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Engagement and Reflexivity: Approaches to Chinese–Japanese Political Relations by Chinese Students in Japan

Herby LAI

Abstract: Amidst political tensions between China and Japan, and against the backdrop of the patriotic education campaign in China that promotes a negative image of Japan as the victimiser, Chinese students in Japanese educational institutions study and work in Japan in a highly politicised context. In general, how they chose to interpret their experiences in Japan, and their views on history and controversial political issues involving China and Japan, demonstrates two levels of cosmopolitanism – namely, the ability and the willingness to engage with Japanese people on such issues, and reflexivity towards their own national identities. Meanwhile, some informants would deliberately avoid talking about history and controversial political issues involving China and Japan. While they lacked the willingness to engage with Japanese people on controversial issues, their keenness to separate their daily lives in Japan from the political context means they were also engaged in a reflexive reconfiguration of their national identities.

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Keywords: China, Japan, cosmopolitanism, nationalism, reflexivity

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Introduction

Mainland Chinese have been the largest migrant group in Japan since their numbers overtook Korean migrants in 2007. As of 2011, there were 674,879 registered Chinese migrants (including students) in Japan, accounting for 32.5 per cent of the total number of registered foreigners in Japan (Japan Ministry of Justice 2012a). Chinese students also make up the largest foreign student population in Japan, consistently accounting for at least 58 per cent of all foreign students in Japan in recent years (Japan Student Services Organisation 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013).

At the same time, the political relations between China and Japan have been tense and occasionally hostile. This largely stems from a number of controversial issues relating to interpretations of Second World War history and contemporary territorial disputes. This political climate is part of the backdrop against which Chinese students in contemporary Japan find themselves, and this paper is about how they placed controversial issues between the two countries into the overall context of their lives in Japan.

In an attempt to conceptualise and interpret how Chinese students in Japan mediate their living in Japan and the hostilities between China and Japan at the state level, I propose that their approaches to issues that often spark controversy between the two countries reflect a variety of ways in which the two levels of cosmopolitanism – engagement and reflexivity – associate with their views on how such issues should be placed in the context of their lives in Japan. While patriotic education and negative media coverage of Japan has the potential effect of creating a Chinese subjectivity deeply intertwined with the political relations between China and Japan, and which may entail anti-Japan sentiments, how my informants handled history and controversial issues, and how they interpreted negative experiences in Japan, demonstrate that they have instead utilised their knowledge of Japanese culture and society as a resource to interpret their experiences in Japan from a different angle. They moved away from passionately defending the Chinese official position, rejecting the dichotomous use of the national categories of “Chinese” and “Japanese” (and the antagonism implied by it) as the primary framework by which to analyse their experiences in Japan.

Two Levels of Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is associated with the exposure to different cultural elements commonly associated with different national entities – this is the common thread running through the disparate references to the term in several China-related studies. By being used either to denote a place with multiple elements and influences from multiple cultures, as in a “cosmopolitan city” such as Shanghai (Abbas 2000; Knight 2003), or to refer to individuals by virtue of their experiences studying and living abroad (Nyíri, Zhang, and Varrall 2010: 25–26), cosmopolitanism has been placed in a framework where the mere existence of a multitude of cultural influences appears to imply cosmopolitan characteristics. This is premised on the assumption of the existence of distinct cultural elements that coexist in particular settings in society, and such cultural elements are often associated with national entities. But there are also attempts to theorise cosmopolitanism that provide a deeper, more nuanced conceptualisation of the term. For instance, Hannerz’s articulation of cosmopolitanism defines it as

a personal ability to make one’s way into other cultures [... and] cultural competence in the stricter sense of the term, a built-up skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings. (Hannerz 1990: 239)

This definition emphasises a set of skills and attitudes at the level of the individual that enables that individual to competently interact with the multicultural elements s/he encounters regularly. This ability can be a result of international migration, but given that cosmopolitanism is an individual ability and disposition, its development is very much dependent on the individual – international migration may facilitate, but does not guarantee, the development of cosmopolitanism.

It has also been argued that the increase in international migration is precisely one of the reasons why cosmopolitanism is all the more needed. In Beck’s (2000) theorisation of the ideal type of cosmopolitan society, the second age of modernity is characterised by increased travel and migration, enhanced international-communication and commodity-transport networks, and other forms of interconnectedness of nation-states as its epiphenomena. It requires interpreting society as having the ability to engage in a “reflexive learning process” that pertains to “issues of shifting perspective and transna-

tional conflict resolution” (Beck 2000: 96–97, 100). In such a context, the social sciences must move away from a static understanding of “culture” as a bound entity associated with a national one. The “reflexive and critical self-understanding of cosmopolitanism” (Delanty 2006) is a distinctive feature of this strand of theorisation. This is applicable at an individual level – more specifically, as part of what Beck (2002) calls the “dialogic imagination,” which is the “central defining characteristic of a cosmopolitan perspective” and

corresponds to the coexistence of rival ways of life in the individual experience, which makes it a matter of fate to compare, reflect, criticise, understand, combine contradictory certainties. (Beck 2002: 18)

Such reflexivity also entails the re-interpretation of the “local,” the “national,” and the “global” in response to the blurring of boundaries between these categories in the second age of modernity (Beck and Sznaider 2006). Although Beck was ultimately concerned with conceptualising a cosmopolitan society and a paradigm shift in social research, it is also clear from the foregoing quotes that the structural changes in social relations characterising the second age of modernity can have a profound impact on individuals.

While the ability to understand individuals, phenomena, and practices that form parts of the “Other”, as well as the commitment to engage with them, per Hannerz, are prerequisites for the cultivation of cosmopolitanism, the development of cultural reflexivity, which is also at the heart of cosmopolitanism, inevitably involves deeper, longer-term, and more profound changes. Meanwhile, what Beck’s conceptualisation of the cosmopolitan society means for individuals is that intercultural engagement can be a resource for developing a cultural reflexivity that can impact the identities and subjectivities of an individual. This complements Hannerz’s emphasis on knowledge, ability, and commitment, but also involves even more profound changes to the individual than Hannerz’s formula. In other words, individuals with exposure to multiple cultures are not necessarily cosmopolitans who are reflexive of their national culture or dominant ideologies within that national space (Ong 1999: 12–14), and this is precisely the distinction between being merely exposed to different cultures and being reflexive about them. This means Chinese students in Japan cannot be presumed to be culturally reflexive cosmopolitans just because they are away from home. Their reflexivity-

ty must be judged by their attitudes and dispositions. Within the context of the study of their approaches to controversial political issues between China and Japan, against the backdrop of the patriotic education campaign in China, cultural reflexivity would entail a review of the Chinese students' standpoints on these controversial political issues, or a re-interpretation of national categorisations and characterisations.

In this paper, I will present data garnered from my Chinese student-informants' accounts of their experiences in Japan, which show that cosmopolitanism manifests itself in both forms – engagement and reflexivity – in the lives of these students, particularly in relation to their approaches to controversial issues between the two countries.

Methodology

The research question calls for a contextualised understanding of the lives of Chinese students in Japan, and as such the data was collected through in-depth interviews with Chinese students at high-ranking Japanese universities. The interview questions addressed a wide range of issues relating to their lives in Japan, and this paper is a presentation of the themes relating to Chinese–Japanese political relations.

I spent a large part of the 2010–2011 academic year in the metropolitan areas of greater Tokyo and the Kansai region (encompassing the large cities of Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe in Western Japan), conducting in-depth interviews with Chinese students living in the two areas. These sites were chosen for their relatively high concentration of universities and large numbers of Chinese students – the number of Chinese holding a student visa and registered (to be living) in Tokyo was 40,738 as of 2011, while the figures as of 2011 for the prefectures of Osaka, Kyoto, and Hyogo (where Kobe is located) were 11,095; 4,903; and 4,888, respectively (Japan Ministry of Justice 2012b). I interviewed 53 students from mainland China, and also students and ex-students from Taiwan, Macau, and Hong Kong. An interview with a Japanese resident in Hong Kong also contributed to the data featured in this paper. I approached Chinese students through the mailing lists of Chinese student associations in different universities, and through activities organised by such associations. I developed my connections with Chinese students in Japan through meeting them in person at events. There is a degree of self-selection

in the sampling, since many interviews were conducted as a result of students responding to my interview request. Due to the need to obtain the informed consent of my informants, especially given that the interview covers their life experiences and may touch on personal episodes, a degree of informant self-selection cannot be eliminated. Given that the research data comes from in-depth interviews, the richest body of data would inevitably come from informants most willing to respond to my questions at length. All informants featured in this paper were interviewed in Mandarin Chinese. Consent for conducting interviews and publishing related findings were obtained from all informants, and all names of informants in this paper are pseudonyms.

The sampling of Chinese students in Japan is indeed unrepresentative of the general higher-education student population in China. Specifically, with regards to attitudes towards Japan, the fact that they had chosen to study in Japan suggests that they were unlikely to be members of the group of Chinese people with the strongest anti-Japan sentiments. Nevertheless, while my informants may not be representative of the full spectrum of sentiments and attitudes towards Japan among Chinese students in general, since the topic of approaches to politically sensitive issues is more nuanced than a simple “pro-Japan/anti-Japan” dichotomy can capture, an investigation of this topic is still of academic value even with an unrepresentative sample. Specific common themes were picked out from the students’ accounts of their experiences in Japan that they gave during our conversations. The themes relating to students’ interpretations of “Chinese” and “Japanese” as national categories, and their approaches to handling controversial topics vis-à-vis the two countries, are organised and presented in this paper.

Chinese–Japanese Political Controversies

Chinese students in Japan are inevitably embedded in the contemporary political conflicts between China and Japan, the two main themes of which concern the interpretations of the history of Japan’s invasion of China during the Second World War (1937–1945), and the sovereignty of a set of islands located in the East China Sea that China calls the Diaoyu Islands (釣魚島, *diaoyudao* or 釣魚台, *diaoyutai*) and Japan calls the Senkaku Islands (尖閣諸島, *senkaku shoto*). The follow-

ing brief overview of some of the triggers of the 2005, 2010, and 2012 anti-Japan protests provides a sketch of the context of political conflict within which contemporary Chinese migration to Japan (including but not limited to student migration) must be considered.

The history of the Second World War has been one of the most salient themes of Chinese–Japanese relations, and remains one of the key contexts within which Japan is portrayed and discussed in contemporary China. The ongoing debates and disputes over the “proper” recognition of Japan’s wartime responsibilities have manifested in several ways that led to anti-Japan protests in China in recent years, one of which is the portrayal of the role of Japan in the Second World War in history textbooks used in Japanese schools. One of the latest episodes of this dispute arose from the decision of Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) to approve the *New History Textbook* published by a Japanese right-wing group, the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (新しい歴史教科書をつくる会, *atarashii rekishi kyokasho o tsukuru kai*). The group’s objective was to denounce the so-called “masochistic” view of modern Japanese history (自虐史観, *jigyakushikan*) (particularly the history of the Second World War) (Rose 2000) and to paint Second World War history in a morally neutral light. The textbook published by this organisation plays down the atrocities committed by Japan in the Second World War, including the Nanjing Massacre and the forcing of Asian women to become so-called “comfort women” to be abused by Japanese soldiers. Although its coverage is small – the 2005 edition was used to teach only 0.4 per cent of Japan’s junior high school students (Bukh 2007: 686) – the 2005 approval of this textbook still caused uproar in China. This approval took place at a time where a heated debate on whether Japan should be allowed to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was taking place (when MEXT approved of the allegedly right-wing textbooks in April 2005, Japan’s intention to apply for permanent membership in the UNSC was already known). Japan’s application for UNSC permanent membership resulted in an online petition organised by Chinese internet users against Japan, with over 41 million signatures collected (Wu 2007). This and the textbook controversy contributed to a series of anti-Japan protests in a number of cities in China. Japanese embassies as well as Japanese cars, shops,

and restaurants in many Chinese cities were damaged by protesters (*Mingpao* 2005).

I conducted field research in Japan (2010–2011) just a few months after anti-Japan protests had taken place in China in September 2010 (*renren.com* 2010; *China Review News* 2010). The protests arose in response to Japanese authorities' arrest of the captain of a Chinese fishing boat that had veered close to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands (*Financial Times* 2010). This highlights the ongoing dispute between China and Japan over the sovereignty of the islands, which has previously led to a number of incidents – in 1978, 1990, 1996, and 2004–2005. Furthermore, in 2012, Tokyo mayor Shintaro Ishihara's announcement of the Tokyo metropolitan government's plan to buy three of the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands from a private individual who owns them (*The Daily Yomiuri* 2012) was followed by the announcement by Yoshihiko Noda, Japan's prime minister at the time, that the national government would consider buying those islands (*Reuters* 2012a). Eventually, the Japanese national government secured a deal with the owner of the islands (*Asahi Shimbun* 2012), triggering another series of anti-Japan protests in China (*Reuters* 2012b).

At a more long-term (less acutely hostile, but equally important) level, the launch of the patriotic education campaign in China in the 1990s cast Japan in a specific light, and this perception of Japan plays a key role in China's conceptualisation of its own twentieth-century history and national development. My Chinese informants were educated in China at least up to a secondary-school level before they started their studies in Japan. Given the ages of my informants, the campaign was an integral part of the education they received prior to studying in Japan. Thus it is appropriate to briefly consider the campaign, with reference to how Japan is portrayed, before discussing how Chinese students in Japan actually respond to history and controversial political issues with Japan “on the ground” and in their daily lives.

Patriotic Education and Japan's Role in Contemporary Chinese Nationalism

In the 1980s, China went through drastic economic reforms and the opening of its economic market to foreign investments. The introduction of market capitalism to China was coupled with the decline

of Marxism and Maoism as influential ideologies. With many aspects of Chinese life gradually becoming similar to those in a capitalist society, the Marxist-socialist ideology that had dominated the political discourse of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was losing its influence. The Chinese government took efforts to replace Marxism with another, equally powerful ideology to unite Chinese people of different classes and regional backgrounds, so as to counteract the potential fragmentation that might result from a new capitalist order (Mitter 2003), and to further strengthen the CCP's legitimacy (Zhao 2004: 8–9). The main antagonism utilised to foster unity and loyalty among people has shifted from the concept of class struggle to that of conflict between nation-states (Xu 1998).

In the aftermath of student protests in 1989 (which were subsequently put down by force) (Law 2006), the Chinese government installed a series of civic education reforms, and the patriotic education campaign was launched in the early 1990s. This campaign had a range of objectives (Reilly 2011), including the legitimisation of a new historical narrative to boost the appreciation among members of the younger generation of the CCP's role in leading China to national independence. Interestingly, the victor narrative that emphasised CCP heroics in leading the Chinese people to victory and liberation failed to achieve this goal (Wang 2008: 784–789), and the new direction effected by the patriotic education campaign led to this narrative being replaced by a victim narrative that focused on China's suffering and the West's (and Japan's) responsibilities for such suffering (Wang 2008: 792).

It is within this context that Japan became the significant Other in how Chinese national identity has developed since the 1980s. After China and Japan normalised diplomatic relations in 1972, the Chinese government downplayed discussions of Second World War history (Reilly 2011: 470), emphasising that it was Japanese militarists who were the chief victimisers during the war, and that ordinary Japanese people were also victims (He 2007). It has been argued that such a policy resulted in an overall lack of awareness among young Chinese people at the time of what Japan did during the war (He 2007: 50). But with the launch of the patriotic education campaign, and the aforementioned shift in emphasis of the overarching narrative of modern Chinese history, the role of the West and Japan as the victimisers of China were highlighted (Wang 2008: 792) through an empha-

sis on China's "century of humiliation." This refers to a period between the mid-nineteenth century and the end of the Second World War, when China was forced to sign unequal treaties with Western powers and Japan, thereby conceding land, resources, and control. The historical narrative of the "century of humiliation" represents a time when China was weak, corrupt, and incapable of resisting foreign invasion. In addition to classroom-based education, this historical narrative also oversaw the building or expansion of a number of museums – such as the 918 Museum in Shenyang and the Nanjing Massacre Memorial – that focus closely on China's resistance to the Japanese invasion before and during the Second World War (Vickers 2009: 77).

This narrative of national humiliation, as the precondition by which the ultimate narrative of national salvation can develop (Callahan 2004), served as a contrast with a sovereign, modern China with a growing economy. The emphasis of the "century of humiliation" in the Chinese national consciousness is therefore a key step for Chinese people's recognition of China rising as a great power. Arguably the most important event in the "century of humiliation" in terms of contemporary relevance in Chinese nationalism was the Second World War – particularly the eight years of "resistance" against Japanese invasion. By giving the "century of humiliation" and Japan's victimisation of China significant coverage in textbooks, the patriotic education campaign has contributed to the negative elements of the perception of Japan in contemporary China.

These negative portrayals of Japan in the Chinese education system had not prevented my Chinese student-informants from deciding to study in Japan, often due to their university entrance examination results not allowing them to enter the top-level universities in China, or because they believed the research and learning environment in higher education was better in Japan than in China. Nevertheless, with all my Chinese informants having undertaken at least part of their secondary education in China, and with political controversies between China and Japan (particularly over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands) being one of the key topics in media reports during the time of my fieldwork, the political tension between the two countries was a theme whose pertinence my informants immediately recognised as our conversations moved towards the topic. It followed that they had

different views and approaches towards these salient, controversial issues.

First Level of Cosmopolitanism: Engagement

While there were individual differences between my informants' approaches to controversial issues and political tension, the common themes of “engagement” and “reflexivity” stood out. This is why I decided to analyse such approaches through the lens of the two levels of cosmopolitanism described earlier in this paper. It should be noted that most of my informants spoke little of their views on any currently controversial issues between China and Japan, and the analysis will focus on how they viewed the existence of such controversial issues in the background of their lives in Japan.

Engagement with Japanese People in Discussing Controversial Issues

Some of my informants actively discussed controversial topics related to China and Japan with Japanese people and were highly engaged with Japanese people through such issues. Others sought to avoid discussing such topics, but in many other areas they actively engaged and interacted with Japanese society, which arguably makes it understandable that they would want to avoid controversial topics. Meanwhile, regardless of the types of engagement (with controversial topics themselves, or with Japanese society in general), what ties these approaches together is the second level of cosmopolitanism – reflexivity, specifically that regarding their identities as Chinese.

Specifically regarding controversial issues between China and Japan, an obvious indicator of a cosmopolitan disposition in the form of engagement would be the willingness to discuss such issues with Japanese people. Chao was one of several informants who was passionate about such issues and took the initiative to engage in discussions, but he did not start from a position of understanding. Rather, he said he was “a bit of a *fenqing*” (愤青, angry, nationalistic youth) when he first came to Japan:

I always discuss history issues with Japanese people. After all, my major is in politics, and you know what, in China people said I was a bit of a *fenqing* [...]. [W]hen I came to Japan, I discussed his-

tory issues with many Japanese people, but for some very sensitive issues, such as the Diaoyu Islands issue, it's hard to say who is right and who is wrong, and when things get emotional there will be conflict. (Anonymous 1 2011)

But the keenness was met with indifference, which led him to become much more realistic about the significance of discussing these controversial issues:

Sometimes when I do so [engage in discussions], I find that Japanese young people don't really care about the past [...and] overall speaking they don't really care about what their history textbooks say, or about the anti-Japan sentiments in China. They, themselves, also say they are not political. They sometimes asked me jokingly whether Japan should merge with the USA or China [...]. I feel they really don't care. (Anonymous 1 2011)

I then asked him if he felt angry, and he responded,

I can't say I was angry. In fact, I was glad that they didn't get angry [...]. I think a lot of Japanese people know at heart that Japan has made some mistakes in history; they themselves also say they know this, but they don't want to talk about it again [...]. Before I came to Japan I had some strong views about Japan "amending history," but later I found that it was only a small number of academics who were doing this. Ordinary Japanese people just don't care. (Anonymous 1 2011)

Lianying, a first-year student at a university in Tokyo, said she started discussing controversial issues with Japanese volunteers in a language school she attended before university, and got into some heated discussions. But when I asked her if she had done the same at university, she said,

I just started university [... and] discussing this issue is too scary (恐怖, *kongbu*). I must first make sure the other party has no bad intentions, and wait for a relatively quiet time [to bring up the topic]. (Anonymous 2 2011)

Chao and Lianying both represent cases where a willingness to engage with Japanese people on controversial topics was subsequently tempered by considerations of how they could further engage (in a broader sense) with Japanese society – Chao did not want to make Japanese people angry at him, and Lianying was scared of discussing these issues with people she did not know well.

Engagement with Japanese Society in General

Another aspect of cosmopolitan engagement relates to the overall involvement in studies, work, and life as a student in Japan in general. Some of my informants indicated that, through interactions with Japanese people, controversial issues are put into perspective. An example of such a process was illustrated by Fei, a medical PhD student in Tokyo, who reflected,

My impression of Japan was that the history was terrible, and we should remember that; but I held no prejudice against the ordinary people in this country. Those militaristic ones were perhaps crazier, but the ordinary people are just like us, living their daily lives. (Anonymous 3 2011)

This sentiment also outlines how Chinese people studying in Japan may strike a balance between their feelings of outrage stemming from the history of Japan's invasion of China in the Second World War, and the need to carry on living their daily lives in Japan. Fei implicitly connected the conceptual separation between militaristic Japanese and ordinary Japanese people (which is in line with the separation elucidated in China's official position) with the view that the controversial issues belonged to the realm of politics and were seen as separate from their everyday lives. Fei's identification as an ordinary Chinese person, "just like" ordinary Japanese people who might be more interested in their everyday lives than debating the rights and wrongs of the Second World War, formed a basis upon which an identification beyond national affiliations can be a first step towards a cosmopolitan disposition. In Fei's case, this was enhanced by her interactions with Japanese people in her medical research laboratory. Though not without their differences in research methods, she had repeatedly told me about how grateful she was to her supervisors and colleagues for teaching her new skills and methods. Her conclusion was:

Their skills are very advanced and we should learn from them. So we should not keep thinking about anti-Japanese goods and boycotting Japan [*sz*] and the like; you can't learn from them if you think too much about these [things]. (Anonymous 3 2011)

To Fei, the new skills that she was able to learn in Japan in her professional setting were much more important than any potential negative emotions arising from history or political hostilities, and the latter

should not get in the way of the former. In other words, her engagement with Japanese society put political issues between China and Japan into perspective for her.

Sheng, a forthcoming Chinese student who was “totally anti-Japan” before he came to Japan, remarked that it was the significant effort he had put into engaging with Japanese people and learning their way of life that changed his impression of Japan:

It’s probably an exceptional case, and has everything to do with the effort I put in. In the last four years, the Japanese people around me have all been good and sincere, and I have received a lot of help from them [...] but not all Chinese students in Japan live in such an environment. There are definitely Japanese people who reject Chinese people. But this is also related to your efforts, and whether you really want to understand them. Even if there are barriers to communication, you can make an effort to compensate for them. (Anonymous 4 2011, on his changed impression of Japan from a very negative one to a very positive one)

He indeed attributed his initial “anti-Japan” stance to education, which “presents history from a subjective angle.” In sum, in his view, active engagement with Japanese people and society would eventually offset the negative image of Japan one would have if one viewed Japan from the Chinese perspective through the controversial issues.

Similarly, while Chao was highly conscious of the China–Japan animosities, he also admired several features of Japanese society, which he placed in direct contrast to the negative image of Japan, as illustrated by the following quote:

I think Japanese people are not as cruel as portrayed in history books. It was a thing of the past. Also, although they are rather ambiguous about historical issues, and refuse to admit some things, in terms of solving social problems, including economic development, Japan is a revelation to China. That includes the quality (素质, *suzhi*) of citizens as well [...]. [W]e often say China is a nation of manners (礼义之邦, *liyì zhī bàng*), but now I know Japan is the nation of manners. [...] Also, Japanese people’s *suzhi* doesn’t come from education, but a kind of refined character from the inside (涵养, *hanyang*). I know some housewives who have not had a higher education, but the qualities they demonstrate would make a Chinese person feel inferior. (Anonymous 1 2011)

Chao demonstrated that controversial political issues, when put in the context of a Chinese student living in Japan and gaining knowledge about Japanese society, is but a component of his overall assessment of Japan and its people. While the “quality” of Japanese people that he talked about was not directly related to the substance of the debates around the controversial political issues themselves, his narrative placed “quality” in direct contrast with the negativities arising from controversial political issues as if they could offset each other.

Dong, an undergraduate student in a university in central Tokyo, commented that first-hand accounts from people in his home town who had worked and lived in Japan balanced the negative image of Japan arising from history and controversial issues, even before he had a chance to see Japan for himself:

I am from Fuqing City [...]. [M]aybe a lot of people in China think Japan and China are arch-enemies, but [...] there were many people from Fuqing who went to Japan to work [...]. [M]y initial knowledge in Japan came from a relative of mine, who went to Japan to study and has lived there for several decades. At first I heard about what Japan was like from him, and only learnt about Japan’s invasion of China from books. (Anonymous 5 2011)

(How would you describe your initial impression of Japan?)

Well [...] firstly, I hadn’t experienced it for myself, and secondly, what I had been hearing was two contrasting views. On the one hand, everyone was saying [how bad Japan was], and on the other, the relative of mine who studied and worked in Japan told me something completely different. So I categorised Japan as somewhere I had not been to, and a place that I could not evaluate. (Anonymous 5 2011)

This shows that, even before a Chinese student sets foot in Japan, hearing other people’s accounts of their own engagement with Japanese society can mediate the negative image of Japan born out of controversial issues.

Controversial Issues as Motivations for Engagement

Two of my informants would go even further, saying their motivation for going to Japan to study was precisely because of the negative image of Japan in China that arose from history and controversial issues. Zhilong, an undergraduate student in Tokyo, cited anti-Japan

sentiments in China as a strong reason for him to study in Japan: “The more serious the ‘anti’ sentiments (反, *fan*), the more I wanted to go and have a look” (Anonymous 6 2011).

Shenjie, a postdoctoral researcher in a university in the Kansai region, had a similar motivation:

There are, after all, some conflicts between Japan and China, and I think it is necessary for me to see the truth for myself. Some media opinions are rather extreme, and I would have the feeling of being cheated if I hadn’t seen things for myself [...] [Just before I applied for the exchange programme to study in Japan] there was an incident of Chinese students murdering a Japanese family in Fukuoka, leading to strong reactions. But I think [...] the incident should be analysed from the perspective of personal circumstances, rather than escalating it to a political level. And my university offers this exchange opportunity; if I did well I would have a scholarship [...] so I thought I should grasp the opportunity. (Anonymous 7 2011)

In sum, the interplay between engaging with and approaching issues that have proven controversial between the two countries took three forms among my informants: In some cases, engagement and the salience of controversial issues went hand-in-hand as manifested in the keenness on the part of some of my informants to discuss controversial issues in Japanese society (with Japanese people). In other cases, engagement with Japanese society led to a reduction in the significance of controversial issues and political tension due to their being put in perspective in the lifeworlds of Chinese students in Japan. Finally, other informants were prompted by controversial issues, political tension, and negative news to make the effort to engage with Japan.

Second Level of Cosmopolitanism: Reflexivity

There is also a deeper level of cosmopolitanism at play in some other aspects of my Chinese student-informants’ lives in Japan. A small number of them recollected negative experiences in Japan that could be interpreted as originating from their being discriminated against because they were Chinese. Remarkably, they refused to draw such a conclusion, and would even distinguish themselves from such views. The fact that such experiences can be interpreted through the “lens”

of national identity is an example of the politicised nature of Chinese students (and other Chinese migrants) in Japan, and my informants demonstrated a tendency to counteract this by seeing through the apparent correlation between their national identities and their negative experiences, and by placing their experiences in the context of their understandings of how Japanese society works.

Hui, who recently graduated with his master's degree and was preparing to begin work at a language school in Japan, had both witnessed and been on the receiving end of bullying when he first started a previous part-time job. Rather than taking it personally and associating it with national affiliation, he noticed that his Japanese boss was just as mean and derogative to Japanese newcomers as to Chinese ones:

I have a connection not only to the superficial things of Japanese society, like [you would be able to experience when you] go out for dinner or shopping in Japan. You know, if you dine out or shop in Japan, they would be very polite to you [...] but I have also worked in a Japanese workplace [...] and have seen how they bullied newcomers and juniors. I saw that very clearly. At first when my Japanese language was not very good [...] they had many different names for an item [...] and I couldn't remember them all. So a Japanese (senior worker) was very angry with me and said, "Don't you understand Japanese?" [...] I thought he looked down on me [...] and looked down on Chinese people. But one week later my view changed. Why? A week later I became familiar with the system, and there was another newcomer. The same person also said to this Japanese newcomer, "Don't you understand Japanese?" So this means he didn't intend to hurt me as a Chinese person by saying this, and this was just his way of telling juniors off. I then knew it was just an aspect of Japanese society. (Anonymous 8 2011)

In other words, in that workplace, newcomers from Japan were treated in the same way (just as badly) as non-Japanese newcomers. Any differential treatment along nationality lines was almost nullified by the strongly seniority-based hierarchy that dictated power relations in the workplace. One week into the job, he became familiar with the workplace and his view on the situation changed. He then concluded that personal mistreatment should not be considered an issue on a national level:

Sometimes Chinese people who work in Japan would think: if you insult me, you are insulting my country. There is no need to say that [...], as] they [Japanese people] haven't thought that far, and don't intend to look down on us. [We get told off because] we did something wrong [...and] similarly, within their group [Japanese people], if someone fails to meet [the standard], he will get told off as well [...]. [I]t's just that Japanese people have lived in similar environments, so they would make fewer mistakes than us. (Anonymous 8 2011)

Meanwhile, Peiying, a postgraduate student in the Kansai region in western Japan, spoke of a similar experience. Similarly, she did not conclude that she was mistreated for being Chinese:

Overall speaking, [part-time] work is OK. I was most unhappy with my job in a Japanese pub in my first year of university. There are a few *senpai* (先輩, seniors), who had worked there for a few years, who really liked to bully *kobai* (後輩, juniors). Actually there were a lot of Chinese girls and just two Japanese girls there. Those two Japanese girls really liked to bully *kobai*. I don't know if they particularly picked on Chinese or on *kobai*, since all the Chinese girls there were *kobai*. Anyway I was quite unhappy then, so I quit. (Anonymous 9 2011)

Even when a negative incident was rather obviously nationality-related, my informants did not develop an antagonistic or “us-against-them” mentality because of it. Dichou, a PhD student also at a university in the Kansai region, told me about an episode at a shrine where she was prevented by an old Japanese man from performing the purification ritual of washing her hands and mouth at the *chozuya* (手水舎, a place in a shrine where visitors go through this ritual). Although she was upset, she refrained from seeing this as anything other than an isolated incident that did not accurately reflect Japanese society as a whole:

My friend said it happened because we spoke Chinese[...]I was very angry at the time, but now I think there are different kinds of people in society [...] for example, right-wing groups in Japan are a social phenomenon. Their existence is shaped by society, and it doesn't mean all Japanese people are like that. Therefore I won't be too angry [about unfriendly treatment]. (Anonymous 10 2011)

This was to be contrasted with some Chinese friends of hers, one of whom said,

I know of more than one Chinese friend who holds prejudices against Japan. They may have been bullied in the part-time workplace or had a conflict there, and will then immediately attribute it to “because she is Japanese” and that Japanese people are not nice to Chinese people. Actually some Japanese people I interacted with also think like this: they see some Chinese people behaving badly, and will think all Chinese people are like that. If you explain things like that, the animosity will be huge – it is just like saying it is all essentialised national characteristics [... so] I said to them, “Don’t think that way.” (Anonymous 10 2011)

By clearly distinguishing herself from these views, on the surface Dichou was critiquing overgeneralisations of “essentialised national characteristics.” But at the same time, such rejection of nationality-based essentialisation is also an attempt to separate (part of) her daily life in Japan from the overarching context of Chinese–Japanese political conflicts: the refusal to consider “the Japanese” as a category first and foremost has the effect of emphasising the individual and rendering the national as a category that defines a person’s preconception of another person. This is particularly significant, given that Chinese–Japanese political conflicts and China’s patriotic education campaign both presuppose and reinforce the distinction between “the Chinese” and “the Japanese” as national categories, under which individuals are presumed to be subsumed.

Dichou’s journey towards this reflexive position actually started with a negative impression of Japan before she started studying Japanese. She mentioned two sources directly related to the war that influenced her view back then – textbooks and her grandmothers’ recollections of their experiences in the war:

In textbooks, I had a particularly strong impression from the part about the War of Resistance against Japan. [...] [M]y grandmothers’ [...] lives were very hard in their villages, and they had some very painful experiences with regard to the invasion. (Anonymous 10 2011)

While her impression of Japan subsequently improved as she studied Japanese in China, she was still defensive of her Chinese identity when she first came to Japan:

When I first came to Japan, I had a much stronger feeling that I was Chinese than when I was in China. [...] Emphasising you are Chinese means you belong to a group and are not alone. And [...]

when I watched the news in Japan that casts China in a negative light [...] I would very instinctively react by thinking “Japanese people are not being friendly to Chinese people.” Together with my identification as Chinese [...] my position became antagonistic to Japanese [...] involuntarily. I would think Chinese people were particularly friendly and Japanese people particularly unfriendly. (Anonymous 10 2011)

Meanwhile, history was still an issue that bothered her:

I used to have a bit of prejudice against Japan [...]because] what I used to know is a section of Japanese society, and now I have a fuller understanding of it. For instance, when I first came, I was particularly enraged by how Japanese people understood history and thought, “How could they think like that?” But after chatting with my Japanese friends more often, I knew that their education [shaped how they viewed history] and so the government must bear some of the responsibility. When I hang out with them, as individuals, we could be very honest and sincere, and then I realised my initial impression of them was a bit subjective and harsh. (Anonymous 10 2011)

Her subsequent reflection on this indicates a shift to a more critical and culturally reflexive position with regard to her national identity as Chinese. More specifically, through the people with whom she was able to interact in Japan, she moved away from a reactive position where she would automatically defend the official position of China when challenged:

I know an American person who is very critical of the Iraq war and of the hegemonic politics of America. We really enjoy talking to each other. But when she asked me about my views on the issue of Tibetan independence, I immediately said this issue didn't exist. Then she said to me, I think you are a very liberal person, so why did you reject the Tibetan independence issue immediately, without discussing what it actually is? This got me thinking [...]. I saw my Chinese identity as too important, and have lost a bit of my critical thinking. So now I don't think you must defend the official position of the Chinese government if you are Chinese, nor does a Japanese person have to defend the official position of the Japanese government. (Anonymous 10 2011)

Avoiding Controversial Issues, Engaging with Japanese Society and Being Reflexive

While Dichou’s reflexivity developed in part through discussing political issues with others, there were a number of informants who, while clearly also highly competent in engaging with Japanese people and manoeuvring their ways around Japanese society (as evident by their accounts of their experiences in Japan in general), were much less keen to discuss history and controversial issues with Japanese people. Their lack of eagerness to engage with Japanese people over such issues presents a limit to the extent to which this formulation of cosmopolitanism can explain the strategies of Chinese students in Japan for handling such issues while living in Japan. It also raises the question of why these informants, while closely engaging with Japanese people and society in their daily lives at universities and their part-time workplaces, would avoid not only bringing these political topics up but also discussing such topics when they were brought up by Japanese people. I argue that this is another strategy to separate their lives in Japan from the context of Chinese–Japanese political conflicts and another way of re-thinking and reconfiguring their national identities.

Yinzi, a master’s student in a university in the Kansai region, said she had been avoiding controversial topics “for (her) own good”:

I studied in a foreign-language institute and worked in a Japanese company, so those sensitive topics [the war] were untouchable. [...] [A] few days ago I went out for a meal [...]; the owner knew me quite well, and he asked me if I would have a chat with a gentleman who was learning Chinese, and so I did [...]. [T]he gentleman asked me if I had encountered scary things in Japan. I said no, except the earthquake. He then asked me what I thought about history. I didn’t directly respond to his question, and only said, I started learning Japanese when I was 18 [... and that] I quite like this language and the culture, and my future livelihood will surely depend on this. So I don’t want to make everyone unhappy. (Anonymous 11 2011)

Peiyong, who earlier spoke of her negative experiences in the workplace, was similarly detached from many potentially relevant political issues:

I happened to be in China in September 2010 (at the time of the latest episode of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute, which I

brought up in the interview because of its relative recency) [... and I learnt about it] after I came back to Japan. My colleagues at my part-time workplace were all Japanese, and they were on good terms with me. So they asked me (switching to Japanese), “Hey, what do you think about that incident?” I didn’t know what incident they were talking about. Then they said it was the Senkaku Islands [... and] they asked what the Chinese people in China thought about this, I said (in Japanese), “I’m sorry I don’t know.” Then they knew not every Chinese person cares about this. They thought many Chinese people were anti-Japan, but in fact those who care about politics and those who don’t are totally different [on this]. (Anonymous 9 2011)

Meanwhile, her colleagues were almost as dispassionate about the dispute as she was, and this was why they could share a laugh about nationalistic comments online:

Japanese people also think [the dispute] is a matter for the state [...]; although, when I used Mixi (*a Japanese social networking site*) after I returned to Japan (*after the Diaoyu/Senkaku incident*), there was a person who knew Chinese and whom I didn’t know, sending me a message, saying, “Go back to China. Diaoyu Islands belong to Japan. Go away!” Then I knew there were very agitated Japanese people too.

(Have you met anyone like that in real life?)

No [...] I told people in the shop (*her part-time work colleagues*) about this, as a joke, and everyone laughed. The incident didn’t concern them. (Anonymous 9 2011)

She made it clear that she did not like discussing history and controversial issues with Japanese people, for two reasons. First, as discussed, she was not particularly interested in political issues; second, she thought any such discussion would be “fruitless and pointless” because it would make little difference to the actual outcome:

There have been some Japanese young people interested in politics who tried to discuss such issues with me, but nothing comes out of such discussions. Even if I say the islands belong to Japan, I can’t return them to you on behalf of Chinese people [...] so when they try to discuss it with me I don’t want to do that. It’s fruitless and pointless, and I don’t really like discussing pointless issues. (Anonymous 9 2011)

Peiyong's account shows how the apparent tension between Chinese and Japanese people, as perceived (for example) by Japanese people through the anti-Japan demonstrations in China, can be dispersed and relegated to a position of insignificance in the real-life interactions between Chinese and Japanese people, as Peiyong's interactions with her part-time work colleagues showed. This is made possible both by Peiyong's lack of interest in dwelling on political issues, and by the fact that she was in a context (a workplace with Japanese people with whom she gets along well) where Chinese and Japanese people could have shared objectives (doing their jobs in the team) not explicitly related to national categories.

This, as well as her interpretation of negative experiences in the workplace (detailed earlier in this section), and her comment that making Japanese friends

is just like making Chinese friends; it's neither difficult nor easy. It depends on the individual. There are 1.3 billion people in China, and I won't be able to get along with every one of them (Anonymous 9 2011)

all suggest the relegation of the importance not only of the rights or wrongs of political conflicts between China and Japan, but also of “the Chinese” and “the Japanese” as the leading categories by which interpretations of her life in Japan are organised. This echoes Fei's conceptual separation of “militaristic Japanese” and “ordinary Japanese people” (discussed earlier in the article), in that Fei's association as an ordinary person with “ordinary Japanese people” emphasises their belonging to the same category, thereby blurring the distinction between “the Chinese” and “the Japanese” as categories to classify individuals.

Conclusion

All in all, my Chinese student-informants had a range of approaches to handle controversial Chinese–Japanese issues within the contexts of their lives in Japan. Antagonism between China and Japan over history and politics was mediated (at the level of the Chinese student as an individual) by an increased level of engagement and knowledge of Japan, and diminished in significance when placed in the context of what they experienced in Japan, including the positive attributes of Japanese people and society. In some cases, this also has the longer-

term effect of facilitating a more culturally reflexive view of an individual's national identity as Chinese. While such a view is a (personal) political stance in itself, the refusal to see negative experiences in the framework of antagonistic national groups is, to an extent, an attempt to minimise any effect of international politics between China and Japan on their conceptualisations of their lives in Japan. Some informants avoided political topics altogether, which was also a strategy to separate their lives from the context of Chinese–Japanese political conflicts and another indicator that such topics were not important for them. While the political landscape of Chinese–Japanese relations will inevitably be a context in which Chinese students in Japan, present or future, continue to find themselves, their strategies of navigating through such a context suggest that the re-thinking of “the national” as a category, proposed by Beck and colleagues (Beck 2000; Beck and Sznaider 2006) as a key agenda for the social sciences in the cosmopolitan paradigm, is also taking place implicitly “on the ground,” at the level of individuals' everyday lives. As such, I would suggest that the link between cosmopolitanism and the re-thinking of the national as the defining category or term of reference in understanding social phenomena can be expanded to interpret individual dispositions in cross-cultural settings. This need not be confined to overseas students' experiences, but can also be utilised to understand the experiences of tourists and different categories of migrants.

This study provides an example of how (if at all) cosmopolitanism operates at an individual level in a politically sensitive context. While China and Japan were not exactly at war with one another when my Chinese student-informants were studying and living in Japan, Chinese student-migrants in Japan can nonetheless be considered as a case study of the attitudes and dispositions of student migrants studying in a state with occasional hostilities with the home state. While this study is one of several studies on the development of cosmopolitan competence and identity changes among Chinese student-migrants (for example, Gu and Schweisfurth 2015), its emphasis on the development and cultivation of cosmopolitan dispositions within the context of an ongoing political dispute between the “home” and “host” countries provides a specific dimension of individual cosmopolitanism on which many previous studies on individual cosmopolitanism did not focus. The specific effects of political hostilities and historical animosities between China and Japan on

Chinese students' development of an understanding of Japanese society – from providing an ongoing “issue” about which students must decide to engage or consciously avoid, to supplying an impetus (for some students) to actively seek to know more about Japan – adds to the complexity of the manifestations of individual cosmopolitanism. In other words, the findings of this study can contribute to expanding the understanding of the features of a cosmopolitan (or cosmopolitanising) individual.

My Chinese student-informants' experiences with handling politically sensitive topics in Japan also provide a glimpse of the potential effect of the development of individual cosmopolitanism. While cosmopolitanism can coexist with a strong national identity (Appiah 1997), the reflexive aspect of a cosmopolitan disposition, and the reconfiguration of national identities as a result (as demonstrated by some of my Chinese informants), has the capability to counteract the strong division between “us” and “them” that might arise from a strong national identity among migrant groups in foreign countries. This is all the more significant if the particular migrant group's home state has ongoing issues of conflict with the “host” state, as is the case of Chinese students in Japan. As such, cosmopolitanism at an individual level has great potential to become a force to counteract inter-national hostilities in the everyday lives of individuals.

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