting a war with Japan, whereas the majority of organic users called for the Sino-Japan war to demolish Japan.

"Talk about my own thoughts on the ownership of Diaoyu Islands: China is stepping into a speedy developmental stage of reform and opening. It is not a proper time at all to fight a war. People surfer most during the war. So my suggestion to the government: launch economic sanctions to Japan! All Chinese people boycott Japanese goods! Offer financial aid and new employment opportunities to

former employees in the Japanese companies who lost their jobs as a result. It will cost far less than fighting a war!" *("关于钓鱼岛的主权问题，我也谈自己的感思：中国正步入改革开放的高速发展期，实在不适合在此阶段发生战争。因为战争害的最苦的是老百姓，所以我建议当局：对日本实行经济制裁！全民抵制日货！对原为日企打工因此而受到影响的失业员以经济补助，并有效分配劳动力，必竟这部分补助金额远少于战争的开销！")*

However, as events unfolded, users constantly updated the campaign in real time. Many of them and the media witnessed the extreme nationalist emotions and violence in the street protests. A shift in online public opinion was documented as well. Along the same line of argument as used by the official media outlets, opinion leaders become conscious and demanded for reason and civility among their fellow Chinese on Weibo after large protests took place in China. In their posts, many reflected and criticized the irrational and immature behaviors of their fellow Chinese people, noting that the nationalist street mobs make China lose face. Their voices were infused with discussion on China's position on the international stage. Unlike those who blamed the Chinese government, they expressed their confidence in China's current development, claiming that only the "rational patriotism" and improvements in overall national quality can help China gain international respect and support. For instance,

"Today is National Humiliation Day, also a day to examine your intelligence. Remember the history and memorize the national humiliation means to become stronger in economy and in military, more civil in both system and quality." ("*今天国耻日，也是秀智商的日子。铭记历史，勿忘国耻是要在经济上军事上更强大，制度上素质上更文明。*")

"The Diaoyu Islands incident disturbed both home and abroad. Japs are pressing hard abroad while "patriots" are smashing, robbing and setting fires at home. China, catch up! After 30 years of reform and opening, China should not catch up only in GDP. The powerful national quality is the foundation of a strong country. Resolutely defend sovereignty of Diaoyu Islands and resolutely support rational patriotism!" ("*钓鱼岛事件，惹得国内外纷纷扰扰。国外，是小日本的步步紧逼，国内，是"爱国人士"的打砸抢烧，中国，追上去！三十年的改革开放，追上去不应该只是 GDP，国民素质的强大才是一个国家强悍的根本，坚决捍卫钓鱼岛主权，坚决支持理性爱国！*")

In addition to obliquely accusing the government and the protesters, opinion leaders suggest for more "civilized protest." Instead of criticizing and telling individuals what to do, several opinion leaders' posts suggested some cities need to improve their protest strategies and

to avoid vandalism. The following example is among the top engaged posts, composed by Hu Xijin, a well-known journalist and editor for Global Times. His post commented on the domestic protest, and is targeted at several cities instead of the mobs of nationalists. He proposed that people express their patriotism in a more mature and civilized manner.

> "During protests to the Japanese invasion to Diaoyu Islands, some cities did it highly organized while vandalisms were seen in some other cities. Beijing civilians showed the best performance during this round of patriotic movement, while some people in Shenzhen and Shanghai behaved negatively. Let us better express our patriotism and strongly oppose illegal vandalism. Hopefully all cities will join a competition of civilized protesting. People are looking forward to seeing Shanghai and Shenzhen to lead the way in it nationwide." *("都是抗议日本侵占钓鱼岛，有的城市抗议活动井井有条，有的城市出了个别打砸事件。在这一轮爱国行动中，迄今北京市民的表现最好，但深圳、上海等地都有负分。让我们大家更纯熟地表达爱国，坚决反对非法打砸。希望各城市做文明抗议的竞赛。上海、深圳，大家期待你们在文明抗议方面也做全国的表率。")*

On September 18, 2012, the largest scale of anti-Japanese demonstrations broke out in many cities in China. Online opinion shifted into a more cautious direction. Unlike those who expressed their disapproval directly towards the demonstrations and mobs of nationalists, some opinion leaders' tone was careful, delicate, and inexplicit. In the following example, several influential opinion leaders are lamenting "a country" and expressing feelings that "their country" was deeply humiliated. Instead of blaming the protesters, the opinion leaders implied that the violence was allowed and even mobilized by the government in an obscure way.

> "Today, a country was laughed at worldwide. I cannot speak out its name. Good night, my sleepless fellow compatriots. Good night, my motherland under humiliation."
>
> RT A serious drama developed into a crazy violent drama and then a ridiculous one. Violence with organization! But no organized intervention in time? Little Diaoyu Islands became a mirror revealing evils. [clown]
>
> RT@user A: Exactly. They all are sacrificial objects.
>
> RT@user B: A police nation with fine security down to water meters cannot handle the childish vandalism? No sentiment needed. Everything was planned and approved under the table."
>
> *("今天，有一个国家沦为全世界的笑话。这个国家的名字，我说不出口。晚安，我睡不着的同胞。晚安，我被羞辱的祖国。*

RT 一场严肃的正剧，发展成疯狂的暴剧，成了闹剧。有组织的暴行！却没有组织的及时制止？小小钓鱼岛成了照妖镜。[小丑]
RT @洪晃 ilook: 太是了。都是殉葬品。
RT@封新城: 一个安保精细到水表的警察国家会搞不定那些小儿科的打砸抢？不必多情，都是被默许和安排的。")

However, not all discussions from opinion leaders were as "rational" and profound as they

claimed. Creative and playful discourse also was found in their posts. They also referred to

popular culture, but not in the same way as organic users, employing the Japanese and Chinese

cartoons and tales. In those posts, Japan is viewed as weak and inferior to China. The following

example uses a hashtag #ChinaJapancrossfire illustrating a fight between the cartoon characters

from both cultures.

> #ChinaJapancrossfire# Live severe battle actions revealed…On the Chinese side, Sun Wukong was raising a giant chopper, with 7 calabash brothers standing behind him. We also saw other figures like Sheriff the black cat and so on. Crayon Shinchan and Doraemon were leading the Japanese side. The Chinese side was the favored one since team Ultraman sent telegraph saying that they would not help the Japanese side to fight against the justice. Reporter live from the scene# Diaoyu Islands belong to China# ("*#中日交火# 现场曝光，战况十分激烈...中方我们看到了由孙悟空举着大砍刀，后面站着葫芦娃七兄弟、我们还看到黑猫警长等等一干人...而日方我们看到由蜡笔小新一干人等带着多啦 A 梦等...相对于中方，日方就显的比较劣势，日方的奥特曼团队发来电报表示不参与日方此次非正义战争...现场记者#钓鱼岛是中国的#"*)

Although perceived as enjoying better living conditions than ordinary people, anxiety and

expression of suffering in everyday life was also observed in opinion leaders' posts. Their major

complaints are targeted at the state apparatus, for being too harsh on ordinary and vulnerable

groups and for not taking good care of the Chinese people. The post below suggests that the

opinion leaders are sympathetic with the lower socioeconomic class by criticizing the city

inspectors' measures against street vendors.

> "I saw the city inspectors were kicking the street vendors out over the weekend! What's the matter? They sell grocery in the community and it's very convenient for all of us. Why can't they go reclaim the Diaoyu Islands? Go! I think 300 cars of the city inspectors are enough." ("*周末在楼下小区里看见，城管把社区里路边卖菜的都给捻跑了......至于吗？社区里卖个菜，挺方便大家的呀，你们有种#收复钓鱼岛#去呀！去 3000 辆车我看就应该够用了。"*)

Yet, they are more aware of their ownership of private material. Some request the state apparatus

to protect their private property. Shown in the next post, the user enumerates his/her lost items

and luxury and seeks assistance from the police on Weibo.

> "F**k! My house was broken in last night. Two laptops. A brand new Ipad. A phone. Three cameras. One Gucci wach. @Suzhoupolice If you can't protect the Diaoyu Islands, can you help us, the ordinary people?" ("*我艹。昨晚家中失窃。损失两台笔记本。一台 new ipad。一部手机。一台 摄像机。两台相机。一块 Gucci 的手表。@苏州公安 钓鱼岛管不到。能帮我们老百姓先做点 实事好不？")*

In sum, the nonofficial nationalism frame has been identified as the most prominent frame

in all posts across the three user groups. The posts with this frame covered a wide range of

grassroots sentiments to re/actions along the events, including adversarial emotions against

Japan, supremacy over Japan, reinterpretation of news on Hong Kong activists, and the various

actions taken to defend the islands. A shift of public opinion was observed within this frame, in

the calling for reason and civility amid the intense nationalist sentiments. The next section

investigates and interprets the posts using the *official nationalism* frame among the three groups.

4.4.2 The Official Nationalism Frame

The official nationalism frame was also a prominent frame identified in the 2012 Diaoyu

Islands dispute on Weibo, with a total of 3,124 posts labeled under this frame. The posts

embedded with the official nationalism frame are manifested in the reflection of traditional

discourse around official nationalism online with its new features. As discussed earlier, Weibo is

in the same position as other media platforms since the marketization of media in China, and it

has been constrained by the interactions between and mutual influence of the power of the state,

the market, and the society. The previous sections have demonstrated the prevalence of

nonofficial nationalism discourse and the rising power of individuals on Weibo. Unlike its

counterparts in western democracies, Weibo, as a social media platform, is not free from

surveillance and control by the state. Moreover, the state official media have employed Weibo to speak for them as well. With that being said, although nonofficial nationalism discourse pervades on Weibo, the influence of the state and government should not be overlooked. The current section finds and interprets the official nationalism frame that emerged embedded in the posts generated by each user group.

4.4.2.1 <u>Media Outlets</u>

Earlier in this section, I have explained that the media outlets use Weibo for news dissemination. Posts associated with the official nationalism frame focused on news coverage on: government announcements/statements, state's attitude towards sovereignty and territory, and the endorsement of the party and its leadership.

One leading official nationalism topic focused on the reactions of Chinese government, especially on how the Chinese government responded to the unfolding of the events, mostly its diplomatic means. The media outlets actively covered the government announcements. Throughout the events, the Chinese government was responding quickly to every movement that Japan took, issuing strong warnings, severe condemnation, and diplomatic protest. Such response is one very standard rhetoric of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to comment on international issues. The following post exemplifies the media accounts rearticulating the statements from MFA in the events.

> "Chinese people desire peace and keep walking on the way of peaceful development without hesitation. However, peace must be built on the foundation of mutual respect, not on our sacrifices on the sovereignty and territory integrity as a price. We hereby seriously warn the Japanese government: Do not play with the fire! Otherwise, it will be the Japanese side who must be responsible to all the consequences caused by this dangerous and futile farce." (*"中国人民渴望和平，坚持走和平发展的道路不动摇，但和平必须建立在相互尊重的基础上，我们绝不会以牺牲主权和领土完整为代价。在此，我们郑重警告日本政府：不要玩火！否则，由这场危险而徒劳的闹剧造成的一切后果，只能由日方承担。"*)

Such government statements also expressed the ruthless determination of the Chinese government to defend the islands with its expanded military power. The official media expressed the gradually toughened military rhetoric toward Japan throughout the events on Weibo. They attempted to convince the Chinese people that China is prepared to fight for the territory at any cost. However, scholars claimed that Beijing's response was overall very mild (Gries et al., 2016). The following example represents a typical message from the official media outlets that addressed the absolute determination of the government to defend China's territory.

> "[Liberation Army Daily: Never dream to steal half square feet of our territory] By pushing forward the "nationalization" of Diaoyu Islands at its own will, the Japanese government is publicly challenging the territory and sovereignty of China, as well as its national dignity. Japanese politicians should not misread the times nowadays. Today's China is not what it was when the "918" incident broke out; today's Chinese army is not the Northern Navy during the Sino-Japanese war, with the liberation army surging significantly. The Japanese government will be burnt by the fire set by its own if keeping walking on the wrong way." *("【解放军报：休想攫取我国半寸领土】日本政府一意孤行推进钓鱼岛"国有化"，这是对中国领土主权与民族尊严的公然挑战。日本政客不要误读时代。今天的中国已不是"九一八"事变时的中国；今天的中国军队更不是甲午年间的北洋水师，解放军战斗力已突飞猛进。日本政府倘若继续执迷不悟，必将自吞苦果。")*

In the media coverage, national symbols played a critical role in disseminating messages presenting the official discourse. They enumerated historical documents such as reports of maritime security from Ming Dynasty in the 1500s and different maps drawn by Chinese showing the Diaoyu Islands as China's territory. During the dispute period, Xinwen Lianbo (新闻联播), the daily news from the official media channel CCTV started reporting the Diaoyu Islands' weather forecast. Such strategy was employed to declare China's ownership of the islands, primarily to its domestic audiences. In addition, China's national flag was another symbol the media outlets used in their posts. The following headlines represent the use of national symbols in the media coverage.

> "Spokesperson Enumerates Evidence of Chinese Ownership of the Diaoyu Islands" ("【中国外交部发言人列举钓鱼岛为我固有领土依据】")
> "CCTV Broadcasts Weather Forecast for Diaoyu Islands Today" ("【今起新闻联播天气预报将增加钓鱼岛】")

4.4.2.2 <u>Organic Users</u>

Quantitatively, organic users utilized official nationalism in less than 10% of their entire posts. Many of them were agitated by the official discourse during the dispute. Their intense sentiments not only targeted the Japanese islands purchase, but also their own government. The official diplomatic strategy was confronted vigorously with deep suspicion, confusion, and disapproval among those Weibo users. Many of them expressed anger toward their own government because of its softness and ambiguousness in dealing with Japan. They were frustrated at the verbal warnings such as "severe condemnation and protests" from the Chinese government, and they further vented their complaints about an incompetent government by questioning the ownership of the islands. The following examples illustrate how Weibo users respond to the government's job in the dispute.

> "If the Diaoyu Islands belong to China. Please send army on them, if not, why bother to protest?" *("假如钓鱼岛是中国的，请派军队驻守；假如不是中国的，何必不痒不痛的谴责？")*

> "I am very angry on the Diaoyu Islands dispute! My dear motherland, what are you doing? Japan is stamping on your head, and you are still condemning and protesting? So many of us are very disappointed. What are you waiting for?" *("发现自己对钓鱼岛事件无比的愤怒 我亲爱的祖国啊 你都在干什么啊 人家都踩到头顶了 你还抗议 还谴责 多少民众心灰意冷啊...还不强硬...等什么啊！")*

The frustrated and furious sentiments towards the state's nationalist demands extended into other fields, especially sport, during the study period. Several Chinese leaders from different eras realized the importance of and employed sport for both international and national goals (Xu, 2009). The 2012 Summer Olympics in London serves as an ideal event to observe the reflection of modern sports and Chinese nationalism on Weibo. The majority of organic users who discussed the Olympics showed their enthusiasm toward China's territory more than the medals

in the Olympic Games. Furthermore, they called China's obsession with medals and international

status into question. The following posts illustrate the opinions on the Olympics during the

dispute.

"Honestly, I have zero enthusiasm towards the Olympics. No matter how many gold medals we win, Japan won't return the Diaoyu Islands, Philippines won't let go of the Huang Yan Island, Taiwan is not returning to China, and the U.S. won't miss any opportunity to defeat China…how does the gold medal help boost China's position?" ("*真心想说，对于奥运我已经完全没有热情了，中国金牌拿得再多日本也不会把钓鱼岛拱手相让；菲律宾也不会对黄岩岛松口；台湾也不会欢天喜地地投怀送抱；美国也不会放过任何一个暗地里变着法子打压你中国的机会。。。金牌，到底能提高中国的什么地位呢？*")

"The gold medals are Chinese people's spiritual opium, and it only lasts for a few days! A gold medal makes an ordinary Chinese happy for a few days, but what does the gold medal give for your own life? South China Sea, the Diaoyu Islands, no change!" ("*奥运金牌是全民的精神鸦片！药效只有几天而已！得了金牌P民高兴了几天，回到自己的显示生活，该怎么样还是怎么样？南海、钓鱼岛，老毛子照样开炮！*")

Throughout the 2012 dispute, China's leaders avoided escalating the issue with Japan.

Besides the official and diplomatic condemnation and protest, the Chinese government sent

patrol and fishery boats to the water surrounding the islands. However, they were not escorted by

the army, PLA's vessels. Organic users expressed their dissatisfaction with the PLA in the

dispute; as shown in the first example below, they started questioning and jeering at the army's

incompetence in reclaiming the disputed territory. Additionally, disappointed by their own

government's reactions, some users started formulating their own military strategies to defend

the islands, such as praising the Hong Kong grassroots activists and organizing boats to travel to

defend China's territory.

"PLA, can you go on the Diaoyu Islands? Can they reclaim the Paracel Islands? The Huang Yan Island? Tannu Uriankhai? The Southern Tibet? Dare you? You don't! You can only parade and threaten your own people!" ("*敢上钓鱼岛吗？敢收复西沙南沙黄岩岛吗？敢收复唐努乌梁海吗？敢收回江东六十屯整个外东北吗？敢收复藏南吗？敢吗？不敢吧？！就知道在老百姓面前迈正步，唬自己人！！*")

"Salute to the Hong Kong heroes! When can we go to the islands to defend our own territory? I am going to join the civic army! Last, don't expect the official statements, they are useless s**t! Useless!" ("*向这些(香港)英雄们致敬！谁有兴趣咱也组织个民间船去钓鱼岛那捍卫咱的华夏领*

土？或是谁已经有了？通知老脏一声，我要加入你们？最后还想说的是别在对无用的官方们期盼什么狗屎了，啥要求放人或强烈谴责的 P 话都已经听惯了！没用的东西！")

Contrary to the expression of frustration and disappointment, traditional Chinese official nationalism discourse in favor of the state's rhetoric was still endorsed by some organic users on Weibo. Safeguarding China's sovereignty and territorial integrity was another dominant topic found in the posts within this category. Many of them claimed that to defend the Diaoyu Islands was to protect the sacredness of their motherland. For instance,

"I hope all Chinese unite and defend the sacred territory of China –the Diaoyu Islands!" *("希望所有中国人起来坚决保卫祖国神圣领土钓鱼岛！")*

People would rather die than be disgraced! The Diaoyu Islands belong to China, and more to us as Chinese people! The Japs are bullying us for so many years, enough! If the war is unavoidable, our swords should cut off the heads of the Japs! Do you support me? ("*中国古有言，人可杀，不可辱！钓鱼岛是中国的领土，更是属于我们人民的！属于我们的钓鱼岛被小小弹丸之国日本欺凌了数十年，真够了！如果此战不可避免，大刀应向鬼子们的头上砍去！试问大家，会支持么！")*

The official nationalism frame was manifested in posts attempting to reinforce support for the CCP's leadership in China as well. Besides defending the islands, some organic users took a step further to explicitly declare their support of the communist party, the army, and the Chinese leaders. For some users, patriotism means to support and love the ruling party. The following posts illustrate users' willingness to obey the party's leadership and follow the party's demand in defending China.

"The great PLA is the people's army guided by Mao's thoughts. The PLA is not afraid of bleeding or dying! Whenever there is a call from the party and our motherland, they will eliminate the enemies!" ("*伟大的中国人民解放军，是用毛泽东思想武装起来的人民军队，不怕流血牺牲，敢于斗争、敢于刺刀见红、敢于胜利，只要党和祖国一声令下，必定消灭一切敢于来犯之敌。")*

4.4.2.3 <u>Opinion Leaders</u>

As a less addressed frame by the opinion leaders, the major themes emerging from the discussion suggested their interactions and reconstruction of the official discourse. Those themes can be summarized into three major areas: national unification, government function, and contemporary grievances.

On the issue of sovereignty and territory, opinion leaders expressed their determination and blamed the government and the army for failing the people. The desire for a unified China was clearly articulated by opinion leaders. Many posts expressed their firm determination to safeguard China's territory and the sacredness and inviolability of China's sovereignty. One characteristic of such posts was further addressing the blueprint to realize their determination. For example,

> "The gunshots are still echoing around my ears and the Diaoyu Islands are hitting our hearts. Never forget national humiliation! Defend the sacredness of our territory! Patriotism needs enthusiasm, but needs more efforts. Being prepared and moving forward are the cornerstone of our national rejuvenation! Civilized and rational patriotism is the most powerful demonstration. Unification and hard work makes justice stronger!" ("*81 年前的枪炮声仿佛还在耳边回响，钓鱼岛波涛时刻敲击着我们的心，民族屈辱永志不忘，神圣国土决不容外人践踏，爱国不仅需要热情，报国更需脚踏实地努力，居安思危，砥砺前行是我们民族振兴的坚强基石，文明有序、理性冷静是最强有力的宣示和意志，团结一心、奋发图强必将令正义更有气势和力量！*")

Dissatisfactions with the weak government and army were located at the same time. After the actions taken by Hong Kong and Taiwan activists, Chinese people expected the government to take tougher and more effective actions against Japan. However, the government's only tactic was to send vessels to accompany Chinese fishing boats to work in the disputed area. This reaction provoked questions and debates around the roles of the government and the army in defending China's territory. "Where is the people's army?" became popular in their posts. To them, the army failed to fulfill its mission to protect their motherland.

"Defending the territory is every government's basic duty, the unarmed people shouldn't be on the frontier!" *("保护自身领土是每个政府的天职，本就不该等到需要赤手空拳的百姓打先锋。")*

"People initated, where is our PLA? Defending the integrity of sovereignty and territory is the sacred duty of our army. Are you performing your duties?" ("*人民已经行动了，人民子弟兵在哪里呢？！维护祖国统一和领土主权完整是军队的神圣使命，你们履行使命了吗？"*)

Reference to the softness of the Chinese government's reactions was noted frequently. Same as the complaint from organic users, they grumbled about the official statements as ineffective. They extended their criticism about softness to the mere display of national and military power by the government commenters and military experts. For some users, these means are funny, unacceptable, and even insulting for Chinese people. As a result, much of the dissatisfaction towards the government reaction was manifested in questioning for a stronger effect. The posts below exemplify such discursive strategy.

"The Diaoyu Islands belong to China. Chinese territory is sacred and inviolable! BUT the Japanese army is on there. Now you tell me who owns the islands?" ("*钓鱼岛是中国的，中国领土神圣不可侵犯！但是人家日本都有在上面驻扎军队了，你说岛是谁的？是谁的？！"*)

"The sovereignty of territory is not declared by the army or the government, but by activists, and the foreign navy can do whatever they want. Funny?" ("*一个国家的领土主权不是由军队去宣示,不是由政府去宣示,而是由志愿者去,然后任由被他国军舰冲撞逮捕,可笑还是可悲?"*)

Lastly, opinion leaders moaned about contemporary grievances via the lens of official nationalism. As suggested in previous sections, users on Weibo express their ire toward the government bureaucracy, corruption and social injustice, and their own economic conditions and insecurity. Within this frame, they represent their complaints using metaphors, irony, and sarcasm. The following posts complain about house prices using sarcasm.

"The price Japan paid for the islands purchase is invisaion to China, and more it's a humiliation to Chinese housing/property price. All levels of Chinese governments say no to the purchase!" *("日本 1.66 亿购买钓鱼岛，不仅是对中国赤裸裸的侵略，也是对中国地价的严重侮辱，中国各级政府决不答应。@任志强")*

Also, some new themes expressing contemporary grievances, such as freedom to travel in China and access to information, are discovered only under this frame.

> "I have no idea why China is so ridiculous. Let alone the Diaoyu Islands, we can't travel freely to our own territory like Hong Kong and Macau. Look, if the Americans can't go to Alaska. Can we say anything about the territory integrity and equal rights in China?" ("*我也一直想不通为什么中国会这么荒谬绝伦。不说钓鱼岛，中国人连铁板钉钉属于中国领土的香港、澳门也不能说去就去。想想美国人如果去夏威夷阿拉斯加还受限制，还能说是领土完整、人人平等吗？"*)

> "Hong Kong activist Kuang Yang checked in on Facebook while on the Diaoyu Islands. When I saw it, my heart is down! If he could browse Facebook, it means that Diaoyu Islands don't belong to China." ("*香港保钓人士杨匡通过 Facebook 在钓鱼岛打卡签到，看到这我的心一下子凉了，能上 Facebook，说明钓鱼岛不是我国领土..."*)

This section investigates the posts that embedded the official nationalism frame. The findings suggest that discussions from the three groups overlapped with each other, but each group has its own agenda in utilizing the official discourse. Besides the nonofficial and official nationalism frames, the study identifies a relational nationalism frame that offers a global context to better understand the islands dispute and the perceived "China" in the global order.

4.4.3. The Relational Nationalism Frame

Lastly, this section presents findings of the second most prominent frame that emerged from the discussion – the *relational nationalism* frame, identified 7,624 times among all the posts. Each of the three user groups examined in this dissertation contributed about 30% of their posts with this frame. Overall, posts embedded with this frame tend to emphasize the origin of the Diaoyu Islands dispute, the bilateral international relationship such as Sino-Japan, Sino-America, Taiwan issue, and international perception of the current dispute. It has been suggested elsewhere that bilateral relationships serve as the most prominent source in understanding Chinese sovereignty and nationalism (Feng & Yuan, 2014). The relational nationalism frame also places Chinese cyber nationalism within a global context. In the posts, China is viewed as a

modern nation-state, and people express their imaginations and understandings of the nation through their construction of the islands dispute.

4.4.3.1 Media Outlets

Despite the radical sentiments towards Japan observed among organic users and opinion leaders, the media outlets framed China's bilateral relationships differently. Their posts covered the origin of the dispute, the factors defining Sino-Japan relationships, and perceived international relations during the dispute. Notably, the media posts were primarily targeted at the domestic audience, rather than targeting international opinions.

Japan and China are closely tied by their geographic distance, cultural resemblance, and economic dependence. During the dispute, media coverage minimized tensions between the two countries. Instead, overall throughout the events, they tended to emphasize the mutual interests and friendship in Sino-Japan relations. As mentioned earlier, the year of 2012 is the 40th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China. For the media outlets, especially official media on Weibo, the Japanese islands dispute undermines the rapprochement between two countries. The majority of the coverage urged Japan to cease the purchase and respect history to avoid Sino-Japan war. For instance, the next example envisions a healthy and friendly Sino-Japan relationship, if Japan suspends the islands purchase.

> "'Global Times: Stop the Islands Purchase to Avoid War' The only thing to help the Sino-Japan relation is to cease the islands purchase. The only way to develop a healthy and friendly Sino-Japan relation is to solve the islands issue together. The solution to the islands dispute is fundamental to rapprochement for both countries." ("【环球时报：停止购岛是中日免"战"第一步】挽救中日邦交的唯一可能在于停止任何形式的"购岛交易"，而发展健康友好的中日关系的唯一出路在于立即着手解决钓鱼岛问题的共同研究和外交交涉，通过解决钓鱼岛问题迈出中日实现历史和解的第一步。停止"购岛交易"是第一步")

In addressing the reasons and responsibility of the current dispute, Weibo media outlets tended to blame Shintaro Ishihara, the Tokyo governor, who proposed to purchase the islands in the first place. The media outlets portrayed this individual decision as responsible for the 2012 islands dispute. For instance, the next post says that the governor interrupted and broke the Sino-Japan alliance ultimately in the important year.

> "The tension escalation of the Diaoyu Islands dispute between China and Japan imitated by Shintaro Ishihara. He wants to interrupt and demage Sino-Japan alliance." ("*这次中日之间围绕钓鱼岛一系列热点升级，实际上起因在于石原慎太郎，想在今年这个重要的年头，来干扰，甚至破坏中日关系的同盟。*")

Later on, instead of attributing blame to an individual, media outlets on Weibo switched their target to the Japanese extreme rightist. Either way, the Chinese media outlets on Weibo showed little interest in infuriating Japan and Japanese in general or provoking radical anti-Japanese sentiments among Chinese. The following headline demonstrates the strategies of media outlets used to blame the Japanese belligerent extreme rightists.

> "Japanese rightists landed on the Diaoyu Islands and placed a Japanese flag" *("【日本右翼分子登钓鱼岛插日本国旗】")*

The media outlets also addressed Sino-Japan relations to warn the domestic audience that how the Chinese acted in defense of the Diaoyu Islands would impact the bilateral relation. The official media, as shown in the following example, point out that defending the islands is not China's priority. The only influence of the movements is to jeopardize China.

> "'People's Daily: Wrangling Japan is stupid and defending Diaoyu Islands is hurting China' Head to the Branch of People's Daily in Japan comments on the Hong Kong activists landing on the Diaoyu Islands. He says that currently China's focus is not the Diaoyu Islands but to develop its economy. If we want to solve the islands dispute now to anger Japan, will make our generations suffer!" *("【人民日报：与日闹翻是蠢事 保钓是害国】人民日报日本分社社长韩晓清今天发表评论说：香港保钓人士登上钓鱼岛是害国行为。中国当前最重要的是发展经济，而不是夺回钓鱼岛。因此，如果在现阶段提前提出解决钓鱼岛问题，与日本彻底闹翻，是让中华民族子孙后代后悔莫及的蠢事。")*

Before Japan, the United States was the major target of Chinese cyber nationalism after the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 (Tok, 2010). In contrast to their coverage on Sino-Japan relations, the media depicted a deteriorating Sino-America relationship, due to the United States' own agenda in the region, the U.S.-Japan alliance, and its long-term ambiguity about Sino-Japan relations. The media coverage was slanted to shape news stories about the U.S.-Japan relation in a negative tone, and casting China as a victim of their alliance. The following post exemplify the ambiguity of America's attitude on the islands ownership and its intention to only benefit itself while acting as an intermediary.

> "'Beijing Daily: The U.S. is never an ambassador of peace' Leon Panetta visits China, but his intention is not the peace in East Asia, he will only faithfully protect the interests of the U.S. The Diaoyu Islands dispute is agreed between the U.S. and Japan. He addresses the U.S.-Japan alliance in Japan, and now he says he has no position in the dispute. The American way to mediate is to make it worse!" ("*#言论#【北京日报：美国从来就不是什么和平使者】帕内塔前来，不会诚心诚意维护东亚和平，他只会诚心诚意维护美国利益。钓鱼岛问题，本就是美日私相授受形成的。帕内塔在日本强调美日同盟，承诺部署导弹防御系统，来到中国便开始宣称不持立场，大谈友好外交、和平解决。如此"调停"，显然是在火上浇油。"*)

In addition to Sino-Japan and Sino-America relationships, Taiwan is another critical component in the relational nationalism frame. As explained in the last chapter, the persistent islands dispute involves three parties claiming ownership of the islands. The political status of Taiwan itself is a contentious issue: Taiwan claims and operates as an independent regime, while China claims sovereignty of Taiwan. Against this background, the coverage followed the basic national policy, firmly regarding Taiwan as part of China. Consequently, media posts emphasized protecting the Diaoyu Islands together and minimized the political crisis between China and Taiwan. They addressed that compatriots on both sides belong to the same family, and the two sides should cooperate to safeguard the overall interests of the Chinese nation. The next post represents the framing on the dispute involving Taiwan in the news.

"The spokesperson of the Taiwan office states that the people across the straits are one family. Defending the Diaoyu Islands and defending Chinese nation's interests are the duties of people in Taiwan and in mainland China." ("*国台办发言人范丽青表示，两岸同胞是一家人，"兄弟阋于墙，外御其侮"。维护对钓鱼岛及其附属岛屿的主权，维护中华民族整体利益，是两岸同胞义不容辞的共同责任。*")

Consequently, the media especially the official media frame Ma Ying-Jeou, the President of Taiwan at the time, in a rather negative way. The media covered actions taken by Ma, who travelled to the islands' nearby area to claim Taiwan's sovereignty over the islands. However, regardless of his actions to defend the islands, Ma was negatively portrayed as having a hidden agenda to force the international community to recognize the independence of Taiwan.

Aside from bilateral relations, media outlets emphasized that Beijing has gained support from the international community. Their coverage usually cited foreign experts and politicians who show their understanding and support of China's claims. Media outlets also covered reports from foreign media on their stance with China and their recognition of China's ownership over the islands. Such coverage aimed to display China's international status. The headlines of media outlets' posts below illustrate Australia official disagreement with Japan's claim over the islands and expresses the intention to strengthen cooperation with China.

"Australia doesn't support Japan's claim on the Diaoyu Islands "("*【澳对日本关于钓鱼岛说法不给任何支持】*")

"*How German mainstream media report the Diaoyu Islands dispute* "("*【德国主流媒体如何报道中日钓鱼岛事件】*")

4.4.3.2 Opinion Leaders

In general, about one third (30.4%, n=685) of the opinion leaders' discussion approached and constructed the islands dispute using the relational nationalism frame. In the posts embedded with the relational nationalism frame, the opinion leaders discuss bilateral relations with Japan and the U.S. and the Taiwan issue in a different framework than the media outlets. A potentially

friendly Sino-Japan relation does not exist for them. Overall, they adopted a pro-war discursive strategy to approach the issue. To address their perceptions of the relation, they employed a much stronger anti-Japanese voice than the media. Unlike media outlets who carefully blamed the Japanese individual and rightists, their posts identified Japan as an enemy of China – an enemy who must be taken care of. Many users suggested military means were necessary, even if the two countries went to war. Remarkably, they sought alternative information sources more than domestic news channels. The Japanese sources tended to show a tough attitude, suggesting to Japanese readers that China catalyzed the dispute. Thus, the more news opinion leaders posted from the Japanese side, the more likely their words could spin public opinion to detest Japan.

> "Use economic and military to treat Japan is the only remedy for Japan!" ("*必须经济、军事双管齐下，方可医治日本的病。*")

> Stop boosting Sino-Japan friendship! Japan's PM slapped Chinese leader on his face. Please 1. Carry out economic sanction on Japan. 2. Have military practices on the Diaoyu Islands. ("*不要再吹嘘中日友好了，日本首相狠狠的抽了中国领导人一个耳光。请中国政府对日本政府：1 展开经济制裁；2 在钓鱼岛军事演习。*")

Despite disapproval for the amiable Sino-Japan relation, the opinion leaders advised people to separate Japanese government from the Japanese people. They desired and called for friendly Sino-Japan relations only in the nongovernmental realms. In the next example, they try to warn their Chinese fellows to act appropriately to achieve the friendship between ordinary people in those two countries. One popular post fiercely condemned the patriots who cannot separate Japanese people and Japanese food from its government. It can be assumed that such a message was targeted at enraged nationalists, who are too undereducated and poor to afford housing and democracy.

> *"Japanese government, Japanese people, and Japanese food are different! F**k you people, why can't you distinguish Japanese government and its people? Love your mother**king country! You love it, and you can't afford buying a place or rent! Democracy?? Even your parents have no idea what it is!" ("日本政府是日本政府，日本人民是日本人民，日本料理更是日本料理，你妈*

逼，你们丫傻逼吧，政府与人民与饮食都分不清，爱你妈逼国啊！爱的你连房子都买不起也租不起，爱的你连＂民主＂这个词都是你爸妈听你爷爷说的！”)

Same as the media portrait of the United States' role in the islands dispute, the U.S. has been viewed as hostile and evil. Opinion leaders regard the U.S. as the initiator of the dispute; some users blame the U.S. from a historical perspective, while some address the U.S. as a backstage supporter of Japan. As differently as the media accuse the U.S.-Japan alliance, opinion leaders make the U.S. a separate enemy of China. Overall, many opinion leaders noted that the 2012 incidents represent the cynical manipulation of Sino-Japan relations for U.S. political and economic gain.

Envisioning the U.S. as an arrogant and selfish entity, opinion leaders discussed an anti-U.S. strategy on Weibo. As mentioned earlier, they advocated to boycott American products because the U.S. initiated the dispute. In terms of bilateral relations, their posts are aggressive and aimed to express and stir anti-U.S. sentiments. For instance,

"The U.S. is a fox! F**k, go die, U.S.!" ("*美国就是大狐狸，靠，美国你快灭忙吧!*")

The problem of Taiwan remains a major concern for the opinion leaders' discussion of bilateral relations. The discussion embedded their understandings of the Taiwan issue toward addressing the islands dispute primarily at three levels. First, they recognized China's sovereignty over Taiwan. Some opinion leaders bundled the islands dispute with the issue of Taiwan, and the islands dispute is a key factor of the Taiwan issue. Moreover, ultimately, China's unification relies on the settlement of Taiwan issue. The following examples state their attitudes toward both issues.

"Taiwan and the Diaoyu Islands are part of China!" ("*台湾和钓鱼岛是中国不可分割的一部分!*")

"The Diaoyu Islands issue is part of Taiwan problem. If we can't solve the islands dispute, we can't sovle the Taiwan problem. It's vital to China's national unification. Even no grass is alive on the land,

we can't give it up!" ("*钓鱼岛问题是台湾问题的一部分，钓鱼岛问题不解决，台湾问题不能最终解决，它跟中国的统一和民族复兴大业统一联系在一起的，它不是不长草的地方，就算一根草都不长，我们也不能丢。"*)

Secondly, they recognized and praised Taiwan's efforts to protect the islands as a means to criticize the Chinese government for its incompetence in solving the problem. Only under this circumstance did the opinion leaders regard Taiwan as its own regime. In several posts, they called Taiwan Dang Guo 党国, the Taiwan version of a one-party political system. Third, the opinion leaders overly glorified Ma Ying-jeou for his re/actions in the islands protection throughout the events. Compared to their own leader at home, the opinion leaders portrayed Ma as a national hero who is willing to risk his own life to protect the territory. Some claimed that for Ma's performance in the dispute, he is destined to be remembered in history.

Opinion leaders also resorted to international endorsements for China's ownership of the islands. On one hand, instead of showing and reinforcing the international support Chinese government gains, the opinion leaders felt the issue had not been recognized by other countries as the media outlets are optimistic. Opinion leaders suggested to further inform other foreign countries and the international community about the islands dispute, so China can start a just war with Japan.

 "If we solve the dispute, we need to start a just war, so we have to let more ordinary people in foreign countries to know the islands dispute. The Japs illegally invaded China's territory. Chinese people know it but many foreigners don't! We need to have international support." ("*我们最终要解决问题（预计是军事手段），必须师出有名，这就必须让尽可能多的外国普通百姓知道钓鱼岛归属问题有争议，小日本非法占领。现在国人知道日本非法占领，但很多外国人不知道啊。这就是在国际上挑战日本占领的法理性。"*)

On the other hand, when the opinion leaders acknowledged that Japan receives support from other countries, they tended to attack whoever showed such support to Japan. In those augments, China was not considered a victim as in the U.S.-Japan alliance; it becomes a super

power that can suppress countries who are sympathetic with Japan. Those countries are described

as "dreaming (to defeat China)" and jokes to mess with Chinese people.

> "The president of Panama says that "The Diaoyu Islands belong to Japan." What a stupid idiot!"
> ("*巴拿马总统称"钓鱼岛是日本固有领土" 这 SB*")

4.4.3.3 <u>Organic Users</u>

Overall, the relational nationalism frame serves as another significant lens through which

organic users could understand and interpret the islands dispute. The organic users contributed

30.2% (n=6,885) of their total discussion with this frame. Situating China in a global context, a

generally aggressive animosity towards the outside world – especially Japan and the U.S. –

pervaded their discussion. First, organic users rejected the conception of friendship in Sino-Japan

relations in every perspective by both media and opinion leaders. The anti-Japanese sentiments

also pervaded their perception of the Sino-Japan relation.

> "Let me reclaim: I hate Japanese. Even if they all die, it can't ease my anger. Why didn't you all die
> in the earthquake?" *("我再说一遍 我恨日本人 即使他们整个种族消失 也不能平息我的愤怒 地*
> *震怎么还没把你们震死！")*

Secondly, a pro-war theme was identified in their posts as a result of this animosity. Some users

advocated military actions to control the dispute and threaten Japan. They were mostly confident

in China's national power, especially its military force. As addressed earlier, they believe a Sino-

Japan war is the ultimate resolution between two countries.

> "The most expensive thing in the world is not racer cars, not boats, not diamonds but rocks in the sea.
> The name is Diaoyu Islands. If there's a war between China and Japan, it's for the rock! So many
> fighters and vessels and so many young lives! The world will be different because of the islands!"
> *("这世界上最昂贵的不是豪宅 不是跑车 不是游艇 不是钻石 不是好莱坞明星 其实是一枚山峰*
> *石 大海做的托盘 他叫钓鱼岛 如果有一天开局了 中日之间是一场豪赌 为了这枚山峰石 双方会*
> *押上多少架战机 多少舰艇 多少青春的生命 也许世界都会被他改变了 钓鱼岛就是一枚全国人*
> *民都为之热血沸腾小石头")*

In addition to Japan, the U.S. has been accused of being the real cause and target of the

islands dispute for its alliance with Japan and connections with other Asian nations in the region.

Some people even debate that the islands dispute is essentially a Sino-America conflict. The example below expresses the user's hatred towards both Japan and the U.S.; moreover, it also expresses frustration with the Chinese government. It believes in the people's power to boycott American and Japanese products and to reclaim the disputed islands.

> "We must boycott the American goods and fight Japan! Facing the nationalization of the islands, our incompetent government only protests, useless. Our army and policemen are against our own people, but I believe that our people are strong if we unite to boycott the American and Japanese goods! Let's do it to save the Diaoyu Islands." *("钓鱼岛没了，中国人民必须做好抵制美货，准备第二次抗日！面对日本国有化钓鱼岛的行为，阳痿的执政党除了抗议以外，面对美日霸占我国领土行为，毫无办法，几百万的军警只是用来对付国内人民，但我相信我们的人民是强悍的！只要我们联合起来抵制美货、抗衡日货，才能挽救钓鱼岛命运!")*

While some users seemed overly confident in China's capability, other organic users held a pessimistic view of winning international support in the islands dispute. They projected their feelings on the domestic grievances in real life to illustrate their imaginations of China in the world order. Such imaginations are often confined within one's own experience.

> "A Sino-Japan war over the Diaoyu Islands, who will lose? The international community thinks China loses the war. 1. The corrupted government can't unite people. 2. Army is corrupted with no combative effectiveness. 3. The weapons are too old. 4. China is already isolated by international community. 5. People have no faith in the government anymore." ("*中日在钓鱼岛开战，谁战败？国际社会普遍认为中国很可能战败：1.政府已腐败，难凝聚民心；2.军队更腐败，无多大战斗力；3.武器落后，歼10仅是美国三十年前的技术；4.在国际上已被孤立，四面楚歌；5.民众对政府失望之至，参与作战的积极性很弱。*")

Lastly, the mainland-Taiwan issue in the organic users' discussion was diversified. To them, Taiwan and its leaders took effective measures to respond to Japan's claims of sovereignty of the islands. A profound distrust toward China was found in addressing the Taiwan issue. Again, it appeared easy for organic users to project their perception of real life onto China's world order. Some users refused to recognize China's ownership of the Diaoyu Islands for their perception of the Taiwan issue. The following post best bolsters such a claim and expresses distrust toward a corrupt Chinese government.

"Stupid idiots and blinded young people! Let alone the Diaoyu Islands, Taiwan doesn't belong to China either! Can we stop daydreaming and claiming the islands belong to us? Our government is corrupted. They only know how to gather money and send to foreign countries. Our officers will flee out of China first!" ("*傻 X 们，盲目的愤青们。别说钓鱼岛了，连台湾，中国都说是自己的，可是中国把自己的军舰开到台湾吗？能不能不在那里意淫，说钓鱼岛是自己的。现在的政府，一天到晚除了贪污腐败，疯狂敛财，转移资产外还会干什么。一旦战争真的来了，当官的跑的比谁都快。*")

Along this line, some even directed their ire and challenged the Chinese leadership for its incompetence to reclaim Taiwan and protect the Diaoyu Islands. Some demanded the Chinese leader to step down, as shown in the following post.

"If you can't reclaim Taiwan and defend the Diaoyu Islands, what makes you the leader of China? Step down!" ("*收不回台湾，保护不了钓鱼岛，还有资格做国家第一领导啊，不行就让位吧。*")

To sum up, the relational national frame was employed by Weibo users to construct the islands dispute and China in a broader global context. The analyses of posts by the three groups indicate that each group perceives China's role in the current world order differently based on their own purposes and interests. The reasons and possible factors that lead to such diversification will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.5 Summary

RQ3 asks how media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users adopt and renegotiate the cyber nationalism frames that emerged in the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo. The study identifies three overarching frames on social media in China: nonofficial nationalism, official nationalism, and relational nationalism. To answer this question, a discourse analysis was conducted to explore frame adoption among media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users. Findings also suggest that Chinese cyber nationalism is diversified, stratified, and fragmented across and within each social player group. Findings also reveal a pluralistic and expandable

Chinese cyber nationalism discourse, and people adopt and renegotiate frames according to their own interests and purposes.

While investigating RQ3, this section also attempts to answer RQ4, the role of Sina Weibo in the dispute. Simply put, Weibo serves as an information center fed by all users, a discursive space for various sentiments and opinions, and a site for movement mobilization during the dispute. As mentioned earlier, the role of Weibo must be understood within its historical context. The following chapter will further discuss alternative ways to understand and theorize Weibo.

5. DISCUSSION

The century-long dispute between China and Japan over the ownership of the Diaoyu Islands, the uninhabited islets and rocks, triggered in 2012 a series of drastic and intense online discussions and the largest scale of anti-Japanese demonstrations ever seen across China. The Japanese government ignored China's strong opposition and solemn protest to purchase some islands from the so-called owner and further nationalize the Diaoyu Islands. In the summer of 2012, the Diaoyu Islands dispute exploded on Sina Weibo. I began wondering why people in China, especially those on Weibo, became so involved and interested in the islands dispute. Among various social media platforms in China, Weibo gained its popularity during and after the high-speed rail train crash in Wenzhou in 2011. Weibo users updated the accident seamlessly in real time, aggressively questioning and resisting the way in which the Chinese government handled the accident, drawing more than 10 million comments over just a few days (Custer, 2011). The active participation of the media outlets and general public on Weibo during these massive events symbolized Weibo's prime time and a potentially new era of the internet in China. At that time, a moment stunned us with the vision of a bright future for Weibo, and people felt the power of social media even in an authoritarian China.

The dual rise of cyber nationalism and social media in China in 2012 inspired the research for this study, and such phenomenon initiated inquiries at both empirical and conceptual levels. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the manifestations of Chinese cyber nationalism using the case of the Diaoyu Islands dispute and determine how different social players communicated and constructed the issue on Weibo. To achieve these aims, the research was conducted using frame analysis guided by frame theory and networked framing using a mixed-

method research approach. The techniques used for the frame analysis in this dissertation include content analysis, a labeled LDA topic model, and discourse analysis. This approach enables me to analyze the issue on both quantitative and qualitative levels. Acknowledging the shortcomings of both quantitative and qualitative techniques, the iterative and exploratory process helps me to best extract and interpret the meanings embedded in a plethora of social media texts.

This chapter reviews and discusses the major findings and their implications, and concludes by describing the limitations of the current research and suggesting future research directions.

5.1   <u>Summary of Findings</u>

The analyses were conducted using a mixed methods approach. First, I analyzed Weibo's user categorization, the metadata of the selected users, and their offline identities. Second, a content analysis was utilized to gain a preliminary understanding of the dataset and train the classifier for the topic modeling. Third, a labeled LDA topic model, a technique that a computer learns to predict and determine content-analytical patterns of texts on a large scale from a set of human-labeled documents, helped the coding of the dataset. The topic model identified 11 topics, namely, 1) adversarial sentiments and military actions towards Japan, 2) the narratives of Japan, 3) the roles of the United States, 4) grassroots actions, 5) the roles of Hong Kong, 6) China's sovereignty and territory, 7) the historical memories, 8) the official responses, 9) the roles of Taiwan, 10) contemporary grievances, and 11) boycott and protest. Among them, topics 1, 4, and 11 were the most popular topics on Weibo during the dispute, while topics 5, 6, and 9 fell on the other end. The distribution of the 11 topics reveals a centralization of and imbalance between topics that emerged during the discussion on the islands dispute. Such bias resonated throughout the findings on the existing scholarship of Chinese cyber nationalism, and underscored some

statements as well. The 11 topics, considered as major elements, are reorganized into three frames: the nonofficial nationalism, the official nationalism, and the relational nationalism. Lastly, frame and discourse analyses were carried out to further manifest how different social players adopted and renegotiated these frames to perceive and interpret the islands dispute on Weibo.

Previous social theories of communicative nationalism tend to concentrate on the homogeneity, the unity of people, and the comradeship within a nation (see Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Deutsch, 1966). Admittedly, a nation could be considered as a group of individuals who belong to, either actually or perceptually, the nation. The people are bonded together by the nation's common ancestry, culture, and history (Zheng, 1999). For China, the modern concept of nationalism didn't exist until it was introduced by Chinese elites in the late 19th century. A line of studies on China demonstrates "Chineseness" as the specialness of Chinese as a people, a cultural, social, and political entity (see Fairbank, 1992; Huntington, 1996). The current study is guided by the alternative view of nationalism, which considers nationalism through the diversity and differences among people in a society. Hence, Chinese nationalism is about the different forms of nationalism held by different social and political groups in China. While Chinese nationalism serves a critical field for scholarly debates, Chinese cyber nationalism on social media has been a largely understudied phenomenon. The frame analysis was used to provide evidence and explanation of the diversity of Chinese cyber nationalism communicated among media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users on Weibo. The next section addresses the major findings of the frame analysis, starting with the elite framers identified among the users who produced the most popular posts on Weibo.

5.1.1 <u>**Elite Framers**</u>

For the first research question, the analysis of the sources for the most popular posts on Weibo revealed that individual users, rather than official media, dominated the popular discussion of the Diaoyu Islands dispute on Weibo. Between the individuals and the official media lie the commercial, alternative, and reform-minded media outlets. These findings resonate with a prior study on the framing of political discourse on Weibo (Jiang & Fu, 2015), in which posts by influencers and alternative media outpaced those of the official media.

The scholarship of the Chinese media system informs us that the CCP monopolized the Chinese media system instrumentally to propagate the party's policies, directives, and ideologies, and to mobilize the public (Zhao, 2008) until the economic reform of the late 1970s. Since then, the state official media have been actively competing with commercial media outlets, and later with internet media. On social media like Weibo, most of the party's media accounts have various personalities. They continue to propagandize as the party's mouthpiece, but their posts also cater to the masses – especially the young generation – to gain public support. For instance, their posts include a wide range of popular cultural products, such as videos and images, internet memes, and recipes. While the state official media strive to draw more attention, the finding on the prominent users in this study underscores the party's adaptive ability to utilize Weibo to engage and dominate the nationalistic discourses with other users.

Networked framing, as Meraz and Papacharissi suggest, is more crowd-sourced, concerning both non-elites and elites (2013). Weibo as a tool of expression has promoted the importance of individual members, especially in the competition for information diffusion and domination. The finding on prominent Weibo users during the dispute confirmed that such networked framing process has been taking place in Chinese social media. It contrasts with the

previous line of researches on Chinese social media, for those studies viewed the state and censorship as the major forces driving public opinion and interactions on Weibo (King et al., 2013; 2017). More importantly, the voices of a large number of users may collectively and simultaneously alter the dimensions of Chinese nationalism and exert the power of cyber nationalism, in the same ways in which traditional Chinese nationalism affected state policy-making and diplomacy (Nam, 2006). This finding further suggests that some individuals are even more influential than the state official media outlets in guiding nationalistic discourses on social media in China.

However, not all individuals have the same kind of impact on Weibo. Among the individual users, more opinion leaders (i.e. verified users) were identified than organic users. The opinion leaders represent various fields, namely professionals in traditional media, successful businessmen, and intellectuals, and only one account holder was female. This finding indicates that the most influential users are predominately urban, middle class, more educated or have studied abroad, and male, implying profound inequalities in the power to drive and direct the discourse on Weibo, or in the society. Yet, the opinion leaders alone can't promote their voices to prominence. Networked framing addresses the algorithmic aggregations of the platform, such as the way in which Twitter's hashtag feature boosts topic visibility (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013), Weibo's reposts and comments (Jiang & Fu, 2015), and the backstage promotion of certain content. The opinion leaders collaborate with Weibo's algorithms, as Weibo has been tactically encouraging and privileging opinion leaders to increase the platform's popularity and influence for mutual benefit. The next sections discuss the findings of the discourse analysis on the content to better explore the framing of the islands dispute.

5.1.2 <u>Frame Adoption and Renegotiation on Weibo</u>

Research on Chinese nationalism in the age of the internet has attempted to define and explain the emerging social and political phenomena empowered by the internet. However, many of them fall into the "state-mass/grassroots" dualistic thinking mode (see Wang, 2006; Wu, 2007). To overcome this oversimplified dichotomous approach, the dissertation identifies three prominent cyber nationalism frames that were consolidated from 11 topics via a Labeled LDA topic model to better present the manifestation of cyber nationalism on Weibo. Instead of studying Chinese cyber nationalism for all Chinese people, this dissertation analyzed the different social groups, including media outlets, opinion leaders, and organic users. The three frames – nonofficial nationalism, official nationalism, and relational nationalism – were embedded in the posts generated by all three groups, but operated in different and sometimes contrasting ways.

Nonofficial nationalism was the most popular frame that emerged from the discussion in the islands dispute. The expression of strong sentiments is still the most prevailing characteristic of cyber nationalism manifested on Weibo. For the organic users, the radicalized expression of sentiments in the research represents in three major forms: antagonism toward other countries, primarily Japan and the United States; historical pride and humiliation; and anti-government frustration. The radical adversarial sentiments and the surge of drastic grassroots activism towards Japanese business establishments were provoked gradually and instantly by Japan during the dispute or by a specific reference to history, suggesting that cyber nationalism on Weibo is still highly responsive to specific events, as found in other online forms (Tok, 2010; Wu, 2007). The reactions to these provocations activated a plethora of anti-government

sentiments, reflecting users' frustration and indignation towards the Chinese government. The research finds that, to some extent, users prioritize their individualized resentment and demands in real life, rather than concerning state affairs, in the discussion of their unsolved life difficulties in contemporary society.

Opinion leaders on Weibo served as amplifiers for the weak in the lower socioeconomic class, as indicated by some similarities in the discourse articulated by organic users: historical pride and humiliation and grievances in contemporary life. They found themselves sympathetic with the poor people, but tended to distinguish and detach themselves from the poor and weak by displaying a different set of demands – such as the rights of private property and information access – instead of basic needs.

The differentiation of identification is also suggested in the shift in opinion leaders' discourse found when their promotion of the anti-Japanese campaign went out of control. Amid the radicalized sentiments and street demonstrations, rationality and civility were enthusiastically advocated. Consequently, "rational patriotism" became a discursive strategy to compromise between preserving private property ownership and expressing altruistic patriotism. Such a position proved an identity based on support of the rights to private property, which differed from the identity of "the people," the common subject of patriotism (Feng & Yuan, 2014). Meanwhile, such terms as "rational patriots" and "civilized protest" emerged in the discourse to further enhance that identification: one can act patriotically and rationally. Recall that the interest of the dissertation is not in Chinese public opinion as a whole; rather, it is in the voices of the young, urban, more educated and active internet users in nationalistic discussions. These expressed desires of reason and civility are indicative both of the material position of an

emerging middle stratum (Feng & Yuan, 2014) and of its subjective disposition in contemporary society.

Media outlets on Weibo strategically employed the opinion leaders' "rationality and civility" discourse to articulate and propagate the state's demands to its domestic audience in reconciling grassroots sentiments and state stability. Media outlets largely rejected and avoided the popular nationalistic discourse beyond implying that the protests were permitted by the state; but they had no intention to further escalate the movements among the domestic audience. For the same purpose, media outlets shifted their emphasis to pro-China/anti-Japanese protests overseas instead of domestic demonstrations to show support from Chinese people overseas and distance the street demonstrations into a foreign context.

While operating the *official nationalism* frame, the major roles played by the media outlets were to stabilize the domestic situation and propagate state-orchestrated nationalistic discourses to domestic audiences as well. Official statements, such as severe diplomatic protests against Japan, were densely reported by the media outlets. Uniformly, media official nationalism discourse aimed to display a strong China in national power and indicate China's firm position and absolute determination in sovereignty and territorial issues. However, the current research found that those messages were not targeted at Japan or the larger international community, but at China's general audience at home.

Ironically, the media outlets' framing of official nationalism boomeranged against themselves and the state, evident in the interpretation and reconstruction of the official nationalistic discourse by opinion leaders and organic users. A set of core values defining state patriotism launched in the 1990s are found relevant on social media, specifically national unification, economic developments, and political stability (Zheng, 1999). Against this

background, the Chinese government assured its people that China emerged as a superpower in the world order despite the impact of the global economic crisis (Gries et al. 2016). The organic users aggressively expressed a strong inclination for tough actions and military operations against Japan. The popular nationalists rejected the official nationalism manifested in the media discourse; instead, their framing portrayed an untrustworthy, weak government. The organic users rejected other state/official nationalistic discourses as well. A portion of users on Weibo are not easily manipulated to believe state official nationalism. Modern sport had once been of high importance to enhance patriotism in China (Ecker, 2014; Xu, 2009) and utilized as a national symbol in China's diplomacy (Lam, 2016). The official nationalistic rhetoric emphasized the collective national pride of winning in international games, such as ranking of medals, and record breakers in the Summer 2012 London Olympics. This line of discourse was soon counter-framed by the perception of such national symbol as the Chinese leaders' sick obsession with gold medals and China's controversial nationwide sport system. The findings of the popular nationalists' reaction to the official nationalism frame challenge the existing scholarship of cyber nationalism indicating the polarization between state nationalism and grassroots activism. Current research suggests instead that the two extremes of nationalism coexist and interact on Weibo.

Unlike the rejection of certain aspects of the official nationalistic discourse, opinion leaders adopted both *official nationalism* frames and counter-frames flexibly. Opinion leaders loyally supported the official nationalistic rhetoric in their expressions, but modified and packaged the messages to align with the general public's views. On Weibo, opinion leaders are all real name identified and verified, and most are high profile in their profession or field. Under this circumstance, their expression on Weibo had to be carefully crafted to avoid state

punishment (Buckley, 2013) and gain popular nationalists' endorsement both online and offline. Thus, their posts are more vulnerable to surveillance, manipulation, and deletion (Buckley, 2013). In the framing of official nationalistic aspiration, they deliberately combined the critical elements from both the media and the organic users. Such a strategy is more obviously identified in their application of the *relational nationalism* frame.

On Weibo, China is understood as a modern nation-state through its perceived bilateral international relationships with other nations seen to be significant in its geopolitical interests, especially during incidents that involve China and other political entities. The bilateral relationships serve as the most critical indicator of Chinese sovereignty and nationalism (Feng & Yuan, 2014). The current research suggests diversification in the imaginations of China manifested in the islands dispute. Media outlets framed the Sino-Japan relation in an overall friendly tone that addressed the mutual interests and close connections between these two countries. The U.S.-Japan relation with China was seen as suspicious and China as a victim of that alliance. The glamorization of the Sino-Japan relation served to imply the state's intention to avoid further domestic escalation with Japan. Popular nationalistic discourses flipped media perceptions, and painted them as aggressive and assertive in all bilateral relations. However, resentment best explains organic users' sentiments towards Japan and the U.S. – a mixture of jealousy and hatred was sensed in their ambivalent sentiments toward advancements in the developed countries and China's suffering of humiliation at their hands across history.

In the opinion leaders' discourse, laments were found regarding China's falling behind "civilized" standards and pressures for Chinese people to abandon their belligerent attitude toward other nations. One characteristic of their discourses was a reconciling imagination in which the general publics in foreign countries are in favor of China. Such discursive strategy also

enables opinion leaders to function as mediators between the state and the general public in swaying public opinion, and also to secure their position in Weibo space.

The current research finds that cyber nationalism on Chinese social media embraces various social groups' wide-ranging diversified public opinions and variegated efforts to participate in national politics. In sum, Chinese cyber nationalism is a non-governmental movement within the state's permissive parameters; a grassroots activism facilitated by radicalized sentiments among a large number of participants; an ideological movement that encompasses individual and rights-oriented values; and an adaptive set of guidelines for nationalistic engagements to react to specific demands. Moreover, no longer merely a social political phenomenon, cyber Chinese nationalism is a technological phenomenon assisted by the platform's capability. While there's a profound disconnection between the official nationalistic discourse and popular nationalistic discourse in the pre-social media era, the dissertation found that opinion leaders were promoted as prominent users to dominate the framing on Weibo. And their nationalistic discourse reflected their role as mediators between the state and popular nationalists on Weibo. Thus, cyber nationalism is both a contrasting and reconciling nationalism, as competition for discursive power moves among all social groups. The next section investigates the role of Sina Weibo in the dispute and provides future direction for the theorization of the space.

5.1.3 The Role of Sina Weibo

This dissertation confirmed that Weibo played a significant role to coproduce nationalistic discourses and shape Chinese cyber nationalism. This section reviews the role of Weibo during the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute and offers insights for current and future scholarship on Weibo.

First of all, Weibo affords instant information access, exchange of ideas among social groups in real time, and connections between networked selves (Ellison, 2007; Papacharissi, 2011). As mentioned earlier, for many ordinary Chinese, publically expressing their own opinions and emotions was difficult, if not completely beyond their imagination. Weibo offers the audience an "event-oriented" platform, serving as a news aggressor with multiple sources for audiences to follow an event based on their own preferences. Despite sophisticated state censorship, the affordances of Weibo made self-presentation possible for ordinary people and provided them a relatively open platform on which to participate.

Secondly, Weibo's sophisticated mechanism of user identification and ranking system activated and enabled the networked framing of the dispute. Besides individuals, media outlets and other organizations also utilize Weibo as a battlefield. In the construction of cyber nationalism on Weibo, that fact becomes essentially critical because the prominent users, i.e. the opinion leaders in this dissertation, coproduced the nationalistic frames with Weibo's algorithms and renegotiated those frames with media outlets and organic users.

Third, Weibo enabled the possibility to explore the personalized aspects of cyber nationalism and the contestations of national identity across social groups. Cohen (1996) demonstrates the importance of understanding "how individuals perceive their selves and, therefore, to how they perceive their nations" so that researchers may be "alert to the difference between the regime's representations of the nation and individuals' interpretations of those representations" (p 803-804). Weibo made itself an ideal space to examine the factors Cohen advocated, and simultaneously served as a self-expression tool for the general public and the state's microphone for the media outlets.

Fourth, the findings revealed that Weibo breeds distortion in civic news or journalistic practices on social media in China. Studies on Twitter suggest that news on the platform combines a mixture of fact, opinion, and emotion (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Current research found that Weibo and its users permitted fake news and misinformation during the dispute, and the "duanzi" culture on Weibo further encouraged the creation and dissemination of such news content. This finding resonated with the argument that the power of Chinese internet also lies in other playful, prosaic, and entertaining forms (Yang, 2009).

Finally, Weibo has the potential to organize and mobilize action. During the dispute, Weibo served in limited ways as a space for mobilization among disparate individuals. The actions taken in the dispute were observed in a wide range of symbols and actions, resonating with what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argued for as "connective action" which is based on individualized content and loose connections. The role of Weibo to transform ways of organizing and mobilizing campaigns merits further investigation.

To investigate the role of Weibo in Chinese society, the findings of this dissertation suggest an alternative perspective for research in conceptualizing Weibo and internet space in China in general. A major line of research has focused on theorizing the potential of Chinese online space to form a "public sphere" and civil society (see Bohman, 2004; Esarey & Qiang, 2011; Gordon, 2007; Yang, 2003, 2009; Yang & Calhoun, 2007). Habermas (1991) theorizes the genuine "public sphere" as an open space in people's social life where opinion forms as a consequence of debates among people. It features in the common concern of the public, equal accessibility for those interested, and the rational-critical deliberation which is subject to judgment (Calhoun, 1992). The dissertation examined Weibo in a two-dimensional framework.

Vertically, it situated Weibo in its broader social, economic, and political context, and I argued that Weibo is shaped by both institutional and historical contexts. Horizontally, Weibo manifested multiple social forces and interests competing with each other for a legitimate discursive position in the framing of cyber nationalism. The observations of this dissertation, such as the radicalized sentiments and the unequal distribution of power in framing the dispute, challenges the optimistic theorization of Chinese online space, resonating with prior studies which found the Habermasian notion of public sphere inadequate and inaccurate when applied to describe Chinese online space (Meng, 2010).

Chinese scholars (see Tong 2012; Zhi, 2014) have long debated the coexistence of an official opinion field and a grassroots opinion field. Bourdieu offered the idea of "field" that "field is a field of forces and a field of struggles in which the stake is the power to transform the field of forces. In other words, within a field, there is competition for legitimate appropriation of what is at stake in the struggle in the field" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 44). Based on the concept of field, Tong (2012) suggests that public opinion is only created when individuals gathered into groups discuss, exchange, and negotiate to achieve the same or similar discourse. The official opinion field in China is based on the state official media institutions. In the official opinion field, the state media must propagate the party's ideology and intentions, communicate the party's core values to all people, and promote the positive effects of mainstream public opinion. In contrast, the grassroots opinion field is the opinion field of ordinary people mainly operated and assisted by mobile networks (Tong, 2012). Conventionally, there has been a disconnection between the official opinion field and the grassroots opinion field. While this polarization between discourses manifested in Chinese cyber nationalism, the dissertation observes the frame adoption and renegotiation among social groups and finds the opinion leaders' role in bridging

the gap between the two extremes of nationalism. Zhou (2014) suggests that a social field emerged out of Weibo, and the social field provides a suitable model to explain the discursive interactions among official accounts, opinion leaders, and organic users.

Along this line, the discourse of cyber nationalism must be explored as a dynamic and competing object in multiple, overlapping, and competing fields that assemble individuals into groups struggling internally and externally for discursive power on Weibo. Externally, for instance, the state and its media outlets have always been powerful in upholding and explaining the core value of Chinese nationalism/patriotism. Weibo provides ordinary people a platform to express and contest, enabling them to interact with the official discourse by commenting and reporting, and to create an alternative discourse to challenge the official discourse – as the dissertation found counter-framing phenomena in several places. Internally, for example within the opinion leaders group, they have been constantly competing with other opinion leaders to achieve prominence.

This section reviews Weibo's roles in the discussion of the islands dispute. In sum, cyber nationalism on Weibo, featuring a large number of individuals, demonstrates that Weibo is a vibrant, diversified online space that encourages self-expression and fast news production. It also provides a discursive platform for ordinary users for political participation. However, the proliferation of fake news and misinformation generated by organic users was also identified, largely embedded in the duanzi, or "jokes" in traditional Chinese cross talk. In the end, shifting from a Habermasian conceptualization, this research calls for an alternative framework to explain and theorize Chinese social media.

5.2   **<u>Limitations and Significance</u>**

This dissertation provides an illustrative case study on Weibo to study Chinese cyber nationalism. There are several limitations to the dissertation. First, as a case study on Weibo, it treats the Diaoyu Islands dispute as an episode of various internet-based events/protests. The findings of this dissertation may not be generalizable or representative; rather, the research is highly contextualized and issue-specific.

Secondly, the impact of limited access to Weibo data is twofold. First, the study of the elite frames could have been more independent and comprehensive if data access had been granted. The data collection did not provide any follower-followee information, and the infrastructure's constant updates to its algorithm complicated data collection. The ideal analytical plan was to provide a follower-followee network of the elite framers to better understand the networked framing process. Instead, this research follows a prior study (Jiang & Fu, 2015) in only analyzing the most prominent 50 users. Second, Meng (2010) suggests that the voices silenced online are equally as important as those accentuated. I agree with her, and I suspect that a number of posts weren't included in the dataset due to Weibo's censoring and filtering mechanism.

Lastly, the study relied only on data collected from Sina Weibo. Admittedly, the platform is more widely used than any other by domestic Chinese. The subject of the study is cyber nationalism. Thus, given the uniqueness of the topic on a specific source, the study only found pro-China nationalism. Regardless what frames their discussion embedded, no other valence of cyber nationalism was identified. That said, the use of a single social media platform may preclude discovering other types of Chinese cyber nationalism.

Despite these limitations, the contribution of the dissertation is threefold. First, it adds to the communicative nationalism literature by providing empirical evidence on cyber nationalism in contemporary Chinese society. The study identifies the elite framers on social media, documenting an emerging group of individuals who dominate the framing of national affairs. It demonstrates how cyber nationalism has been constructed collectively by social media users; and at the same time, how cyber nationalism is framed and counter-framed by various social groups on social media in China. The findings on cyber nationalism of the dissertation challenge the traditional line of scholarship on Chinese nationalism study that address either the prevalence of state-led and state-sponsored nationalism or the irrational spontaneous grassroots nationalism in China. Instead, more attention is called to examine the actors mediating between the two extremes, and the importance of studying individualized nationalism in the era of social media.

Second, it offers a better understanding of Sina Weibo and potentially other forms of social media in China. It examines Sina Weibo across two dimensions. Vertically, it situates Weibo in the historical developments of the media system in China. The majority of current scholarship on or related to Sina Weibo simply refer to it as "Chinese Twitter," suggesting that Weibo's uniqueness lies in the radicalness of expression and the presence of censorship on the platform. The notion of Weibo as the Chinese equivalent of Twitter ignores the context and constraints that shaped Weibo in the media ecology. The current research situated Weibo in its historical social, economic, and political environment. Horizontally, the study also recognizes Weibo as a space that holds various fields in which multiple social players with their own interests compete for the discourse framing and domination of conversation on Weibo. The observations regarding Weibo's role in the discussion of the dispute further motivates me to seek alternative ways to theorize Weibo.

Lastly, the analytical framework can shed light on researches utilizing social media data. Acknowledged by the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative approaches to framing analysis, the dissertation used a "manual-machine-manual" analytical framework to analyze the large quantities of text, which overcomes the drawbacks of both methods. Several rounds of iterative and exploratory processes enabled me to better understand the meaning embedded in the discussion.

5.3 <u>Future Research</u>

The current dissertation examines Chinese cyber nationalism on social media, using the Diaoyu Islands dispute as an example. Future research may explore the Diaoyu Islands dispute on multiple sources – mentioned earlier in the methods section, the magnitude of the islands dispute makes it a rich lens through which to understand Chinese nationalism. Other cases on Weibo should also be taken into consideration in comparison to the islands dispute – does cyber nationalism vary from case to case?

It would be interesting to conduct a social network analysis on the social actors within the frame/discourse analysis, if not limited by the data. A longitudinal and comparative study would also be also interesting to examine Weibo in its current environment. For instance, many scholars suggest a decline of Weibo and a rise in WeChat, a hybrid of IM, Weibo, Instagram, and Facebook. Future study may also examine how Weibo's roles have changed since its prime time in 2011-2013.

5.4 <u>Conclusion</u>

The dissertation closely examined the dynamics of the 2012 Diaoyu Islands dispute on Sina Weibo across three layers: users, content, and role of platform. At the user layer, the current

research identifies the prominent users as elite framers on Weibo, whose discussions and conversations on the islands dispute dominated the framing of the issue. The most influential users are predominately urban, middle class, more educated or studied abroad males, implying a profound inequality in the power to drive and direct the discourse on Sina Weibo or in contemporary Chinese society. At the content layer, the dissertation discovers the major topics and frames that emerged from the Weibo discussion. It identified 11 topics via a labeled LDA topic model and then consolidated them into three major frames of Chinese cyber nationalism: nonofficial, official, and relational nationalism frames. The interactions among the social groups using the three major frames demonstrated that Chinese cyber nationalism inherited and strategically adopted the cyber nationalistic discourse from the pre-social media era; however, the dissertation found a contrasting and reconciling cyber nationalism advocated by the opinion leaders which mediated between official and popular nationalism in China. Third, the dissertation explored the roles of Weibo in the islands dispute and sought further understanding and theorization of the online space in China. As the dissertation identifies the proliferation of the duanzi culture among the Weibo users on the discussion of national affairs, it challenges the line of researches which only concentrate on the surveillance and censorship in internet study in China. A dark side of Weibo has been found in the permission and promotion of fake news and misinformation in discussion of national affairs, as found elsewhere in the resurgence of nationalistic sentiments and national politics.

This dissertation represents the first framing study of Chinese cyber nationalism on social media. The dual rise of cyber nationalism and social media in China is not an isolated, discrete, and fragmented episode of global politics. This dissertation gives us a comprehensive picture of the social players, their discourses, and power dynamics in a national/international affair of the

century-long Diaoyu Islands dispute, one of the most explosive national security conflicts in the world.

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