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**Master's Thesis**

**Disputed areas: How China uses history to  
legitimate sovereignty**



## Abstract

The starting point of this thesis is how China articulates its sovereignty towards the disputed areas of Tibet, Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku, and Nanhai Zhudao. It derives on three nationalist narratives concerning the motherland/unseperable China, national humiliation, and the story of the seafarer Zheng He and his treasure voyages; these nationalist narratives are vital components of Chinese nation building and show themselves to be central in articulation of sovereignty of these three areas. They have different functions but a common feature is that the narratives should help China in the transition to become a modern nation-state. The thesis analyze official white papers and news paper articles upon the three cases to trace the nationalist narratives and how they are used. The conclusion will focus on whether there is a link between the difference in the nature of the three cases and which narratives are articulated.

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## **Abbreviation list**

**CCP – Chinese Communist Party**

**KMT – Kuomintang (China's National People's Party)**

**PRC – People's Republic of China**

**SAR – Special Administrative Region**

**SCS – South China Sea**

**TAR – Tibet Autonomous Region**

**USA – United States of America**

**WP – White Paper**

## **Chinese names for the islands and areas mentioned in this thesis:**

**Nanhai Zhudao – The South China Sea islands**

**Nansha Dao - The Spratly Islands**

**Xisha Dao - The Paracel Islands**

**Dongsha – The Pratas Islands**

**Zhongsha – The Macclesfield Bank and the Scarborough Shoal**

**Diaoyu Dao – The Senkaku Islands**

## Introduction

This present thesis derives from a fascination of Chinese culture, and the recognition that this thousand-year-old culture is a huge part of Chinese identity. My supervisor introduced me to a short essay written by Arif Dirlik, an historian on political ideology in modern China, who was motivated to write upon the name “Zhongguo” by a certain discomfort over the words “China” and “Chinese” which he believe to be very broad labels that covered a huge area and different peoples in ancient times<sup>1</sup>. He introduces a nationalistic tendency rooted in the last years of the Qing Dynasty, and the need of reinventing the ancient term “Zhongguo”, which was used in international treaties as equivalent to the Western term “China”. As such, there occurred a certain political adaptation of “Zhongguo” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on Chinese initiative which Dirlik links to Chinese self-identification and “...as an appropriate name for the nation-form to suppleant the Empire that had run its course.”<sup>2</sup>. In other words, a culture, that reached thousands of years back in time, was adapting to new times with a different view on ethnicity, nationhood, nationality, etc., and the concept nation-state was introduced and was very unlike the traditional Chinese thinking of *tianxia*; what is crucial to realize the re-invented term, Dirlik writes, is “...the re-imagination of the past and the present’s relationship to it.”<sup>3</sup>. The meaning of this is that a modern Chinese identity must be in line with both the past of the country and the people(s) in it, and the present; and for this use it is conveniently to use the powerful tools in nationalism and creating a certain common history for the people, like many other countries have done before China in the transformation into a nation.

This is the working field that this thesis operates within, and the background for the problem statement beneath. Three nationalist narratives outlines Chinese past and Chinese values in a certain way and defines what it is to be Chinese, but not least the narratives define what is Chinese territory when articulated in specific (political) contexts. It is the purpose of this thesis to investigate this political context in three cases to see what role these narratives of the Chinese past actually play in an argumentation for Chinese sovereignty over what is believed to be Chinese territory.

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<sup>1</sup> Dirlik

<sup>2</sup> Dirlik

<sup>3</sup> Dirlik

## Field of problem

China has various territorial disputes ongoing and a remarkable thing is that history seems to play a huge role in producing and articulating arguments for sovereignty; it is widely acknowledged among historians that the combination of politics and history is a powerful cocktail that easily can unite or split a people or a nation. Many researchers have documented that the CCP uses nationalist narratives to create a certain collective memory upon a Chinese nation, and these nationalist narratives are based on a certain interpretation and articulation of Chinese history. Keeping this in mind, it would be interesting to see how these nationalist narratives are articulated in practice towards disputed areas with very different conditions.

In order to do this, this thesis builds on three cases concerning Tibet, Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku, and several islands in the South China Sea called Nanhai Zhudao; news paper articles and the official white paper on the specific issue provides the material for analyze in each of these cases which are unique to demography and political circumstances. For example, Tibet is populated and belong to Chinese domestic policy while the two other areas are either no man's land (Nanhai Zhudao) or under sovereignty of a foreign nation (Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku), and thereby belong to the sphere of Chinese foreign policy. Furthermore, the islands in the South China Sea are uninhabited while some of the islands in the East China Sea are inhabited. The purpose of this thesis is to see whether specific nationalist narratives are articulated depending on which area is targeted, and out of these results to conclude on how nationalist narratives are used in claims for sovereignty in a Chinese political context.

The starting point of this thesis is that the nationalist narratives is necessary for the CCP to secure it's legitimacy, and give the impression that the party is worthy to rule China. It is decided to use the approach of *politics of memory and history* in this study to show why history can became such a powerful political tool if adapted to the specific circumstances, and why the concept of *imagined communities* is the glue which make coherence within a people, or within people's; the challenge for the CCP is namely to govern China as a modern nation-state while at same time honouring the ancient tradidion of *tianxia* (All-under-Heaven) which says that the Chinese reign has the obligation to provide good governance for all people's in the world, which is to be understood as people's in the Chinese hemisphere, in this case minorities in Tibet, and people living on the islands. The sense of all this will be further explained later on in this thesis but a short introduction to the context of

the following problem statement is relevant while a lot of question have led to the specific sentence beneath.

## Problem statement

How does China uses nationalist narratives to legitimate claims towards disputed areas?

## Explaining the problem statement

The problem statement consists of some elements which need to be explained and defined due to strengthen the focus of this thesis. First of all, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by “China” while it is the actor intended to exam and must to some extent be seen in connection with the next part of the problem statement, namely the “uses of history”. This discipline will be further explained in a chapter later on but for now it is enough to mention that it entails all preparation of past events, values, traditions, norms etc. and here “China” becomes important. This thesis is focused about the political uses of history in China, more specifically at a national level within the Chinese Communist Party while it is the assumption of this thesis that the CCP uses history to legitimize it’s power and right to rule.

The last part of the sentence refers to the disputed areas of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku, Tibet, and Nanhai Zhudao. As outlined earlier, these areas are very unique in their nature and whether they are a point of interest for either foreign policy or domestic policy and thereby contribute to the dynamic between foreign matters and domestic matters in the sense that the areas are believed to be important parts of China. Combined with the two other parts in the chain, a picture is drawn of the areas as having vital political importance for China and it is at these circumstances that the approach of *policy of memory and history* must be seen; namely as a political tool to uphold the awareness of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku, Tibet, and the islands in the South China Sea as inherent and indisputable Chinese territory.



## Definition of concepts

This section will introduce two important concepts which are essential to the present research; nationalism and sovereignty are often two sides of the same coin in the Western idea of a nation-state. Likewise has China experienced a transition from traditional society into a modern nation-state, driven by political ambitions. Though, nationalism and sovereignty in a Chinese context might be a little different than Western perception, why, it is important to define these concepts before going on to the analysis. First, nationalism will be explained in general terms as it appears from the researcher Anthony D. Smith, and then the section will go on to define filial nationalism and state nationalism as essential to Chinese nation building. After this, the Chinese perception of sovereignty will be presented.

## Chinese nationalism

When talking about politics of history and memory and the use of this, it is also relevant to mention the phenomenomea of nationalism. Before describing the term in a specific Chinese context, it might be relevant to put a few words upon general nationalism theory.

Anthony D. Smith writes that nationalism “...is much more than a political ideology; it is also a form of culture and “religion”. This line of reply brings into focus the central concept of nationalism, that of the “nation””<sup>4</sup>. Smith continues, that the “nation” is precepted as a *public culture* and that nationalism demands the rediscovery and restoration of the nation’s unique cultural identity which means a return to authentic roots “...in the historic culture community inhabiting its ancestral homeland.”<sup>5</sup>. The way for nationalism to do this transition, according to Smith, is by making the members of the nation conscious of their cultural unity and national history, and thereby cultivating their national individuality through national education and institutions; and the transition leaves room for a political symbolism to take place which manifest in flags, anthems, festivals,

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<sup>4</sup> Smith: 33

<sup>5</sup> Smith: 34

ceremonies etc.<sup>6</sup>. In other words, it derives a great and continuously political effort to get the cultural nation fit into the political nation.

In a Chinese context, these above points are interesting due to the country's transition into a modern nation-state; Suisheng Zhao has described what Smith refers to as state nationalism, and links a growing Chinese nationalism in the 1980s to the political need of CCP for political legitimacy. He refers to the crackdown of Tiananmen which was interpreted in official propaganda as anti-China rather than anti-communism. *"The communist regime positioned itself as the representative of China's national interest and the defender of Chinese national pride."*<sup>7</sup>. A new political direction was needed and patriotism (or official nationalism as Zhao mentions it) soon provided name for a campaign of education in patriotism, appealing to nationalism with the goals *"...to rejuvenate China's national spirit, to strengthen the unity of the Chinese people of different ethnic groups, to reconstruct a sense of national esteem and dignity, and to build the broadest possible coalition under the leadership of the CCP."*<sup>8</sup>. It was an "education in the national conditions" and was dominated by three themes: Chinese tradition and history, territorial integrity, and national unity<sup>9</sup>. The new enemy was imperialism as a threat to Chinese unity and pride while Chinese history was characterized as an unceasing struggle against foreign aggression and suppression with regards to the mid-1800s struggles against European powers. The new patriotism/nationalism aimed at redeeming past humiliations and the Chinese heroic resistance should be remembered and the national glory restored. The ancient Chinese traditions was highlighted and Confucianism and other Chinese cultural artefacts restored.

What Zhao tell here is described by Michael Billig as the necessity of imagining a nation amongst nations if a nation is to be imagined in all it's particularity<sup>10</sup>. A certain nation has to define itself but to do so it is necessary to define what makes this nation special and why is it coherent; in general terms, Michael Billig explains nationalism as consisting of two interrelated variables; the objective and subjective variables where the first mentioned includes topics like language, religion and geography and the last mentioned is more about psychology. Billig relates that psychology to the mechanisms of imagined communities as outlined by Bnedict Anderson<sup>11</sup>. The overall questions

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<sup>6</sup> Smith: 34

<sup>7</sup> Zhao: 8

<sup>8</sup> Zhao: 9

<sup>9</sup> Zhao: 9

<sup>10</sup> Billig: 83

<sup>11</sup> Billig: 24

is whether the nation-state or nationalism originated first and whether a nation should be defined as a geographical area or as a people (a particular identity). The definitions are constantly overlapping and to create a certain identity it is necessary with invention of traditions and to define who “we” are. In this process of defining “we”, there will be made a contradiction in “who are we not” which to a certain extent will provide a national narrative of the nation as a people. Nationalism derives on a very selective process, aiming to shape the collective memory to preserve the nation. As Billig puts it: “*Every nation must have its history, its own collective memory. This remembering is simultaneously a collective forgetting: the nation, which celebrates its antiquity, forgets its historical recency.*”<sup>12</sup>”.

Ann Anagnost emphasize the importance of narration in relation to nationalism in her *Making History Speak* upon the Cultural Revolution and Maoist era in China. She defines the narration of history as “...a subject progressively realizing its self-awareness and agency.”<sup>13</sup>. Concepts like History, Nation, Man, Society, and Individual (big letters to underline the timeless universality), she states has to be redefined during a revolution which means that the narrative has to be redressed. She further refers to Benedict Anderson and his theory of *imagined communities* and introduces the term of *speaking bitterness* which create a bond between state and people<sup>14</sup>. The state uses the bitterness amongst people to create narratives for reversing this bitterness and give it a meaning. The narratives has to answer a lot of questions due to who am I, what is my legacy, why am I a member of this community, and so on – topics of timeless universality. In general terms, Billig puts the coherence of a nation that the ruling elite must be equal to the ruled, meaning that there must be a form of cultural link between the people and their rulers<sup>15</sup>. There must be a coherence and a feeling of fellowship for people to support the governance of their country. That social coherence can be maintained in many ways and as stated by Billig the idea of imagined communities offers an approach to maintain this purpose. In other words, mutual trust is the glue that tie a nation together in modern nationalism theory; it is a process of unmasking the unknown and relate to it, giving it a meaning and an identity.

In a Chinese context, Zhao puts this collective memory as a remembering of past events and great achievements of Chinese and a commemoration of ancient values which makes China proud and powerful. The political campaign tries to empower a certain version of Chinese history and

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<sup>12</sup> Billig: 38

<sup>13</sup> Anagnost: 8

<sup>14</sup> Anagnost: 18

<sup>15</sup> Billig: 68

highlight that the unity of China relays on brotherhood, called filial nationalism, and is a great example of imagined communities where it is impossible to know all other members of the community. It is a call for uniting all the ethnic groups living on the soil which is believed as Chinese and is highly a psychological and cultural challenge according to Billig. Zhao has a certain expression in the description of the CCP's discovery of the utility of nationalism; namely, that the Chinese Communist Party "...restored ancestor worship..."<sup>16</sup>. Following Billig and Anagnost, this means an awakening of the ancestors lifestyle, religious values, etc. All these things became a political tool according to Zhao in order to create a nationalism which aim to unite people across ethnic groups. The elements in this unifying process is a rebirth of classical values which is believed typical Chinese and a will to continue and uphold them for showing the greatness and pride of the Chinese nation.

In 2011, William A. Callahan, professor in International relations, co-edited a book with Elena Brabantseva named "*China orders the world: Normative Soft Power and Foreign Policy*" upon the mix of past, present, and future in the efforts for defining China's role in the world order. In the introduction, Callahan mentions president Hu Jintao and his *harmonious world narrative* presented in 2005 as the framework for China's view on the world. He argues that everything Beijing does can be explained in this discourse and quotes a 2005 white paper: "*Looking back upon history, basing itself on the present reality and looking forward to the future, China will unswervingly follow the road of peaceful development, making great efforts to achieve a peaceful, open, cooperative and harmonious development*"<sup>17</sup>. There is no doubt for Callahan that China had opened to the outside world since Hu Jintao's speech to the UN in 2005; he emphasizes the Confucius Institutes' spreading around the world, the Olympic Games in Beijing, and Shanghai's World Expo in 2010 where China presented itself "*...to the world as the source of ancient wisdom and high technology, which together form an alternative model of progress and development.*"<sup>18</sup>.

This charm offensive to the world described by Callahan has to brand China as a legitim partner and peaceful neighbour but the very interesting point to this present thesis is that the Chinese identity is articulated through history and the remarks he makes on normative soft power as a tool for China to reach out to the world and brand itself. The foundation of this thesis will be a string of national narratives which aim to tell a certain history of China and promote ancient values in a

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<sup>16</sup> Zhao: 8

<sup>17</sup> Callahan (2011): 2-3

<sup>18</sup> Callahan (2011): 3

modern world. They build on historical events and interpret these in a certain way as extensions of Hu Jintao's speech upon a harmonious world and peaceful development. When talking about China the first which may come in mind is the Chinese history of humiliation and it includes Western powers, the Japanese, and even Chinese rulers which are believed to be corrupt, according to Callahan. This "Century of Humiliation" is said to begin with the Opium War in mid-1800 and end with the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949.

## The Chinese perception of sovereignty

In the already introduced book "*China orders the world*", Zhao Tingyang, a Chinese philosopher, contributed with a chapter explaining the Chinese perception of the world in comparing with the Western perception of the same topic. The reason for introducing Chinese worldview is that it is very important for the clarification of how sovereignty is perceived towards the three cases. Sovereignty is closely connected to how the world is considered to be and function.

Tingyang introduces the concept of All-under-Heaven (tianxia) as essential for the Chinese world view while he characterizes the concept as "...*the supposed ideal of a perfect empire.*". Zhao continue to explain the three meanings of All-under-Heaven as quite different from the immediate Western understanding of the concept; first of all the term means the "Earth" or simply the "whole world under heaven", almost equivalent to "the universe" or "the world" in Western languages. Second, it carries the meaning of "hearts of all peoples", or the "general will of the people" – therefore, Tingyang writes, All-under-Heaven is a way of seeing the Earth *as it is ours* rather than *as it is* and quotes the philosopher Xunzi to deepen the point: "*Enjoying All-under-Heaven does not mean to receive the lands from people who are forced to give, but to satisfy all people with a good way of governance.*". The concept All-under-Heaven therefore consists of the Earth and its people but for an Emperor to enjoy it fully he must gain the sincere and true support from the people on the land. The third meaning is the ethical/political aspect and regards the world as institutional due a universal system, or with the words of Zhao: "...*a utopia of the world-as-one-family.*"<sup>19</sup>. This parallel to the family indicates a certain responsibility for China and the CCP to treat the world well and in the interests of the people's in it.

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<sup>19</sup> Tingyang: 22

The Chinese view of the world must therefore be considered as a *world-society* which implies an obligation and a commitment to serve the will of all people's in the world and through this be recognized for good governance. As Zhao writes, "*States have always been seen as subordinate units inside the framework of the world-society that are regarded as necessary and the highest political unit.*". It is this worldness which rely on international alliances and unions of nation-states while Zhao writes that "*Such projects have essential difficulties in reaching the real integrality of the world, for they are limited by the perspectives of nation-states, due to the lack of of a vision of worldness. To see the world from its worldness is different from seeing it from a part of it.*"<sup>20</sup>. As such, it is very essential to see the world as a whole and keep a balance in it.

Zhao lists two principles for a Chinese ruler to honour for gaining political legitimacy in proving the rightness of the reign; first, the legitimacy of the establishment of an empire, which he explains as "...to save peoples from a terrible situation when, and only when, welcomed by most of the people...", and second, the justification of enjoyment of the reign, which is explained as "...to keep the world in the order that most of the people want."<sup>21</sup>. To Zhao, these principles is the most fundamental in Chinese perception of the world and the dynamics in it – they implies the responsibility for the Chinese reign to pay attention to all people's in the world and their needs and thereby maintain the world order and keep universal balance between its people's. This mind-set has elements of political sovereignty in it while it defines the world as a whole with its political power center in the Chinese reign; as Callahan writes, the traditional meaning of All-under-Heaven was a perception of the world as consisting of the different political layers of China from the Imperial court to the lowest official and then the peoples outside of China, called "barbarians" in some ancient texts. Though, it differs from a traditional, Western perception of sovereignty due to tianxia's nature of being limitless.

The author Allen Carlson writes that it is a conventional frame among scientist and scholars how the Chinese state "*inscribed historical frontiers and modern boundaries into the minds and activities of those residing close to, across, and along them.*"<sup>22</sup>. In this sense, the Chinese perception of borderlines seems to follow ethnic and cultural principles as developed through history. Another author John Cranmer-Byng elaborate this point when he writes that "*the Chinese world view was normative. It was not simply that the Chinese regarded their culture as superior in*

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<sup>20</sup> Tingyang: 23

<sup>21</sup> Tingyang: 24

<sup>22</sup> Carlson (2003): 679

*material and aesthetic sense; they believed it to be morally superior, and of universal validity.*"<sup>23</sup>. His argument is that the Chinese view of the world was challenged when the Europeans arrived and the country was presented to a world order with nation-states and alien ethical standards which it could not believe in. China must have been weak at that time that the country could not be considered as sovereign or dependent according to Western law<sup>24</sup>. These sentences express very well the relationship between China and European countries, primarily the United Kingdom, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; anti-pati was settled from the beginning where two different ways of observing the world met. Further, following the arguments of Cranmer-Byng, the world order today is significantly inspired by Western persuasions which is not acceptable to China as well as it were not at that time. Another point by Cranmer-Byng is that Japan has been associated into this view of the world as imperialistic and aggressive in their externalising behaviour. It is an interesting point in the sense that a reference to imperialism and aggressive behaviour have a number of connotations when articulated in white papers and news paper articles while the words both can refer to European behaviour during the colonial wars, the present USA, or as a reference to the great humiliation to the Chinese which is to blame Japan. The audience of threats to Chinese sovereignty includes many members which may be taken into account of the national narratives which can have many targets depending on the articulation of them.

In sum, it can be said that the Chinese perception of the concept *sovereignty* builds on a world order different from the Western during the colonial era which still is a dichotomy in the debate today. A world order based on harmony and ethnic relations with thereby following blurred boundaries was challenged by a world view based on a strong central power which was able to uphold strict, geographical boundaries and thereby sustain the sovereignty and independence of the state. This point will be important in detecting the national narratives later on in this thesis due to the frequent talk about distancing *imperialism* in advance for promoting peace and harmony. Cranmer-Byng draws a picture of a regional world order with its center in the Chinese political system. References to this world order can be seen in the following section about China's *core interests* which is a politically generated goal for what is important to China both in domestic politics and foreign politics, and what the country is striving for in order to preserve the Chinese nation.

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<sup>23</sup> Cranmer-Byng; 68

<sup>24</sup> Cranmer-Byng; 70

Timothy R. Heath has explained China's *core interests* in a number of cases. The concept entails the core in a renewed Chinese foreign and domestic policy and explains why China is so keen to claim sovereignty in disputed areas. It is very like the Western concept *national interests*<sup>25</sup>. Heath describes the concept as “*modern, relevant and measureable*” compared to former political benchmarks and as essential to survival and (peaceful) development of the Chinese society. The Chinese officials operates in this sense with two concepts; *issues of core interests* and the more broad *issues sensitive to core nterests*. The *core interests* covers issues like “*national sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, national reunification, China's political system and social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring interests nescesary for sustained economic and social development...*”<sup>26</sup>. In practice, core interests to China therefore include topics like the political system, Taiwan and Tibet. It appears that the concept of core interests is developed as an answer to globalization and the growing economic power of China in order to sustain this development and at the same time functions as a warning tool towards foreign powers not interfering areas of Chinese interest.

## Methodological considerations

### Research method and approach

The literature for this thesis is characterized by studies of the Chinese engagement in the South China Sea, Tibet, and Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku. Despite, it is widely acknowledged in the literature, that nationalism and uses of history plays a huge role in Chinese self-perception and identity, and that many authors refer to Benedict Anderson's term *imagined communities* in their argumentation for it's fundamental meaning for the Chinese approach to disputed areas, including former colonies, the research for this thesis has not succeeded in finding a comparative study of disputed areas claimed by Chinese. Furthermore, it is unclear which role nationalist narratives plays in argumentation for sovereignty over certain areas wherefore this thesis focus on which role these three above mentioned disputed areas play in the nationalist narratives about China, or, in other words, what role they play in Chinese identity making and self-perception. The starting point of

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<sup>25</sup> Heath: 100

<sup>26</sup> Heath: 100



thesis is namely the idea of a Chinese identity dilemma which is sought to be solved by articulating Chinese history in a certain way on a national political level.

The approach to investigate this assertion belongs to the discipline uses of history and is called *politics of memory and history*; the approach will be further explained in a section later on but in short it can be said that the term covers an approach to history as a political tool and builds on the idea that history can be manipulated for creating *imagined communities* that secure or strengthen the coherence in a society. That is the reason why the nationalist narratives are so central in this research while the premise is that these interpretations of Chinese national history are made for securing the stability in the Chinese society, and thereby in the end the legitimacy of the CCP. A growing Chinese nationalism has been the catalysator for these nationalist narratives and the interesting thing to this thesis is, as mentioned, how important the disputed areas are to the vision of these narratives and thereby the illusion of a certain Chinese identity.

For this use, three nationalist narratives have been selected for this thesis, namely the narrative of the motherland and the unseperable China, the narrative of Zheng He (a seafarer in Chinese history), and the narrative of humiliation or rather the Century of Humiliation which affects many Chinese and must be said to define a great of Chinese worldview. In the analysis section they will be compared with the empirical material which consist of official Chinese white papers and news paper articles to check for matches to see which narratives are present in the material, and not least to which degree. This analysis will indicate the widespread of these nationalist narratives in the official approach to the disputed areas, and thereby the narratives´ importance for the articulation of Chinese sovereignty.

### **The hidden power of history; explaining the role of *politics of memory and history* in Chinese policy towards disputed areas**

The uses of history is a various discipline according to Annette Warring which most important concepts are *heritage*, *collective memory*, *cultural memory* and *community of memory*. Furthermore it is possible to talk about *historical memory*<sup>27</sup>. The common feature of these concepts are the idea that every single human being uses history as a mirror to create an identity by finding values to

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<sup>27</sup> Warring: 7

believe in, acting on etc. It is possible to handle memories individually and as a part of a community but a trait is that there always will be an interpretation of the history which tends to give the individual a direction to follow in life and thereby a certain perception of the surroundings. It range from the exhibition on the museum, over the construction of a building or a monument to the parade and invention of traditions, and the spoken word<sup>28</sup>. All this scenarios have in common that they carry a statement and a certain interpretation of the events which gave rise to the action. They all pick their material up in past events and articulate the events in specific ways due to the purpose the narrative tend to serve. The purpose for an exhibition can be providing people with knowledge of a certain historical period, the monument can be a symbol to remember a great event or a person while traditions and speeches among other things have the ability to interpret the past for saying something about the present and the future. It is an ongoing selection process to find the focus points in history worth highlighting.

It is within this field that the approach *politics of memory and history* is to find. Warring states that this approach is concerned about research with “...*national or major communities’ public articulated memories as research field, often with a central historical event as turning point.*”<sup>29</sup>. It is an approach which is concerned about “...*the role that constructions of the past plays in modern societies due to social cohesion, collective identities, legitimation of institutions, and social hierarchys, including the socialising process of people into certain contexts and cultures.*”<sup>30</sup>. She further writes that collective memory and politics of memory typically is approached as power conditions and power means due to either promote the self-determination of the individual or to control and manage the individual.

As stated earlier the power conditions and the power means relays on a certain construction of memories which can be articulated in various ways (monuments, parades, the spoken word etc.) but also the education system and everyday communication (partners, news papers etc.) is an important element in reproducing these certain ideas

Jan Asmann calls this *communicative memory*<sup>31</sup>. The past is reproduced everyday and everytime a little bit will vanish and a new focus appear due to the selective process which determines the uses of history. Specific expressions in the language will develop – a form of shortcuts to memorize

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<sup>28</sup> Warring: 17

<sup>29</sup> Warring: 15: my own translation

<sup>30</sup> Warring: 16: my own translation

<sup>31</sup> Asmann: 126

specific events or situations due to “*remember the Alamo*” which is essential to American patriots and “*never forget humiliation*”, essential in Chinese nationalism. These two expressions does not make much sense by themselves but really does if the history they refer to is known. Warring calls these shortcuts patos-formulas because they derives on feelings and makes people emotional when memorizing<sup>32</sup>.

Last to mention is the *imagined communities*, a concept developed by Benedict Anderson. It tends to create unity and coherence within a nation by giving the people a common past they can associate and identify with. Benedict Anderson call this *imagined communitites*<sup>33</sup>; imagined, because the individual will never have the chance to get to know all the other members of the community but rather have a feeling of and think themselves being a part of a community. Imagined communities can rely on many aspects of life including religion and politics but the important mechanism to understand is that these communities defines and builds on a certain way of life which can be offered to the individual. The philosophy behind all this is that the individual seeks a way to define itself and an identity and therefore is adaptable to such a story which offers coherence and continuity.

The above is the context of the approach *politics of memory and history* and the essence according to Warring is that “...*memory and history is produced, institutionalized and used for certain, often political, purposes.*”<sup>34</sup>. These constructions of the past into modern contexts often has the role of legitimating institutions and social hierarchies and socializing populations in certain social contexts and cultures. A last aspect on the research upon politics of memory is the aspect of power conditions and power means. “*As exercise of power, politics of memory can be used due to promote the human skill of self-determination or due to controlling and restrain others.*”<sup>35</sup>. In other words, the very important thing about politics of memory is the ability to create a certain reality for the individual by articulating the history in a certain way. Another great tool of politics of memory to rely on is the creation of a counterpart/an enemy in order to mobilize the public opinion. This hostility can be manifested in many ways due to the establishing of places of memory, specific

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<sup>32</sup> Warring: 17

<sup>33</sup> Brix Bertelsen on Anderson: 336

<sup>34</sup> Warring: 16; my own translation

<sup>35</sup> Warring: 16; my own translation

expressions in the language, invention of new traditions etc.<sup>36</sup>. The approach is popular known as *the politics of hearts and minds* and is basically an instrument to define what people should think and feel about a certain topic.

Torbakov has used the approach of politics of memory in his analysis of Russia's transition from the Soviet Union into a state which is struggling to find a way to handle its past in relation to defining the core interests of Moscow<sup>37</sup>. He ends up concluding that even it at first sight appears that this showdown with the past is directed through the foreign policy it actually has quite a huge role in the domestic policy to legitimate institutions etc. Politics of memory therefore has a double role in both handling international relations and the role of establishing order inside the nation. Even Russia and China shall not be compared as nations in this thesis it is an important point of Torbakov that history is used internally to legitimate the government and its action and towards foreign policy in securing interests and finding place in a new world order. An interesting point towards China because of the struggles for political legitimacy internally which, as in the Russian case, is dependent on the performance in foreign policy. China has witnessed a huge political and cultural changes since the mid-1800 and these changes required China to find a new place in the world, including redefining "What is China"? and "What is it to be Chinese"?

Terminology is an important tool due to shaping the public opinion<sup>38</sup>. If history is described due to a certain vocabulary, specific aspects of history is highlighted while other is hidden in the shadow and forgotten from the collective memory. The way an aspect of history is articulated in public will give rise to a certain perception of the things occurred at that time and will automatically be interpreted in a present framework – values and principles will be drawn from history and set into a present context. This interpretation of history will be the truth unless an alternative vocabulary and interpretation is accessible.

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<sup>36</sup> Warring: 17

<sup>37</sup> Torbakov: 210

<sup>38</sup> Warring: 13

## The necessity of historical chapters

Each case represents a dispute in which China claims to have historical evidences for sovereignty. The involved countries have a very old relationship as regional neighbours and thereby a common history; and this common history are very significant as background to the subjects for interpretation for China to create arguments for sovereignty over the disputed areas. As mentioned, the analysis will rely on official white papers and news paper articles, and these documents are to be treated as products of their time and the accumulation of experiences, values, etc. so far. This context is necessary to understand and interpret the importance of the document and analyse how and, not at least, why they use history as they do.

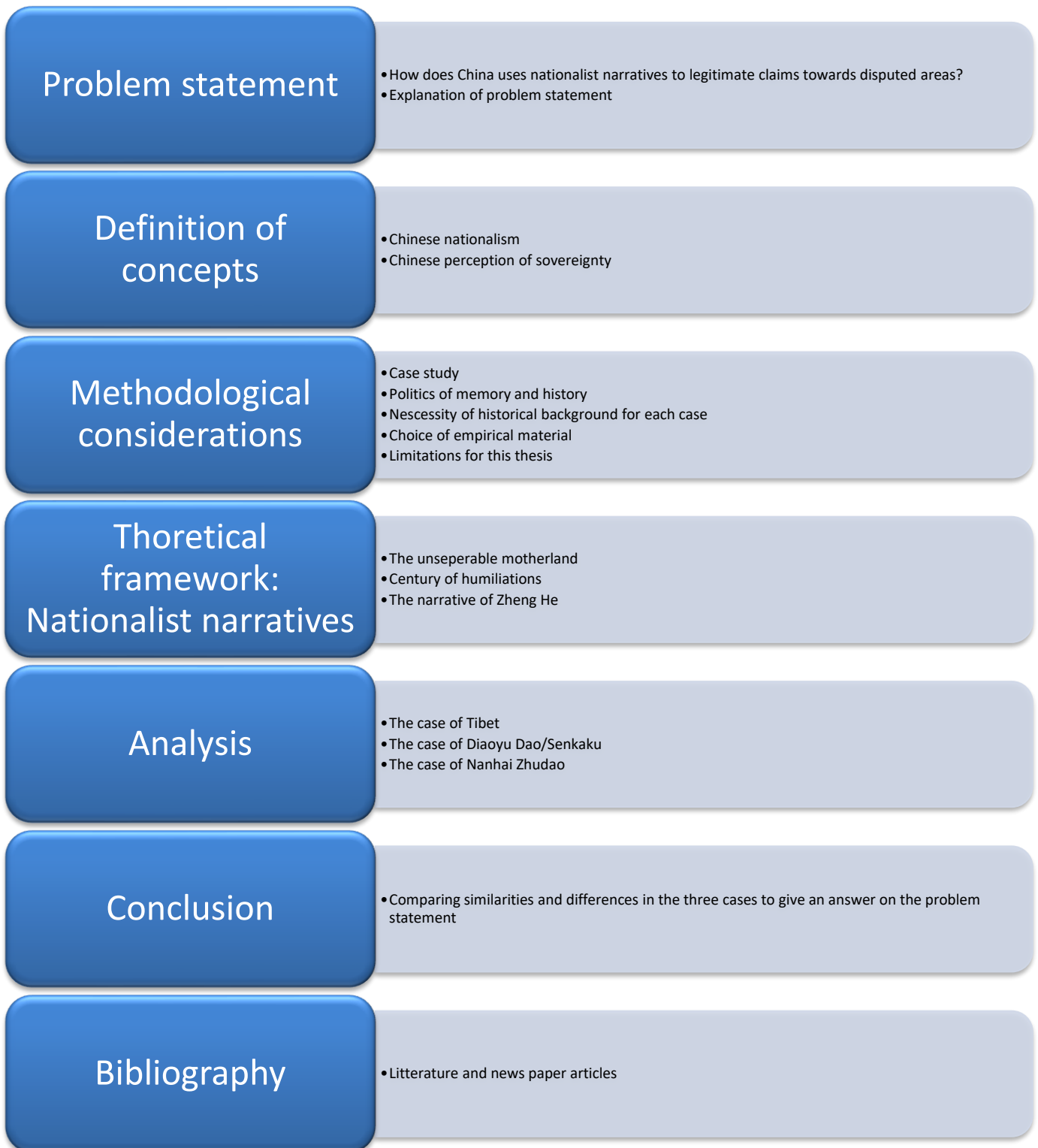
The approach of *politics of memory and history* becomes relevant in this sense to analyse how the Chinese authorities interpret the history and uses it in framing the policies towards disputed areas. The central aspect is how history is articulated and how the Chinese authorities wants to remember the common history with China's neighbours. It is relevant in the sense that this ommon history provides the material which is interpreted and translated into national narratives. Furthermore, a historical chapter is necessary in the sense to understand the essence of a national narrative, and, perhaps more, the background of the nationalist narratives provides valuable information due to the interpretation for understanding which thoughts and values they really express, including, what is not told in the narratives, and why it is not told. By having the information of the historical background in each case, it is possible to answer these questions, and show in which way Chinese history is manipulated to fit in a modern, national, political context in China.

## Structural design

This section is intended to give a brief overview of this thesis' structure and the importance of each elements. As mentioned, this thesis concerns about how China legitimizes claims on disputed areas by operating the analytic tool *politics of memory and history*; the section of methodological considerations is intended to reflect upon the relevance of this tool and the importance of defining the Chinese perception of sovereignty. This approach requires first of all an analytical framework to outline the direction for the analysis and underpin why the discipline of uses of history is relevant in a Chinese context. The theory of nationalism is chosen from the view that China shows nationalistic

tendencies in these years, not least in the argumenation for sovereignty in disputed areas. As such, it is relevant to investigate on a political level how history is modified and presented to the people and the world. In this sense, a number of concepts need to be clarified and in the preliminary chapters the approach *politics of memory and history* and the Chinese perception of the concept *sovereignty* is explained, the last mentioned as a form of counterweight to the Western perception. It is attempted to emphasize the historical dimension through the chapters of this thesis while this is important for understanding the way China acts in domestic and foreign affairs today. Furthermore, China's core interests is outlined as a political programme created for supporting this nationalism and giving it a direction while defining what China is striving for.

The analysis is based on three single cases of disputed areas with a unique status due to the (historical) relationship to China and the present conditions of ownership etc. and is divided into two sections; an analysis of the relevant white paper and then an analysis of articles. The meaning of this structure is to locate national narratives in the white paper due to the parameters established in the theory section and then see whether these same national narratives is broadcasted in the news papers. This is relevant to see how China will positionate itself in domestic politics as well as in foreign politics due to the nature of the cases. Each will end up with a partial conclusion regarding the articulated narratives and how dominantly they are. The point is that it is all about branding China in a certain way but to different audiences. The white papers are primarily for politically and scientific use while the news papers communicate the political message to the Chinese people and, perhaps not least, the outside world.



## Choice of empirical material

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how history is used in the official policies towards disputed areas. Therefore, it is chosen to use the official Chinese white papers regarding Tibet, Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku, and the islands in the South China Sea, complemented by news paper articles from Global Times and People's Daily. This provides a great insight in the official policies on these issues due to that the white papers themselves are written by the State Council to state the Chinese position while the newspapers are mouthpieces for the CCP. The focus will of course be on which nationalist narratives is present in the material and to which degree, but this approach also allow an investigation whether the news paper articles articulates the same narratives as the official white paper in each case. This possible continuity of information is interesting due to the target group of the news papers which consists of the common Chinese man, but we might also presume that these news papers to a large degree function as sources of information to many foreign medias, since the written language of Global Times and People's Daily easily can be found in English. Thereby, the Chinese government suddenly has a huge audience to it's messages on nationalist issues in the struggle for claiming sovereignty over disputed areas.

This whole material gives great insight in the official position and the arguments used to back it up. Most of these arguments are references to historical events, ancient charts, but also, at least for the newspapers, personal anecdotes and statements from both Chinese and foreign experts. In an overall perspective, it can be said that even a tiny little news upon one of the three cases gives occasion to mention the historical arguments for Chinese sovereignty and likewise they are very frequent with average 3-5 articles in a month in each case. This indicates awareness upon the issues and the fact that the articles are translated into English shows an effort to reach out for an international audience.

The selection of the news paper articles can not be said to be representative; as mentioned, both news papers is mouthpieces for the government, and are expected to pass on the official statements and viewpoints, and furthermore are the number of chosen articles so few that they must be said only to have the ability to show an tendency in the public orientation towards disputed areas. The reason for chosing People's Daily and Global Times was depending on the circumstances in China which does not allow a public debate upon the discourse and policies which the central



administration set. Therefore, it is chosen to gather material which can set the message of the white papers into an actual context, and at same time makes it possible to investigate whether the nationalist narratives are strictly passed, or changes and differences can be detected when the media and the audience change.

The white papers are chosen to get insight in the official statement on the three cases and are up to date except the one on Tibet. It is an older version from the 90's but nevertheless it is relevant towards the political wish of integrating Tibet in the Chinese nation. Though, it is necessary to be aware of the historical circumstances which have taken place in the meantime and highly influence the language used in the white paper, for example, that Tibet's independence nowadays to a higher degree is a topic of interest to the world community than compared with past times. The historical context is important for understanding the national narratives along with their occurrence and significance in the argumentation for Chinese sovereignty; therefore all three cases will begin with a section describing the relationship between China and the counterpart during time seen from a Chinese perspective. This will help understanding why a certain nationalist narrative is present and which historical material it derives upon; this link is necessary to conclude upon how nationalist narratives are used in certain contexts, and trace similarities and differences.

## Limitations

The limitations of the current research will be outlined here. Firstly, the focus is on three particular areas, namely Tibet, the South China Sea islands, and Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku, and is limited to a Chinese national political perspective on these three disputed areas. This does not mean that there is not regional and international interests in these areas, and in Tibet the dispute even relays on whether the country is an independent nation or a part of China. Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku is an official Japanese territory contested by the the Chinese, and the disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea has huge international awareness, especially due to the UNCLOS, and as a valuable trading route. The point is that even there is a lot of realpolitik and legal issues linked to these areas, and there might be short references to this in the further research; though, the focus of this thesis is more immaterial and is directed upon these areas value in the Chinese self-perception. In other words, the theory is centered about some specific nationalist narratives, and not the legal perspective, and the rational interest of China and foreign powers towards these specific areas.

## Theory: Chinese nationalist narratives

As outlined earlier in this paper, every nation has its own narratives to define itself and give the people an identity. The Chinese identity dilemma is to be solved by reinvented nationalist narratives which can unite the Chinese nation. The following section will present three narratives based on Chinese history and articulate values and traditions which is believed to be particular Chinese. It will explain their occurrence and context while these narratives is interesting towards the analysis of the empirical material to investigate which role they play in how sovereignty is articulated and claimed.

### The unseperable China

The narrative of the unseperable China is to some extent linked to the narrative of humiliation due to the thought that uniting the motherland is a great force from being humiliated by foreigners. Here should be added the element of the narrative that the CCP is the guarantee that nor even corrupt Chinese politicians will act in disfavour of the national interests. In other words, the essence is that the CCP is the strong core of a harmonious motherland going towards a bright future. Again, it is necessary to point out that this narrative should be seen as legitimating in a political context, explaining, as it builds on historical references to activities and events in the past, telling the story how China became a nation. Furthermore, the narrative is duable in the sense that it both refers to mainland China and, in a broader context, and the people's (ethnic groups) living in China. For example, the ancient Chinese tributary system is seen as a symbol for Chinese influence in the south-east Asian region, and today China still see itself as important for continuously regional development.

A lot of areas, which China today believe as Chinese, have a history being colonized by mostly Western powers while mainland China have experienced invasions from Japanese. All these events have transformed into a political context where the logic seems to be that China is an easy target if divided but strong as a unity. The previously mentioned term *tianxia* is a good starting point for understanding this nationalist narrative due to its philosophy of providing and maintaining good governance for all people's under Heaven. The tributary system fitted perfectly into this mind-set

due to the caretaking of the region, and China still expect to have this role. Today, this role seems to include the maintenance of former colonies and welcome them back to the motherland.

## Century of humiliation

“The Century of Humiliation” is a huge part of Chinese identity and the perception of China’s history, starting with the Opium War and lasting till the establishment of the CCP in 1949. The humiliation narrative has evolved, according to Callahan, from the incentives of the Britains in mid-1800 to get their way into the Chinese market through violence, known as the “gunboat diplomacy”. This provoked a feeling of powerlessness and bitterness among Chinese directed against the Britains which was seen intruders and occupiers but the anger was as much directed against the Chinese reign which was seen as corrupt and out of touch with the will of the people in collaborating with the foreigners. From then, the feeling of humiliation developed over the century, especially within a couple of wars with Japan which victimized China and gave a feeling that China was an easy prey for foreign invasions. It was this reality that the PRC was developed to handle when the KMT government finally was removed in favour of the CCP. It is relevant to note that this humiliation narrative to a high degree is invented and elaborated by the CCP in the struggle to distance from previous Chinese reigns and thereby get political legitimacy among the Chinese people<sup>39</sup>. Zheng Wang puts it this way: “*China certainly has its own intellectual and cultural heritage on peace and conflict, and more importantly, this heritage includes both pro-conflict and pro-peace discourses.*”<sup>40</sup>.

Callahan emphasizes the insecurities and humiliation as being the determining factor of Chinese policy in his work “*National Insecurities*” and puts his statement this way: “...*humiliation has been an integral part of the construction of Chinese nationalism.*” and argues that “...*humiliation can be generalized to explain a modular form of nationalism...*”<sup>41</sup>. Thereby, it is not just the glories of China which is to be commemorated in Chinese nationalism but also the weakness of the nation, most significant in the articulation of the “Century of Humiliation” and Callahan emphasizes the symbolic and moral values of this commemoration by stating: “*International politics has been*

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<sup>39</sup> Callahan (2004): 204

<sup>40</sup> Wang: 9

<sup>41</sup> Callahan (2004): 200

*transformed from “conquer or be conquered” into “humiliate or be humiliated”. (...) history is a “strategic issue”, especially as it informs the dynamic between nationalism and foreign policy.”*<sup>42</sup>. Historical memory and the commemoration of it is transformed into a strategic political tool, providing fuel for and giving answers to essential questions as mentioned previously and not at least defining a place for the Chinese in the world order.

Callahan deepens this point in another paper with focus on the Chinese commemoration day, “National Humiliation Day”, which was introduced in 2001; to Callahan history is a security issue in which the Chinese finds their identity in what he calls a “symbolic economy”<sup>43</sup>. Compared with the upper Callahan writing, he does not just links national humiliation to foreign aggression and invasion, but also to domestic corruption due to a feeling in the Chinese people that “...*foreign imperialism [was] encouraged by domestic corruption.*”<sup>44</sup>. It is the reason why the CCP has to legitimate itself, to distance itself from former corrupt leadership of the nation; national humiliation and national salvation is discursive twins according to Callahan and is manifested in the minds of people as the conviction that “*Only China could go from so high a civilization to be the lowest of low, the Sick Man of Asia, and back again.*”<sup>45</sup>. It is a highly political project in which narratives is designed to sustain the success of the CCP through the awakening of nationalism.

## The narrative of Zheng He

The 11<sup>th</sup> of July 1405, Zheng He, a Chinese eunuch admiral, set out on the first of seven famous voyages he made in the South/East China Sea and the Indian Ocean. He was sent by the great Ming Dynasty and was the first person to discover, name and map the islands in the South China Sea<sup>46</sup>. Zheng He reached far out and visited several countries in Asia and reached the continents of Africa and Australia.

The sources to his various sea faring adventures through the South China Sea and East China Sea are numerous and detailed and interpreted by many authors to be the very foundation of the Chinese claims for historic rights of the islands and other features and related waters in the South China

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<sup>42</sup> Callahan (2004): 202

<sup>43</sup> Callahan (2006): 183

<sup>44</sup> Callahan (2004): 205

<sup>45</sup> Callahan (2004): 206

<sup>46</sup> Shicun: 16

Sea<sup>47</sup>. It is the first hard rock evidence that a Chinese sailed the South China Sea following the order of the Emperor. Before the recordings of this admiral the sources are very influenced by myths and rare archeological funds on the contested islands.

According to Yoshihara, the narrative of Zheng He serves as a diplomatic tool which aims to “reminds Asian nations that China once exerted a benign sea-based supremacy over the region.”<sup>48</sup>. Zheng He made a lot of trade agreements without using force and by emphasizing this in all diplomatic connections in the region today, China wants to portray itself as a peaceful maritime power. The voyages is known as the “*Ming treasure fleet*” because of all “*the valuables it carried to trade with foreign people*” and thereby promoted China’s naval ambitions. Yoshihara states that research on pre-modern Asian affairs “*demonstrates that the peripheral states of the Sino-centric tributary system benefited strategically, economically, and culturally from Chinese primacy*” and that they “*voluntarily joined a hierarchical order that formally acknowledge China’s beneficent dominance in Asia.*”<sup>49</sup>.

Yoshihara categorizes the Zheng He narrative as a soft power diplomatic tool which works as a stopgap for the lack of hard power in “*Beijing’s military weakness, inexperience in overseas environments, and in deployment of forces to assure internal security in provinces such as Tibet and Xinjiang...*”<sup>50</sup>. Further, he writes that the invented soft power may give rise to an impression of China and make the Chinese political and military presence in coastal Asia more welcome to regional governments. In other words, realpolitik has shown realities to Chinese politicians and as a consequence they changed strategy towards using soft power in the international relations. In this process, the narrative of Zheng He was revived and made into a symbol for modern Chinese international behaviour. Despite that the narrative portrays Zheng He as a peaceful diplomat and a symbol of the prosperity of Chinese supremacy in Asia, the real story of Zheng He’s voyages might not have been that peaceful; a funny note is that the admirals ships was burned on the Emperor’s order and for many years Zheng He was an unknown person in Chinese history until the last 20-30 years where he has been celebrated annually. Furthermore the Chinese Columbus, as Chinese

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<sup>47</sup> Shicun: 21 ; Shen: 121

<sup>48</sup> Yoshihara: 64

<sup>49</sup> Yoshihara: 64

<sup>50</sup> Yoshihara: 65

newspapers like to call him, is celebrated at an annual event at his tomb outside Nanjing at the 11<sup>th</sup> of July, the starting date of the first expedition<sup>51</sup>.

The above mentioned link to the ancient Chinese tributary system which also deserves a comment; it builds on *tianxia* and is attached to Zheng He in the sense that the system in Chinese commemoration is synonym with how China creates peaceful development in Asia by taking the initiative; and today, China still is the guarantee for this generating wealth, prosperity, and strength in the region. Like the idea of *tianxia*, the fruits of present regional cooperation is considered as results achieved with China as heart and primus motor.

A last point worth to note from this narrative is the differentiation from Western imperialism and colonization and emphasizing an harmonious international order. Yoshihara here cites a Chinese article: “*During the glorious era when Zheng He went on his Western expedition, China did not seek hegemony: today and in the future, China will rise peacefully and will still not seek hegemony.*”<sup>52</sup>. *People’s Daily* went on to elaborate this point by stating that Zheng He’s expeditions gave full expression to the Chinese spirit of harmony whereas Columbus and his successors opened a large group of colonies in the Americas, bent on a typical predatory rise<sup>53</sup>. Yoshihara links the narrative of Zheng He’s great achievements to the present international relations of China by citing speeches given in Asia by several Chinese spokesmen and Premier Minister Wen Jiabao in a 2009 speech at Cambridge University<sup>54</sup>. The great diplomacy and friendly approach to foreign powers of Zheng He are not either forgotten to be mentioned by present Chinese officials when they maintain international relations.

It is this moral and cultural aspect of the narrative which is important to this thesis. The image of China articulated in the narrative about Zheng He is tended to be a diplomatic tool for promoting the soft values in Chinese foreign policy and thereby downscale the significance of military capacity as noted by Yoshihara – but also towards the world, explaining the peaceful intentions of China. In this, the narrative also provides a counterpart to aggressive behaviour and imperialism which of course reminds strongly of the humiliation narrative and thereby tend to create an image of China that is quite opposite the nations which once humiliated the country. As the analysis will show later on, this aspect of the Zheng He narrative is very significant towards the situation in the

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<sup>51</sup> *People’s Daily*, 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2013

<sup>52</sup> Yoshihara: 66

<sup>53</sup> Yoshihara: 69

<sup>54</sup> Yoshihara: 70

South China Sea; it is very important for China to give the world an impression of peaceful behaviour in the struggles for legitimating claims on sovereignty.

Zhao, as mentioned earlier, emphasizes the reinvention of ancient Chinese traditions and uphold of Chinese values in order to unify China across ethnic groups. The values associated with Zheng He is the peaceful approach to foreign countries and people, and the harmony that he brought onto the world during the voyages due to the very anti-imperialistic description of them. Yoshihara emphasizes the Sino-centric tributary system in this sense and how foreign states benefited from this practice and thereby joined a hierarchial order. Yoshihara emphasizes an ancient relationship in primarily south-east Asia which still must be honoured today in Chinese opinion. It is based on the values of peace and harmony and a practice of mutual exchange of goods and favours. There is not long way to associate these things with friendship and brotherhood in a nationalistic interpretation due to the concept of filial nationalism as earlier introduced due to the sovereignty concept based on ethnical borderlines. As such, the narrative of Zheng He became a symbol of great Chinese values and ancient practice which must be upheld.

In this way, China seeks to place the narrative of Zheng He as a center and inspiration for the present Chinese image and how the country approach foreign powers and handle domestic matters. The soft values of Zheng He is highlighted as typical Chinese and incorporated in policies towards disputed areas like Tibet, as stated by Yoshihara. Thereby, the narrative of Zheng He seems to have found use in both internal and external affairs of China to serve the purpose of showing as a trustworthy partner on the one hand, and being a kind of glue uniting China on the other hand.

As a last point should be attached a couple of comments on the comparism of the two major national narratives described; that of Zheng He and that centered upon the motherland and the unseperable China. In the core the narratives are very different but also have something in common. As shortly mentioned elsewhere the narratives intend to frame China in their own way; the narrative about the motherland is directed at domestic affairs with the message about unity and stability while the narrative of Zheng He is tended at branding China to the outside world through peaceful diplomacy etc. Though, some common elements are present; the message about Japan as occupator and imperialist, and then China as the opposite in terms of “peaceful” and “development”. It may be considered to be the very core of the national narratives that China want to brand itself as the counterpart to imperialism, a liberator so to say.

## Partial conclusion

Together, these three nationalist narratives provides a certain image of China which is politically generated. Their purpose are to frame China as a harmonious unity and a peaceful and trustworthy partner in international relations as well as to the Chinese people. In this way, the narratives conducts the kit that tie the Chinese nation together and give the Chinese people a common identity despite different ethnic groups etc. Keeping in mind the words of an identity dilemma, it must be added that these nationalist narratives is formulated and articulated to solve this dilemma due to Benedict Anderson's words of an imagined community as a foundation for nation building. Furthermore, especially the narrative of Zheng He has this second function as a diplomatic tool which Chinese politicians are keen to refer to in speeches etc. in an international agenda.

As a starting point, despite the narratives have certain overlaps, there can be distinguished between foreign policy and domestic policy due to the nationalist narratives; the one of Zheng He must be said to be outgoing and reach out to the world and show the greatness of China, and not least show that China is not an aggressive power. Towards this, the narratives of humiliation and the motherland must be said to have an moralizing function on the Chinese people itself. In the next chapter of this thesis, official Chinese white papers and selected news paper articles will be analysed to see whether references to these narratives are present. The three cases in focus are, as earlier written, different in their nature due the political status, inhabited or not, etc. Therefore, this thesis presume that the difference of the cases will reflect what narratives is being dominant in the argumentation for sovereignty.

## The case on Tibet

The relationship between China and Tibet as a state reaches about 1500 years back history<sup>55</sup> where the modern known Tibet consisted of nomads, clans, and minor kingships. Yarlung, one of this kingships, in 629 AD had Songtsen Gampo as king. He defeated the clans in the central and Western Tibetan area and coordinated raids into the territories of the great Eastern neighbour; the Empire of Tang. As a unifying figure of the clans, Songtsen had the power to make numerous

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<sup>55</sup> Schaik: 5



alliances with the nearby powers, including the defeated Emperor of Tang and the King of Nepal. He became very successful and the Tibetan area flourished under his reign. The remarkable here is that Tibet was strong and quite dominant in the central Asia in this period, a feudal system with nobilities, and vasals paying tribute. There was continuously raids into the Chinese mainland so it was not a period characterized by peace between the Tibetans and the Chinese empires.

In 842 AD, the Tibetan reign immediately collapsed due to a dispute between the nobilities and the growing Buddhism which led to a nearly total disappearance of the latter from the central Tibet. Later on, Buddhism returned to Tibet and became a strong factor of power in the country, and Tibetan Buddhism was very influent in the society. When the Mongolians in the 13<sup>th</sup> century was dominant in Asia, and there at same time was rivalries inside Tibet, one of the rivals succeeded to negotiate an agreement with the Mongolic Khan that allowed Tibet to remain independent in a spiritual sense, and the monk was declared spiritual leader of Tibet. This solution should be characterizing for Tibet's relationship to other states later on, and is still mentioned as a fundamental factor in the relationship between Tibet and China today. The concept Chöyön therefore deserves a little further explanation due to the main concept of this thesis, namely sovereignty.

Chöyön is characterized as a patron-priest relationship; as mentioned it appeared to regulate the relationship between Tibet and the Mongolic khan where the latter acknowledged the spiritual reign of Tibet but still had the power in a more conventional sense. Chöyön became very debated in Western literature during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century where especially the Britains had interests in Asia and tried to explain Chöyön with the term "suzerainty" while Great Britain occupied Tibet in the beginning of the 1900s. The term is an artificial formation from French meaning *upper-sovereignty*, used to describe the state which is not either totally dependent or independent. In practice, the term covers a demarcation between foreign policy and domestic policy where the occupied state itself maintain the latter one. Though, it is discussed whether the term "suzerainty" can cover the full meaning of Chöyön due to the spiritual dimension<sup>56</sup>. The issue was probably a contradiction in perception of sovereignty due to the nature of spiritual unlimitness as a Buddhistic tradition. This has often been the argument that Tibet did not have strict borderlines in the 1200s and the argument is quite the same when China characterizes the bonds to Tibet today; China and

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<sup>56</sup> Blondeau and Buffetrille: 44

Tibet has a strong spiritual relationship, and Tibet is under Chinese jurisdiction and has nothing to do with foreign policy<sup>57</sup>.

Allen Carlson has contributed to describe and analyse the Sino-Tibetan relationship in the article “Beijing’s Tibet Policy: Securing Sovereignty and Legitimacy” which concerns the development of the common relationship in the 1980s and 1990s. He argues that there was a shift in the mid-1980s in Beijing’s Tibet policy “...spurred by a surge in historically grounded nationalist narratives that crystallized China’s claim to Tibet.”<sup>58</sup>; the shift was caused by national pressure and an international outlook, which increased the Chinese focus on unity and the wish that Tibet should be an integrated part of China. China wanted to gain increased control of its frontier region. Along with this shift in attitude upon the Tibetan Question, Carlson traces a change in perception of sovereignty based on nationalism, and identifies this perception as going towards jurisdictional sovereignty; in other words, the Tibet policy changed from being focused on recognizing differences into a focus of preserving unity because the self-determination in Tibet inspired non-Han populations in other regions, especially Xinjiang and Mongolia, to “...the formation of movements to overthrow the central government administration...”, and Carlson links this transition to KMT’s, and later on CCP’s, “...vision of a unified, modern Chinese nation-state.”<sup>59</sup>. This last sentence about non-Han Chinese and central government administration witness about a tense situation in priorities between the central government and ethnic minorities, but also indicates a certain political dimension due to an ethnic nationalism versus state nationalism. According to Carlson, this political wish already existed in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but, as said, gathered pace in the late 1970s with the reform era.

Before going to the analysis, it is relevant to keep in mind the words of Heath upon the Chinese core interests; a stable political system and a unified China which overlap with the upper mentioned words of Carlson. There is a will in the following white paper to serve the interests of the Tibetan people, and it is important to remember that providing good governance for the Tibetan people is based on the Chinese nation’s condition, and has the core interests as a frame of reference. Thereby can be traced a certain contradiction in achieving these core interests while at same time respecting ethnic minorities.

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<sup>57</sup> Schaik: 71

<sup>58</sup> Carlson (2004): ix

<sup>59</sup> Carlson (2004): 11

## The white paper on Tibet

In September 1992, the State Council of the Peoples Republic of China issued a white paper on Tibet named *“Tibet – Its Ownership And Human Rights Situation”*. It consists of a preface and two parts where the first part makes Chinese sovereignty clear through a historical review from the Yuan Dynasty to the People’s Republic of China and portrays the Dalai Lama and the Dalai Clique as rebels who wants Tibetan independence – an independence which is not in the interest of the Tibetan people according to the white paper. It further reads that Tibet in 1951 was peacefully liberated from a *“medieval feudal serfdom”* with a ruling class of upper-class monks and nobles developed through centuries of imperialistic invasions. This expression refers to the peaceful and non-aggressive behavior of China, and portrays the events in 1951 as liberation, and not occupation as for example the Dalai Lama agitates for. There might also be a parallel between the corrupt reign that humiliated China in the past, and the suppressing reign of Tibet. In other words, the purpose is to liberate the Tibetans from the destiny that the Chinese people have experienced and suffered, being humiliated by the national reign.

In fact, the expression *peaceful liberation* is mentioned six times in this first part while the words *peaceful*, *development*, *unity*, *motherland* and *unification* are used several times in various variations. For example, the last chapter in first part upon the separatist activities of the Dalai Clique ends up with the remark that: *“To be responsible for the history, the Chinese nation and it’s 1.1 billion people, including the Tibetan people, the central government will make not the slightest concession on the fundamental issue of maintaining the motherland’s unification. Any activity attempting to realize “Tibetan Independence” and split the motherland by relying on foreign forces is an ignominious move betraying the motherland and the whole Chinese nation including the Tibetan nationality. (...). The Dalai Lama is warmly welcome to return to the embrace of the motherland at an early date and do some work that is conductive to maintain the motherland’s unification, the national unity, as well as the affluent and happy lives of the Tibetan people.”*<sup>60</sup>. These sentences clearly highlights the purpose of this white paper in nationalistic terms, and mentions one of the Chinese core interests, namely the national unity, which is articulated in form of the narrative upon the unseparable China. The Tibetan people is included in the Chinese nation whereas the Dalai Lama is articulated as a threat to it’s stability due to the symbolism of the former

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<sup>60</sup> WP Tibet, Ch. III

Tibetan reign which suppressed and humiliated its people, according to the white paper. It is worth noting that the white paper mentions the Tibetans as a people within the Chinese nation, a recognition of its ethnicity. Again, it is necessary for the Chinese authorities to highlight the intellectual heritage that the Chinese reign has to be recognized by all people's under heaven for its rule and results. In this way, the white paper seeks to establish an imagined community among the Tibetans, and a sense of affiliation with the motherland. In other words, the liberation of Tibet actually should be seen as being for the Tibetan's own best, and to protect the people from further suppression and humiliation from their own countrymen, and, as it is indicated, foreign forces, undoubtedly a reference to Tibet's colonial past.

The second part is about the advantages and improvements that Tibet has gained under Chinese rule as a result of the *strategy of peaceful development* and entails nine chapters covering the state of Tibetan serfdom which is regarded as “*darker and more cruel than the European serfdom in the Middle Ages.*”<sup>61</sup> and hereafter the gains including personal freedom, political rights such as democracy, economic development, and improvements in living standards, including education and culture, and people's health. The white paper mentions the corvees as the Tibetan servants had to do and calls the code that sorted the Tibetan people into three classes and nine ranks, a stipulation that “*people were unequal in legal status.*”<sup>62</sup> *Peaceful liberation* continues to be mentioned frequently (at least 2 two times per chapter) and, furthermore, this second part of the white paper entails two interesting distinctions worth noting. First, there is distinguished between *the old Tibet* and *the new China* which refers to the turning point of the “*Agreement on measures for the peaceful liberation of Tibet*”, signed in 1951 by China and the local government in Tibet. It is a great leap forward for the Tibetan people according to the white paper which underlines the point with another comparison while talking about human rights as a counterpart to the serfdom and the serf-owners exploitation of the labor force<sup>63</sup> and it is called epoch-making in Tibetan history that “*New China's Constitution and laws guarantee that every Tibetan enjoys the right to subsistence and personal safety.*”<sup>64</sup>. Furthermore, a law on redemption was made and Tibetan peasants was able to own land and its livelihood.

This above quoted paragraph highlights the increased living standard of the Tibetans since the liberation from serfdom under their countrymen. Again, the overall argument of the white paper

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<sup>61</sup> WP Tibet, Ch. IV

<sup>62</sup> WP Tibet, Ch. IV

<sup>63</sup> WP Tibet, Ch. IV

<sup>64</sup> WP Tibet, Ch. V

seems to be, that the Tibetan's return to the motherland has benefited the people far more than the alternative of being independent and continue the serfdom; the white paper even goes as far as to mention that the liberation of Tibet has secured the human rights of the people – an expression that might be directed to the world community to justify the intervention as being constructive and development minded instead of being aggressive and hostile. Furthermore, it has great value for China to articulate itself as a gatekeeper of human rights in international relations because this mind-set defines a modern nation. The message in the above could therefore be seen as an attempt to build an image towards the world community that China is taking care of its own and its historical legacy. The parallel made to European serfdom is also interesting in this sense; in memory of China's and Tibet's past as colonized by Western powers this is a sort of distancing Chinese values and behavior from Western occupation and aggression. China has liberated Tibet from circumstances that was developed in line with a Western model; this is a strong point to make in the ambition to make the Tibetan's believe in Chinese supremacy.

A last couple of remarks to be mentioned here is the separation of religion and politics with the 1959 Democratic Reform which brought democracy to the Tibetan people. The white paper calls the previous rule for a despotic rule and states that the separation has given freedom to the people, both political and religiously, and sees the Dalai Lama as responsible for this despotic rule. It has changed in a positive way since the reform: *“Since the peaceful liberation of Tibet in 1951, many noted religious figures have worked in co-operation with the Chinese Communist Party and the government, and participated in the management and discussion of government affairs.”*<sup>65</sup>. This remark indicates the Chinese accept that religion is still a huge part of Tibet and thereby in the relationship between Tibet and China.

The separation of religion and politics is also interesting due to another reason, namely the previously mentioned concepts of Chöyön and suzerainty while they mark a dividing line between Tibetan buddhism and a reign based upon parliamentarism in co-operation with the central government. Immediately, there can also be an international oriented explanation to the Chinese focus on Tibet as having a religiously image. Wang Hui writes in the chapter *“Theosophy and the Image of Tibet”* that the Western perception of Tibet is based on Theosophy, *“...a body of theory that posits wordless intuition as the means of communicating with the spirits.”*<sup>66</sup>. This perception is rooted in history, especially the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it further reads, exemplified by

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<sup>65</sup> WP Tibet, Ch. VIII

<sup>66</sup> Hui: 147

the concept of suzerainty. Hui uses the huge focus on the Dalai Lama, each time Tibet is mentioned in an international context, to argue that Tibet still is widely recognized as religiously and spiritual guided in Western opinion, and thereby the answer to the “Tibet Question” remains to be that “...*all Western countries, including the United States and Great Britain, recognize Tibet as part of China, as one of the autonomous regions of China...*”<sup>67</sup>. The point of mentioning this Western view on Tibet to this thesis is that it might be a point for the white paper on Tibet to articulate the relationship between China and Tibet in a way that resonate in Western opinion. In other words, the narrative upon the unseparable China is articulated in such a way that it helps preserve a certain image of Tibet which builds on an interpretation of historical conditions and events with the purpose to show the natural point that Tibet is not independent and do better under supremacy.

### **The narratives of the white paper**

Two nationalist narratives are present in the white paper upon Tibet, namely these of the motherland, that has to stay united, and the narrative of national humiliation. As the vocabulary indicates the articulation of Tibet as part of the Chinese nation, and as an important piece of the Chinese core interests, is by far the most dominating narrative in the white paper. Secondly, there is an intention in the white paper that the military action in 1951 was necessary due to save the Tibetan’s from further serfdom and secure the development of the country. The word “humiliation” is never mentioned explicit in the white paper, but it can be readen between the lines, and in the articulation of Western serfdom; due to the historical tension between China and Western occupation it is nearby to assume that this choice of expression is not accidental but to some extent refers to the “Century of Humiliation”.

From a nationalistic perspective, the white paper on Tibet entails many elements tended to make the Tibetan people feeling as a part of the Chinese nation and historical references to illustrate that the relationship between Tibet and China is much older than the official intrusion and political takeover in 1951; the frequent talk about motherland and being a unity is a clear try to hit nationalistic

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<sup>67</sup> Hui: 155

feelings. China also uses the historical references to place itself as a great alternative to Tibetan independence due to serfdom etc. and thereby articulates the unification as a historical necessity.

The vocabulary used in this white paper is also worth noting; as written in the above the expressions “motherland”, “unity”, and “unification” are very frequent due to nationalistic efforts but in a broader perspective in addition with expressions like “peaceful liberator”, “development”, and the frequent repetition of the word “peaceful” there can be drawn a red line to the core interests. China see itself as a peaceful liberator who have brought harmony to Tibet in terms of democracy and freedom. It fits quite well with the concept *development* as outlined by Heath which is associated with a stable political system with clear security structures. The Chinese perception of development is therefore threatened by the Dalai Lama which is believed to threaten the political system in Tibet.

The very core of nationalism is the imagined cohesion and belief of a common identity. The Tibet case is unique in the sense that it regards a populated area which adds a cultural perspective to the case and makes it sensible due to the mingle of Tibetans and Han Chinese. In other words, the relationship between Tibet and China to some extent is the question about handling minorities and navigating in an environment where different cultures and traditions meets. Unifying different peoples in the same nation can be a challenge even the historical background of Tibetan-Chinese interrelation. For this purpose is needed a glue to cohere the nation and this glue might be nationalism in this case as long as the tool of *imagined communities*.

The white paper frames Chinese involvement in Tibet as a “peaceful liberation” for the Tibetans own good and connects it with a sort of historical brotherhood which have to be maintained due to the mention of several historical relations between Tibet and China during royal weddings etc. Furthermore, the expression “*to be responsible for the history*” makes it clear that the “*motherland’s unification*” (equal to China and Tibet) is historical conditioned and by that mean an unbreakable constellation which everyone, both Chinese and Tibetans, have to pursue in order to maintain the peaceful development of the motherland.

The articulation of the Dalai Lama as separatist and enemy of the nation is another powerful tool; it is important with an enemy or a threat due to establishing a nation. By doing this, a narrative is created about “who are we not” and who should “we” protect against. In the case of the Dalai Lama, it is a tightrope between the wish upon unifying the motherland and having these powerful, spiritual leader who unifies the Tibetans. It complicates and disturbs the picture of harmony to the Chinese

but still the Dalai Lama is a very important figure due to maintaining the religious dimension in Tibet – therefore, according to the narrative of peaceful development the Chinese welcome the Dalai Lama to the “*embrace of the motherland*”.

## What the news paper articles say upon Tibet

The vocabulary used in Chinese news papers is quite remarkable and included expressions like *China’s Tibet* and *China’s South Tibet* which obviously are statements that Tibet belongs to China, not just the northern part of Tibet but also the southern part belonging to India. It is explicit that Tibet is seen as a part of the Chinese nation. The first mentioned term covers the Tibet Autonomous Region and a southern county which actually is Indian, and called Arunachal Pradesh. China claims this county as the southern part of Tibet and continues to mention it as belonging to China. As such, the dispute upon Tibet is two-pieced but still interlinked; as the white paper was strict upon the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) the news papers are more loose in their definition of the dispute. They are not always strict upon mentioning whether the article is about TAR or the southern part. These blurred lines may to some extent be linked to the Dalai Lama which is believed to destabilize the region due to his actions for uniting the northern part and the southern part of Tibet.

A recent example showed the tense of this conflict. In April 2017, Dalai Lama visited the disputed border region Arunachal Pradesh, apparently on India’s invite according to Global Times. The newspaper outlines the visit as “*selling out China’s territory for his personal gains*”<sup>68</sup> and is very rhetorical in the description of Tawang’s (the Chinese name for the region) history to affirm Chinese sovereignty. Dalai Lama is accused to intend dividing the country through his numerous visits in the region.

Another Chinese reaction to this visit is reported five days later where six Roman alphabetic names for places in the region is introduced; it is “*to reaffirm China’s territorial sovereignty to South Tibet*” as a professor outlines the naming<sup>69</sup>. This is indeed a political signal to the Indian government but also a very clear example of a political statement of unity. The message is made for the local population in the disputed region and the Chinese population but in particular also a message to the outside world which might be better off handling Roman alphetic names than

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<sup>68</sup> Global Times, 14th April, 2017

<sup>69</sup> Global Times, 19th April, 2017



traditional Chinese or Tibetan names. The message is clearly that the region is Tibetan and thereby of Chinese interest. The standardization of the names is a way to incorporate the places into the language and allows people to talk about them in a concrete way and thereby relate to them.

Another example of smothering the differences between Chinese and Tibetans is the translation work of the local Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committees<sup>70</sup>. 8.100 translated words from Chinese into Tibetan since 1999 witness a huge effort to integrate the two languages and fits well with the Chinese core interests about creating stability, integrity and unity within the Chinese mainland and its hemisphere.

A common terminology is necessary to remember as a nation and these two examples about everyday life and geography indicates an active Chinese policy towards integrating Tibet and China in this sense. Being able to talk with each other at the same level makes it easier to build mutual trust and serves as soft power diplomacy.

Another interesting aspect in the two articles is the articulation of Tawang as a holy place to Tibetans and the mention of an important monastery in the region. It makes them physical places of memory but also refers to the spiritual connection between China and the Tibetan people. The articles describes Dalai Lama as a threat to this stability and spiritual order due to his Indian influence. One of the articles concludes very clearly that *“The Dalai Lama should refrain from promoting any illusion about “Tibetan independence.” Now that Tibet is enjoying ethnic solidarity, social stability and the livelihood of people living there has improved under the leadership and the democratic reform of the central government.”*<sup>71</sup>. It is a direct link to the Chinese core interests and explicitly defining the Dalai Lama as a troublemaker. This point serves two aspects: that the central government (China) is responsible for having established stability and ethnic solidarity among the Chinese and Tibetan people and at the same time pointing out an enemy to this order. It is the very essence in the narration about unity which Global Times communicates in these articles.

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<sup>70</sup> People’s Daily, 17th April, 2017

<sup>71</sup> Global Times, 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

## Partial conclusion

The national narrative of the peaceful liberator is directly articulated in the white paper on Tibet; liberated from itself and the ruling class which suppressed the Tibetan people in serfdom. The national narrative of brotherhood is very present in this case when analyzing the news paper articles as well as terms like “motherland” and “unity” are frequently used; aligned with the political achievements Tibet has gained under Chinese rule the Tibet case is the most clear example of the practice of imagined communities; an attempt to make the Tibetans feeling affiliated to the CCP. Furthermore, a huge factor in the white paper is the Dalai Lama due to his fight for Tibetan Independence; he is made into a sort of national enemy, a very powerful mean in establishing national feelings. Though, China still invites him to join the motherland because the Dalai Lama after all is a unifying, religious figure in Tibet. This policy seems a little contradicting but actually makes good sense in order to the narrative of stability and development. The Dalai Lama is considered to create stability in Tibet but is at same time considered a partisan because he does not believe in being a part of the motherland. Another point is that China and Tibet has a certain religious connection which is an image dependent on the Dalai Lama. The main purpose for China in Tibet is the task of promoting the feeling of brotherhood with China while framing it an ancient brotherhood that must be maintained.

## The case on Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku

The dispute about Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku is very much a geographical and technical issue between China and Japan; China claims that the islands is belonging to Taiwan while Japan say that it is a part of the Ryukyu Islands which the country annexed as the Okinawa Prefecture. The dispute roots in the Ryukyu Kingdom which ruled a string of islands in the East China Sea from 1429 to 1879. During the era, the kingdom was influenced by both China and Japan according to diplomatic relations but especially China offered knowhow etc. in supporting the reign. Ryukyu was in this way a part of Chinas tributary system but in the last part of the era the kingdom became a vassal of the Japanese Empire before it was incorporated as Okinawa Prefecture in 1879.

The upper is a short historical introduction to this case; though, it is also very interesting to look at the countries relationships which is troubled. Latest is the Nanjing massacre in 1937 in the then Chinese capital. In Chinese memory, these massacre has been preserved as an cruel example of imperialistic aggression. Though, it is still necessary for China to cooperate with Japan to some extent and therefore the “myth of military clique” occurred as an explanation to the importance of creating a good Sino-Japanese relationship later on. The myth pointed out that it was a small military elite in Japan which was the architect of the Chinese humiliation during the second Sino-Japanese war. According to Zhao, this myth, supported by both Chinese and Japanese governments, was constructed not only to normalize the relationship between the countries but as much as an effort to legitimate the communistic rule of the CCP<sup>72</sup> by cultivating a popular nationalism. Zhao writes that nationalism is being used as a political tool by the CCP to maintain political order and stability in domestic politics, fueled by foreign issues.

### The White Paper on Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku

The white paper entails five chapters with sub-chapters which headlines clearly express the islands as Chinese inherent territory, that they was illegally “*grabbed*” by Japan and manifested as Japanese territory in an illegal “*backroom deal*” between the USA and Japan. Furthermore is an overview of the “*totally unfounded*” Japanese claim of sovereignty and finally an examination of the measures China has taken to “*safeguard*” sovereignty. It is a strong rethoric practiced and might be coupled with the turbulent and violent past of China and Japan while the center for argumentation is the Sino-Japanese War in July 1895 where Japan illegally occupied Diaoyu Dao according to China. The white paper mentions several maps and nautical charts (European and American) showing that Diaoyu Dao belonged to China. At same breath, it accuses the Japanese to have organized “*secret facts-finding missions*” in a decade before the invasion.

Already in the beginning of the white paper it is clear through the articulation and harsh expressions that Japan is seen as a thief with calculated motives about stealing from China. The neighbor has abused the weak position of China after the Opium Wars etc. to occupy and steal Chinese territory and manage to get Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku legalized as Japanese territory in co-

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<sup>72</sup> Zhao: 189

operation with the USA. The white paper very clearly places Japan in the “Century of Humiliation” by this aggressive articulation, and even say that the USA, and thereby western powers, has sanctioned and approved the Japanese takeover. Thereby, the white paper has defined an exact enemy from the beginning, and in the following the white paper continues to articulate Japan as a historical enemy whom China has protected Diaoyu Dao and it’s population against for centuries.

The historical argumentation for sovereignty is attached to ancient Chinese emperors and their activities; the basic argument is that the Chinese came to discover, name, and exploit the islands in 1372 long before the Japanese due to “*the King of Ryukyu started paying tribute to the imperial court of the Ming Dynasty. In return, Emperor Hongwu...sent imperial envoys to Ryukyu.*”<sup>73</sup>. The white paper refers to the book *Voyage with a Tail Wind* from 1403 as the first known evidence mentioning the name *Diaoyu Dao*. It continues to mention a number of sources (including a historical record from Ryukyu) to back the argument that “*Gumi Mountain (also called Gumi Mountain, known as Kume Island today) is part of Ryukyu’s territory, while Chi Yu (known as Chiwei Yu today), and the areas to its west are not Ryukyu’s territory*”. Later on, it was stated that “*Gumi Mountain is the mountain guarding the southwest border of Ryukyu*”. This section ends up concluding that “*the waters surrounding Diaoyu Dao are traditionally Chinese fishing ground. (...) In the past, Diaoyu Dao was used as a navigation marker by the Chinese people living on the southeast coast.*”.

The following section is on jurisdiction, saying that Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku was under the coastal defense of the Ming Dynasty for preventing invasions from Japanese pirates. The white paper mentions a couple of charts incorporating the islands into the jurisdiction of coastal defense of the Ming court and later on, in 1621, it mentions charts which “*included the Diaoyu Dao Islands as part of China’s maritime territory*”. In 1871, under the Qing Dynasty, a book “*included Diaoyu Dao as a strategic location for coastal defense and placed the islands under the jurisdiction of Gamalan, Taiwan (known as Yilan County today).*”.

In the following chapters of the white papers, it appears that Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku still belong to Taiwan, even that Taiwan was handed over to Japan after the Sino-Japanese war where the Qing court was “*forced to sign the unequal Treaty of Shimonoseki...*”<sup>74</sup>. In 1900, Japan changed the name of Diaoyu Dao to Senkaku Islands, the paper further reads, and continue with arguing in

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<sup>73</sup> WP on Diaoyu Dao, ch. I,1

<sup>74</sup> WP on Diaoyu Dao, ch. II,2

chapter III why the occupation was illegal by then and later on, why and how Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku was illegally acknowledged as a part of Japan in “*backroom deals*” between Japan and the USA.

The last two chapters entails a argumentation why Japans claim on Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku is totally unfounded and what measures China has taken to safeguard its sovereignty. In this part is the phrase “*historical jurisdiction practice*” to be found which might sum up the arguments for sovereignty, protection of the islands which is the core of the white paper. But also a remark in the end of the white paper draws attention; “...*the issue of Diaoyu Dao has attracted attention from Hong Kong and Macao compatriots, Taiwan compatriots and overseas Chinese. Diaoyu Dao has been an inherent area of China since ancient times. This is the common position of the entire Chinese nation. The Chinese nation has the strong resolve to uphold state sovereignty and territorial integrity.*”<sup>75</sup>. These concluding remarks on *compatriots, the entire Chinese nation, and state sovereignty* sum up very well the entire message of the white paper, and which nationalist narratives it presents; knowing that both Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao is former colonies under jurisdiction of Western powers it is nearby to conclude that the point of mentioning these areas is to show that they enjoy the protection of the motherland, and urges Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku to come back to the motherland as well. The expression “*strong resolve*” underlines the point that the Chinese nation see it as it’s duty and determination to protect and keep the motherland together from hostile forces. To this, it is worth noting that “*the Chinese nation*” in this section is clearly articulated as popular and supported by both these single areas and “*overseas Chinese*”, meaning Chinese living in foreign states. The point is important while it indicates an intention of the white paper to make the issue of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku into a cultural issue by articulating the historical relationship between the population on the islands and China, and thereby induce nationalistic feelings. As briefly touched above, the argumentation in the white paper predominantly relay on the narrative of the unseparable China when it concerns sovereignty over Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku, but it is also possible to trace the narrative of humiliation due to the framing of Japan as a historical enemy which always have been a threat to peace and stability.

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<sup>75</sup> WP on Diaoyu Dao, ch. V

## The narratives of the white paper

The narratives represented in the white paper can be said to build on subjective interpretation of historical records based upon the idea of an unseparable China which is targeted at promoting nationalistic feelings among Chinese despite their place of living (Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas). There can be traced two major narratives in this white paper as mentioned above and they seem to facilitate the theme that Japan is an eternal aggressive power, and China is the victim of this aggression.

It is interesting that exactly Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan is mentioned as examples of *the entire Chinese nation*. They all belong to China as *Special Administrative Areas* (SAR) and are examples of former colonies. Their status as partly political independent areas under Chinese ownership makes them troubled areas to some extent due to the discussion where the line must be drawn between being a part of the motherland and self-rule; a matter of sovereignty. China has a need to signal unity and these are good examples of areas which have returned to the motherland after having been lost. The symbolic of Western imperialism as parallel to Japan's occupation of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku might also be highly intended. It is implicit but a reference to the narrative upon Japan as the evil emperor which might not be unnoticed by the mentioned *compatriots*. It is a narrative aimed at establishing a feeling of national unity across areas with different background and legacy and a try to incorporate the islands into this narrative about a nation which can unify different regions without being imperialistic. It is a narrative with the purpose to create the idea of a motherland to these partly autonom areas and giving them a feeling of affiliation.

The ancient tributary system where the Ryukyu Kingdom gets protection in exchange for paying tribute to the Ming Emperor is central in this sense and makes it possible to talk about a certain Chinese hemisphere, based upon this exchange system of goods. The hemisphere seems to be of a very practical character according to the white paper but still it shines through that it was a peaceful and fruitful relationship due to the envoys sent to the Ryukyu Kingdom and likewise it shines through that the Ryukyu Kingdom was so happy to got an ally against the Japanese pirates that it accepted Chinese jurisdiction and later on signed a treaty giving the Ming Dynasty sovereignty over Senkaku/Diaoyu. It is necessary to read between the lines because the white paper of course represent the Chinese point of view and the Chinese interpretation of the historical events but again Japan is articulated as a common enemy which is necessary to unite against.

What is not mentioned, nor indirectly except the brief passage with the envoys sent to facilitate the Ryukyu Kingdom, is the narrative of Zheng He; according to the records he should have been in the East China Sea and would be relevant to mention here due to Chinese diplomacy, friendly and peacefully support for development etc. An explanation might be found in the relative huge focus on speaking of the motherland and articulating China as a unseperable unity; while the narrative of Zheng He is very much a telling about China in the world, otherwise the narrative of the motherland is a telling of internal matters and how China defines herself against the world. It can be seen in the mention of Japan and the USA in the white paper where the aim is to positionate China against the “*backroom deal*” adopted by the two countries. The white paper is domestic oriented in the sense that it is intended to bring a message upon the unseperable China which is threatened by foreigners rather than it is directed at foreign matters and diplomacy. Remembering Heath and the core interests, national unity is essential to Chinese self-understanding and therefore can not be dealt upon.

### **What the news paper articles say upon Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku**

The role that history plays in today's discussions of sovereignty over Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku between China and Japan can be seen in a number of articles brought by the Chinese news papers People's Daily and Global Times. There are articles about the development of new textbooks for school children favouring Japanese sovereignty, articles, which accuse Japan for manipulating history, and articles with a historic overview upon the link between China and the islands, and how they were stolen by Japan. A common feature in the articles is that they never miss a chance to use history as an argument for Chinese sovereignty and blaming Japan for being an eternal aggressor towards China. The news paper angles vary a lot: the political meeting between ministers and ambassadors of the two countries, overview articles of the Sino-Japanese relationship, articles upon research in ancient sources, and the personal story from a Chinese living in America.

The present articles are just a sampling of what is accessible but nevertheless indicates a huge focus from the news papers upon the issue of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku. It is pursued both on the political level and the individual level and is very rhetorical in the articulation of the dispute. Furthermore the articles seem to follow the strategy that the issue of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku must

never be forgotten or silenced. The Chinese statement is highlighted systematically in these two news papers to judge from the 5 year timeframe as the analysed articles are written.

In 2012, People's brought two articles with headlines that hardly can be misunderstood; they reads "*History proves China's sovereignty over Diaoyu Islands*" and "*Ignoring historical facts, Japan to take practical consequences*" and very clearly reflect the official statement that Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku historically is an integrated part of the Chinese nation, and that Japan make a huge mistake to ignore this fact<sup>76</sup>. The first mentioned article is a brief historical overview of China's relation to the islands since 1372 and how the Ming and Qing Dynasties continuously visited the islands during diplomatic trips to their neighbours. The occasion for this article is that the Okinawa Prefecture, under whose jurisdiction the islands belong, intend to rename some of the islands; the news papers reaction to this is to refer to an "*in-depth research*" which conclude that Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku by a mistake were precepted as Japanese in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; the article follows this remark up by insinuating that Japan abused this Chinese mistake to take over the islands. Except the article does not use the same offensive vocabulary as the white paper does it is clear that the tone is harsh and sees Japan as cheating and stealing. The word "humiliation" is not mentioned but it can very well be the thought of these sentences.

More dominantly is the narrative of the unseperable China, and an attempt to make the perspective on the debate into a cultural issue; significant is the mention of the Qing and Ming envoys which visited the islands continuously long before the Japanese, and thereby, in the opinion of the article, included the islands in Chinese "*maritime defense zone*". The article does not deepen this expression but a suggestion might be that it was a defense of the islands against Japanese piracy as mentioned in the white paper upon Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku. The Ryukyu Kingdom is also mentioned in this context due to it's membership of the tributary system, and present Ryukyuan is articulated as witnesses that "*... the Diaoyu Islands have been part of China's territory since the Ming dynasty...*"<sup>77</sup>. Thereby, the issue of sovereignty over the islands is tried made into a matter of personal and historical relationships.

The second article is written over the theme that Japan is going to break a decade-long consensus upon Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku with China by taking moves to nationalize some of the islands. The

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<sup>76</sup> People's Daily, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2012 and People's Daily, 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2012

<sup>77</sup> People's Daily, 2<sup>nd</sup> February



article states that Japan has changed its mind on the tacit agreement “...after the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea took effect in 1996.”<sup>78</sup>. The UNCLOS issues international standards due to define demarking lines between national and international waters and thereby the islands within them. The news paper warns that ignoring these historical facts and disrepute the underlying consensus will harm the Sino-Japanese diplomatic relationship. The consequences is not specified but it is worth noting that this news paper article urgent for a bilateral relationship instead of referring to an international law sanctioned by the UN which indicates a wish to keep the issue of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku as a regional question; something similar was at stage in the white paper which focused on the shady relationship between Japan and the USA. It is obvious that China do not like this Western influence on what it believe to be a regional matter to be solved between China and Japan. It makes sense due to the articulation of Western powers as occupying powers, and that Japan is co-operating with them, is seen as shady and hostile. Again, there is an underlying tone of humiliation in the article but also a confrontative attitude towards Japan to choose between a regional co-operation with China or being part of Western co-operation. The message of the article is clearly that, as Japan acts now, it is seen as stealing the islands from China under the protection and accept of the UN. Regional co-operation is seen as a historical condition involving China and a partner why it is not necessary to involve a third part.

A new dimension is though interesting while it points to the future and the legacy which is passed on to new generations due to knowledge of the dispute over Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku; in February 2017, Japan approved new teaching materials which China protested against and urged Japan to “teach the young generations with correct historical views.”<sup>79</sup>. The day after, People’s Daily brought a more elaborating article which accuses Japan to “...whitewash history...” by stating in the school books that there is “...no dispute...” upon Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku. The article makes a parallel to the massacre in Nanjing, and mentions that experts warns Japan against manipulating with this “savagely murder” on “as many as 300,000 civilians and unarmed combatants in one of the bloodiest, most barbaric campaigns known in history.”<sup>80</sup>. The article continue criticizing phrases in the new textbooks for glorifying Japan and “...lack balance and fail to represent the feelings of unjustness from countries like China and South Korea...” It ends up with a remark that “...experts speaking with authority on the matter have accused Abe of flaunting his revisionist,

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<sup>78</sup> People’s Daily, 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2012

<sup>79</sup> People’s Daily, 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2017

<sup>80</sup> People’s Daily, 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2017

*militaristic and imperialistic stance and in doing so mocking his detractors.*”. This is a clear signal that China does not the way in which Japan is avoiding it’s past cruelties.

These two articles from mid-February 2017 concern the theme how history and historical events are memorized and passed on to future generations. This is a strong political tool to control how historical events are articulated, and remembering Benedict Andersons words of imagined communities the certain Japanese school version of the ownership of the islands is likely to form the opinion and memory of future Japanese generations which China perceps as disrespectful to history. Japan is accused to try to glorify it’s past away from being militaristic and imperialistic which refers to the often used Chinese vocabulary containing imperialism, aggression, etc. Again, of hthe regional co-operation is highlighted and the importance is underlined that this relationship must build on respect for history. In other words, the article warns that this regional co-operation can be hurt in the future as relaying on a wrong articulation of history that is not respectful to China, including the damage and suffering caused by Japan. This reminds of the doctrine of *never forget humiliation*, and according to the article, a denial of the past will “*fan the flames of historical and territorial disharmony between Japan and its closest neighbors.*”. The expressions “*disharmony*” and “*closest neighbors*” is a reference to the world order which China want to be guarantee for, a world order characterized by harmony, peace, and stability which is the direct opposite of Japans aggressive behaviour. In this, there is a reference to the narrative of Zheng He as a symbol of Chinese values, and a wish of doing good for other people’s, including the islands.

In general, there is a very explicit rhetoric in the reviewed articles about the islands in the East China Sea. The articles entails both explicit and implicit references to the countries’ violent past for Japan always being the aggressor and China the peace-keeper. A very clear example was given in October 2013 when People’s Daily interviewed a Chinese spokeswoman on the issue of the Japanese military buildup. She is quoted to say “*If you look back at history, it is self-evident who is a peace-keeper and who is a war-maker*”<sup>81</sup>. She emphasized that China strives for dialogue and consultation and recommend Japan to do so to “*safeguard regional peace and stability.*”. This statement fits well with the message of the Zheng He narrative and at same time refers to Japan as a national enemy and unworthy to be a regional guarantee for peace and stability. The spokeswoman point to China’s and Japan’s common past and interpret it in a certain way in a reaction to the present Japanese accuses for being very aggressive in the East China Sea. Thereby, she emphasizes

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<sup>81</sup> People’s Daily, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2013

that there is a huge difference between Japan and China – Japan has a past of military buildup and still pursue that strategy while China follows the “*path of peaceful development*” as she categorizes this strategy as a “*strategic choice*” and “*fundamental interest*” of China - a clear reference to the core interests which aims to stabilize both internal and external relations. Though, despite of this past, the point of the nationalist narratives is that China is willing to preserve a regional co-operation but the condition is that Japan’s humiliation of China never must be forgotten.

A recent article settles the argument that the Chinese military buildup is to preserve and uphold the regional order in the South China Sea and East China Sea<sup>82</sup>. It entails a brief review of Chinese history since the 17<sup>th</sup> century during the era of colonization and emphasizes that China’s ability to protect an ocean frontier was developed relatively late in 1887. Before this, Japan had occupied Taiwan and associated islands. The article not only serves as an explanation to the necessity of Chinese naval power but also tells the story upon how China became a nation, able to demarcate and protect its borders, and thereby derives upon the collective memory as explained by Michael Billig and Benedict Anderson. It is tended to fuel the Chinese nationalism about preserving sovereignty and the Japanese example as the illegal occupator serves to legitimize the claim of sovereignty over the Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku. The purpose of naval build-up is to avoid further humiliation, and to protect the motherland against aggression.

## Partial conclusion

There is some similarities and differences between the white paper and the news paper articles; first of all, they have in common the narrative of national humiliation which is the starting point for all further argumentation, quotation of interviewed persons etc. The narrative is used as a framework to characterize the actions, past and present, of Japan towards Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku. The vocabulary and articulation used are also harsh in both medias, probably most characteristic in the news paper articles. Both the white paper and the articles are harsh about Japan involving in international co-operation with the purpose to claim Japanese sovereignty over the islands, and many of the news paper articles in this case urge Japan to return to a regional co-operation, and a consensus that the dispute over Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku is unsolved. The articulation of Japan as continuing to humiliate

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<sup>82</sup> People’s Daily, 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2016

China is the dominant narrative in the news paper articles while the white paper seems more balanced, and even the humiliation narrative also is widely used here, there is a lot of references to areas which have returned to their motherland. The narrative of the unseperable China in general is the common thread through the white paper as explaining why Chinese sovereignty over Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku is historically right. Though, it is an interesting point that the white paper want to make the claim of sovereignty into a cultural issue by emphasizing the relationship between the people on the islands and China.

## The case on Nanhai Zhudao

In recent times (the 20<sup>th</sup> century), the so-called Nine-Dash Lines has been issued by the Chinese authorities as an argument for Chinese sovereignty over four groups of islands in the South China Sea which is marks on a nautical chart building on interpretation on these ancient sources. The dash lines entail the two minor groups of Dongsha Qundao (the Dongsha/Pratos Islands) and the Zhongsha Qundao (the Zhongsha Islands) which consists of entirely submerged seamounts including the Macclessfield Bank and the Scarborough Shoal<sup>83</sup>. The two major groups of islands is the Nansha Qundao (the Nansha/Spratly Islands) which consists of 230-400 shoals, reefs, islands, and banks and covers a geographical area of 250.000 square kilometers of the South China Sea<sup>84</sup> and the Xisha Qundao (the Xisha/Paracel Islands), which includes more than 20 reefs, atolls, cays, islands and shoals laying about 150 nautical miles south of Hainan Island. This huge area in the South China Sea is claimed, entirely or partially, by several countries in south-east Asia due to a variety of precepted historical rights, and China and the Phillipines are among these stakeholders as the following white paper concerns. The very foundation for the Chinese claim of sovereignty over these islands seems to be that especially the Paracels has been vital fishing grounds for Chinese fishermen throughout history and home for seasonal Chinese visitors and settlers since ancient times; furthermore, China argues that it was the first to explore and name the islands<sup>85</sup>. Likewise, the Phillipines refers to ancient fishing grounds and other maritime activities in the South China Sea to support it's claim for sovereignty over the Spratly Islands. This practical use of the South China Sea makes it indeed difficult to solve the dispute on a bilateral basis, and therefore

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<sup>83</sup> Gao and Jia: 99

<sup>84</sup> Shen: 97

<sup>85</sup> Shen: 98

China tries to make it into a cultural issue by stating the presence of seasonal visitors and settlers. The problem about supporting this statement is the existence of very few archeological funds on the islands that can prove human settlement.

The author Chen Jie states that the need for legitimacy and unity has given the smallest reef in the Spratlys a symbolic value. He further writes about the historical usage of islands in the South China Sea as the main argument as reason why the Chinese regime will not negotiate China's sovereignty claims to the Nanshas<sup>86</sup>. The essence is that history and sovereignty are closely associated in Chinese perception. In other words, Jie establish a direct link between political legitimacy and the importance of incorporating these islands in the South China Sea in a unified Chinese nation. History has given the reefs and islands such a symbolic value that there is not room for not having sovereignty over these groups of islands in the South China Sea; this would simply erode the political legitimacy of the CCP as worthy to be the reign of the motherland.

It is considered as a fact by Chinese that China is the first to have discovered, named, mapped, explored and exploited Nanhai Zhudao (the South China Sea Islands) and the relevant waters and furthermore to continuously and effectively having exercised sovereignty and jurisdiction over those islands<sup>87</sup>. Though, these remarks is challenged by Granados saying that Chinese activity only is of a practical character alligned with the voyages made by Zheng He in 1349 which goal was to discover the South China Sea more intensely. Furthermore, Granados distinguishes between *knowledge of the sea* (trading routes, private maps etc.) and actual *political control of the sea* and raises the question whether "*knowledge of the sea...represented in written sources should carry the burden of legitimating claims...*"<sup>88</sup>. Granados also state that an official Chinese claim on those islands was made as late as in 1909 and explains this with the developing of a modern concept of sovereignty which urgent the importance of more strict borderlines<sup>89</sup>. In other words, the Chinese claim on sovereignty in the South China Sea is widely based on various historical accounts instead of political control which differs from a modern sovereignty concept. This is basically the dilemma that challenge the claim of sovereignty, and the reason why these islands and reefs has been given a symbolic value; in this way the area in the South China Sea can became a part of an imagined Chinese nation, and thereby achieve status as a Chinese core interest.

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<sup>86</sup> Jie: 25

<sup>87</sup> Shicun: 16 ; Shen: 102

<sup>88</sup> Granados: 110 and 116

<sup>89</sup> Granados: 125

## The white paper on Nanhai Zhudao

This five-chaptered white paper and several sub-chapters repeats the arguments for sovereignty as already mentioned in the literature; namely, that the *Nanhai Zhudao* has been fishing ground for Chinese fishermen for 2.000 years and that they developed a “...*naming system for the various components of Nanhai Zhudao*...”<sup>90</sup>. Some of them settled down for periods on different islands and the white paper mentions several sources, including a French magazine, which mentions the presence of a tablet inscribed with Chinese characters and the little population of Chinese people (Hainan natives)<sup>91</sup>. Furthermore is mentioned some archeological finds like wells, coconut palms, fruit trees and different vegetables, and poultry. All this prove that the islands are habitable, according to the white paper. Another argument is the records of several sailors and merchants mentioning *Xisha Qundao* and *Nansha Qundao* as navigation markers etc.

The next part of the white paper is directed on the involved parts throughout history – primarily France and Japan, but also to some extent the United States. The white paper explicit mentions *French aggression* in 1933 as having triggered strong reactions “*from all walks of life in China*”, including the Chinese fishermen on *Nanhai Zhudao*<sup>92</sup>. The French government forced people to hanging the French flag on the islands but the Chinese government issued that all Chinese fishing vessels should be hanging the Chinese flag. The Chinese also fought heroically during the Japanese war of aggression where *Nanhai Zhudao* was occupied. The war is mentioned and remembered as *the Chinese people’s War of Resistance* and *the World’s Anti-Facist War* in a broader perspective<sup>93</sup>. After the Second World War, it is mentioned in the white paper that both the United States and the United Kingdom together with China issued the Potsdam Proclamation and the Cairo Declaration that Japan should give all “*stolen territories*” back to China.

In this first part of the white paper, there should be attached some comments; as mentioned in the introduction to this case, the arguments for sovereignty are based on regular use of the South China Sea and it’s islands, and this is repeated in this first section of the white paper. Though, it is interesting while compared to the next section of war resistance, hanging the Chinese flag, and

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<sup>90</sup> WP on SCS, Ch. I.i.11

<sup>91</sup> WP on SCS, I.i.16

<sup>92</sup> WP on SCS, I.ii.24

<sup>93</sup> WP on SCS, I.ii.27

support from all walks of life in China. The white paper has suddenly placed the islands in a narration of a heroic resistance war against France and later on Japan which is described as fascist and aggressive behavior, and will not give the stolen islands back to China. In these words lays a narrative upon *Nanhai Zhudao* as an important part of the motherland, and the islands are being made into a place for commemoration of this great resistance war; in this, there of course is a clear and direct link to Japan which once again have violated the interests of China and had stolen Chinese territories.

The second chapter is about the origin of the dispute with the Philippines; China states that the Philippine territory is defined *by a series of international treaties*” and has nothing to do with *Nanhai Zhudao*<sup>94</sup>. Furthermore, it is claimed that the Philippine claim of sovereignty have no base in history or law. The white paper mentions that the Philippine government has acted against common consensus by supporting some civilians entering the islands. But in chapter three, China still express the wish upon settling the dispute in bilateral negotiation due to the “...*Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, namely, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.*”<sup>95</sup>. This is a very interesting remark while it shows an attitude of willingness to cooperate upon solving the dispute. This is remarkable in the sense that it is not an issue in the case of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku and determines a whole different approach to foreign policy – caused by the the troubled past of China and Japan, co-operation and peaceful settlement of the dispute between the two countries is not a possibility. There is used phrases like *consensus, progress in managing differences, and joint development* to describe the expectations and the relationship of the two nations. But it is clearly pointed out in the next chapter of the white paper that there still remain a number of issues and that the Phillipines has taken “*moves that complicate.*”<sup>96</sup>. Nevertheless, the white paper must be seen as an offer of co-operation with the Philippines to settle the dispute in the South China Sea.

The words *peaceful co-existence* and *development*, and the mentioned Five Principles reminds of the ancient tributary system where China co-operated with several countries and secured co-existence; and, even it is not mentioned, the narrative of Zheng He is relevant in the sense that

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<sup>94</sup> WP on SCS, II.i.56/57

<sup>95</sup> WP on SCS, III.i.74

<sup>96</sup> WP on SCS, IV, 92

China is reaching out to foreign, coastal countries in a peaceful manner to settle agreements and start a healthy relationship.

## Narratives of the white paper

This white paper is predominantly a statement of peace and harmony; the phrase “*to have continuously, peacefully and effectively exercised sovereignty and jurisdiction over them [Nanhai Zhudao]*” is repeated 7 times through the white paper in slightly different versions. These adjectives is tended to describe the actions of the Chinese in the South China Sea and at same time through the context emphasize that it is an old tradition to be peaceful and consistent in foreign matters regarding these islands. Thereby is emphasized a troubled past in which the Chinese succeeded. Elsewhere in the white paper, it appears that this success against invasion was caused by the coherence between Chinese, nor just the fishermen on the islands. It describes the heroism of the Chinese people “*from all walks of life*” and is as such a fine example of filial nationalism or a imagined community. It is a narrative of a family which support each other by peaceful means and is consistent in the fight for what is Chinese.

The white paper brings associations for the narrative of Zheng He; of course the telling of the discovery and exploration, the peaceful approach to the surrounding world but not least the spirit of the white paper which calls for figuring out a solution upon the sovereignty of the islands in co-operation with the Philippines; very similar to the foremost task of Zheng He – namely diplomacy. The headline of the white paper urgent that China adherent to the position of finding a solution through negotiation. It is implicit that China will continue the old tradition of peaceful diplomacy as Zheng He was famous for in south-east Asia; a moral liability to respect history and rely on the great values that have been inherited from thousand of years of brotherhood and diplomatic relations in the region [the tributary system].

Even it is not a central point of this white paper it is worth noting the mention of Japan as having stolen these islands from China. The difference in the rhetoric towards Japan and towards the Philippines is remarkable while China urges for diplomacy towards the Philippines while Japan is treated like a war criminal and should definitely be explained that Japan is believed as imperialistic. It is a remarkable contrast to the Philippines which is accused for occupation but still is invited for



bilateral negotiations unlike Japan in the white paper of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku. It must be a matter of not striving for harmony and diplomacy at any domestic cost due to the Japanese massacres etc. but might also be a sign of the status of *Nanhai Zhudao* as no man's land and the need for showing a peaceful attitude, not an imperialistic one.

## What the news paper articles say upon Nanhai Zhudao

Exactly a year after the white paper was released, People's Daily brought an article upon the "*healthy environment of dialogue over South China Sea*" which was established with the Philippines<sup>97</sup>. The article continues the friendly tone conducted in the white paper and emphasizes that there has been an approach in consensus with the Philippines regarding the dispute in the South China Sea and highlight the point that the consensus is reached through meetings between the two countries despite of a Hague ruling on same issue. The meetings are called "...*spirit of good neighborly relations...*" and a "...*priority of regional peace and stability...*" by the Philippines and by the Chinese the message seems to be "*China's position on the so-called Hague ruling is consistent and clear...China is determined to safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea.*". This is a clear denial of international rulings in favour of bilateral negotiations, and exactly in line with the paper which settled a discourse of bilateral negotiations with the Philippines which should lead to peaceful co-existence.

The above quotations follows the narrative about distancing Europe represented in Hague and international law and solve disputes on regional behalf. It is the narrative of an ancient brotherhood in the region which is the best forum to negotiate and solve controversies. The keywords "peace", "development", and "stability" reminds of Chinese core interests and are linked to the success of having good neighbour relations where the exchanges of goods and assets take place due to the "... *benefits to the Philippines such as economic gains...*". It is the path of peaceful development as mentioned in China's core interests as necessary to keep China as a unity.

Another reason for mentioning Japan towards the South China Sea is the *Chinese threat* which is articulated in People's Daily as the Japanese answer to China's rise; the threatening of Japan's status as Asia's power is making Japan "...*contain China's geopolitical influence, from the East*

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<sup>97</sup> People's Daily, 13<sup>th</sup> July 2017

*China Sea to the South China Sea...*”<sup>98</sup>. A Chinese professor says that Japan use this *Chinese threat* to legitimate it’s military build-up in the region. This indicates a certain connection between the disputes which ofcourse affects the narratives too in terms of brotherhood, regional peace and stability, good neighbourhood etc. The article states that Japan long have thought itself as the powerhouse of Asia but now this image is about to fall which is connected to a bettering in regional relations between neighbouring countries.

## Partial conclusion

The case of the islands in the South China Sea is very much characterized by being a part of the Chinese core interests; it is explicit mentioned in the white paper that these islands are a part of a unified Chinese nation. The remarkable thing that a bilateral relationship with the Philippines is strongly proposed through the narrative of Zheng He.

## Conclusion

In general, the disputed areas of Tibet, the islands in the South China Sea, and Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku, can be said to play an important role in how China want to define itself as a nation, and to fulfill a narrative upon a certain Chinese identity. The areas have gained a huge symbolic value as incorporated in history of the Chinese civilization, and in this way incorporated as pieces of a Chinese imagined community. Especially in the cases of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku and Nanhai Zhudao, a great effort is made to prove that the islands are inhabited by people which feel a relationship to the Chinese nation and belong to it. The articulation of the motherland narrative is used due to the try of making these disputes into a cultural issue instead of a pure territorial issue that would make China look like an aggressive and occupying power. Instead soft values as *peaceful development*, *harmonious unity*, and *peaceful co-existence* are articulated over and over again to underline the peaceful motives of China. In other words, the purpose of this narrative is to create the imagination that it is the people’s will to join the Chinese nation instead of a political request.

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<sup>98</sup> People’s Daily, 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2017

Another huge aspect in these two cases, which belong to Chinese foreign policy, are the articulation of the counter part to respect a common consensus over the islands, and to this a clear wish that the disputes are solved on a bilateral basis instead of being regulated by international law. Even the mention of Zheng He is very rare, this call for bilateral ties and diplomacy is a reference to the voyages that peacefully established relations to foreign nations. The narrative of soft Chinese values and a vision of peaceful development is tended to convince other people's in the world that China is a peaceful nation. It makes the narrative of Zheng He a vital component of Chinese foreign policy as a narration of the peaceful motives of the Chinese nation, and a willingness to solve disputes with diplomacy.

In general, interference of especially the USA and the UN is rejected by China, and in the case of Diaoyu Dao/Senkaku it is suggested that Japan illegally upholds sovereignty over the islands with help from the USA. To complete this narrative of humiliation, it is continuously mentioned in the news paper how cruel Japan has been to the Chinese nation throughout history, especially concerning the time around World War II. Humiliation is not an argument for sovereignty in itself but the articulation of a threat towards the Chinese nation and it's stability is essential and very effective in the political struggles for unifying the nation. The narrative of humiliation enables the government to turn the disputed areas into places of commemoration, and thereby give them a symbolic meaning as important places due to Chinese history, and the development of the Chinese nation.

While it is possible to trace all three nationalist narratives in the cases influenced by foreign policy, it is the narrative of the motherland which is dominant towards Tibet as the only case belonging to Chinese domestic policy, but there is also references to China's own history with a corrupt government which did not act in favour of it's people to justify the takeover of Tibet. Though, a significant difference from the use of the motherland narrative in foreign matters, is the ethnic perspective and co-operation with the central government administration. In this case, the motherland narrative emphasizes respect for the Tibetan people, but at same time underlines that the Tibetan people has gained freedom and civic rights under Chinese supremacy, as it never would have if Tibet had remained an independent country with it's suppressing government. In other words, the motherland narrative and the explanation of avoiding further humiliation of the Tibetan people, should back up that the Chinese government try to help the Tibetan people towards a brighter future, and that this imply Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.

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