

Research on the Image of China's Anti-Japanese War on Major Global Social Media

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Abstract

With the development of new media, major social media platforms are playing an important role in facilitating people to express their views, communicate and disseminate their opinions in real time. A search reveals that the discussion on the "War of Resistance against Japan" on major social media platforms is rich in content and covers a wide range of topics. This article takes the image of China's war of resistance against Japan on major global social media as an object of study, comprehensively compares the extent of overseas netizens' awareness and evaluation of the war of resistance against Japan, and explores the mechanism of folk discourse in constructing the country's image from four aspects: communication subjects, communication content, communication methods and audience views. In order to understand the extent of people's perceptions, opinions and positions on the War of Resistance against Japan in other countries, and to know oneself and one's opponent, we can do a good job of foreign propaganda, tell the history of China and spread the voice of China.

Keywords

Anti-Japanese war; National image; International communication; Social media; Folk discourse; Overseas netizens.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of the international status of China's war of resistance against Japan and the study of the image of the state are currently separate in both domestic and international academic circles. As one of the main categories of national soft power, "national image" has become a hot topic in the research spectrum of Chinese academia in the past 20 years. This paper will build on previous research to examine the current global social media discourse and provide theoretical and empirical support to further improve the study of China's national image.

2. OVERVIEW OF BASIC THEORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

International communication is communication between countries with national societies as the basic unit and mass communication as the pillar. This communication and exchange activity across national boundaries, which arises from geopolitical and cultural differences, reflects strong political and practical nature (Zhang Yuqiang et al., 2021). In May 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed at the 30th collective study of the Central Political Bureau that telling a good Chinese story, spreading a good Chinese voice and show a real, three-dimensional and comprehensive China are important tasks to strengthen China's international communication capacity (Xi Jinping, 2021). At present, China's society is developing rapidly, its international status is gradually improving and it is playing an important role in the centre of the world stage, but there is no shortage of negative voices. International communication is linked to international interests, so in this day and age, understanding the attitudes and

perceptions of other countries towards China is an important way to think about how to tell the Chinese story, spread the Chinese voice and shape China's national image.

The Chinese war of resistance against Japan was an important part of the world war against fascism and was of great significance to our country. In contemporary Western scholarship, there are few studies that truly recognise the enormous contribution of China's war of resistance to the world's war against fascism. In contrast to the fruitful research works on the European and Pacific theatres, not many Western academics have focused on the history of China's war against Japan. The Western academic community has long adhered to the so-called 'Eurocentric view', arguing that China's contribution to the Pacific theatre was limited and that the victory of the Chinese resistance was due to the Allied strategy.

With the development of the new media era, more and more people have direct access to the internet, expressing their opinions and sharing their lives on various social media platforms, which is also an important way to convey the values of people in different countries. Unlike official discourse, which represents the interests of the state, civil discourse is a spontaneous formation of democratic agendas or discourses, mostly originating from new media and self-media (Tu Jingliang et al., 2009). The plurality of subjects, methods and contents of communication is also more conducive to understanding the real thoughts and opinions of people in other countries online. In this paper, the five most popular foreign social media platforms (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Quora, Instagram) are used to discuss the "Sino-Japanese War", "Anti-Japanese War", "The Second Sino-Japanese War", "World War II + China", "The Nanjing Massacre", "Unit 731", etc. A total of 258 pieces of content were retrieved for keywords such as "Unit 731". The content on these social media is diverse and presented in a variety of formats such as video, text, images and Q&A, greatly reflecting the advantages of the new media age.

Therefore, this study focuses on the War of Resistance against Japan, and seeks to understand the level of awareness and perception of Chinese history among Westerners on major global social media platforms, and to explore the mechanism of folk discourse on the construction of national image in terms of communication subjects, communication methods, content and audience perception, as well as the implications for China's foreign propaganda.

3. SUBJECTS OF COMMUNICATION

3.1. Change in The Subject of Communication

New media provide more opportunities for the expression of civil discourse. With the development of digital and information technology, the new media, represented by the Internet, has brought about a huge reworking of the previous way of disseminating information, and the social attributes of the media have been strengthened as never before. In *Entertainment to Death*, Bozeman writes that the medium is the metaphor, and changes in the medium always bring about changes in certain perceptible situations and relationships. The communication subject is an essential element in communication activities and is the initiator of communication behavior. The communication subject produces communication content according to his or her own communication intention, which influences the interactive behavior and interaction of communication activities (Ma, 2019). Compared to the era of mass communication, the communication subject in the era of social media presents many new characteristics. Technology helps, information, opinions and even emotions are transmitted across millions of kilometers and in a variety of states in real time, greatly expanding the influence of multiple individuals. Yu Guoming calls this the "equalization of information dissemination" (Zhang, 2022). In the past, the communicators were professionals with professional education and training or social elites or government agencies, forming a monopoly on news. This part of the population has changed from being a passive audience of

the media to a dual role as both audience and communicator. (Song, 2022) For example, netizens will express their views and opinions online after seeing anti-Japanese war-related content on the Internet. The international communication of China's anti-war image no longer relies solely on the official media, and netizens have gradually become the backbone of international communication of China's anti-war image.

3.2. Characteristics of The Communication Subject

Compared to official media, social platforms are basically social in nature, with communication actors aiming to find common interests and emotional resonance, which makes finding and exploring common elements of expression, discourse, emotions and interests a bridge to communication. For this reason, it is easier for individual communicators to find values and interests that are communicable to Western audiences, and to think in ways that are more in line with the receptive habits of audiences in different institutional and cultural contexts (Zhang et al., 2020). And several major global social media giants, with their huge number of users, massive user data, and social communication methods, have made overseas social platforms an important platform for the international dissemination of folk discourse on China's anti-war image, with the dominance of public opinion and communication reverting to overseas people.

The study found that the main body of overseas communication of China's anti-war image can be subdivided into: most ordinary netizens and a small number of opinion leaders such as bloggers. As ordinary netizens, they generally express their views superficially by publishing original content, and their communication is more entertaining and casual, not deliberately propagandistic, with little political meaning. Moreover, they are relatively independent and subjective, and can better reflect the attitude and ideology of the subject of communication. However, its fan base is small, the scope of dissemination is narrow, and the effect of dissemination is not obvious. Moreover, the majority of ordinary overseas netizens have limited channels to obtain and understand knowledge about China's resistance war, and are easily manipulated and influenced by Western media propaganda and political ideology. As opinion leaders such as bloggers, whose fan base is large, the content and views disseminated are more likely to be accepted and recognised. In addition, some bloggers who are keen to popularise knowledge about China's war effort also play an important role in spreading the image of China's war effort to the outside world. Not only do these bloggers have a large fan base, but they are also highly innovative and their content is more systematic, comprehensive and accurate, and they are also more likely to be recommended by platforms and spread widely. The dissemination body as a whole presents an open, inclusive and free character.

4. COMMUNICATION CONTENT

In a communication sense, communication content, i.e. information, refers to news with new content and knowledge, which includes ideas, attitudes and emotions, and is a direct reflection of the communication subject's intentions. In the new media era, communication content is characterised by a sea of quantifiable content and numerous topics.

In this article, a search of five of the most popular foreign social platforms was conducted and a total of 258 relevant pieces of content were collected. Among them, YouTube accounted for 66%, Twitter for 22%, Quora for 7%, Facebook for 2.7% and Instagram for 2.3%, and the time span was from May to September 2021. By combing through the corpus, it was found that the content disseminated by Internet users on the major social media was rich and diverse, mainly divided into the following areas: the history of the Sino-Japanese War, the comparison between the treatment of historical issues by China and Japan, the extent of people's knowledge and views on the Sino-Japanese War, and the role and status of China's resistance. In general, the

majority of internet users were objective and fair, sympathetic to the victims and eager to learn more about this history, but there were also some discordant voices.

4.1. History of The Sino-Japanese War

About 80% of the video content on the YouTube platform is about the history of the Sino-Japanese War. These videos are animated, show maps, old photos, documentaries and TV clips to present the history in a lively and interesting way. For example, the video "Second Sino-Japanese War: Every Day" introduces the change of power between China and Japan from 1931 to 1945 by changing the colours on the map of China; the video "China vs Japan in WW2 - Hilltop battle" is the opening battle scene of the film "The Peace Boat", which depicts a bloody battle in which the National Revolutionary Army (NRA), a Chinese nationalist army, attacks the artillery positions of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA); the LEGO minifigure animated war simulation video "Lego World War 2: Second Sino-Japanese War" features references to the Liuzhu Incident, the Battle of Songhu, the Battle of Nanking and the Battle of Hong Kong, with distinctive sound effects and characterisation; the video "WWII and China : The Untold Story" The video 'WWII and China : The Untold Story' quotes specific charts and data on the extent of power, casualties and duration of the war between China and Japan. In the comments section of these videos, netizens actively discussed and expressed their views, with most videos receiving over 1,000 comments and views. The informative videos provided netizens with the opportunity to learn more about history.

In addition, there are also some Internet users who know the history of the Japanese invasion of China very well and are able to expose the Japanese atrocities with detailed descriptions, such as details of the Nanjing Raid, details of 731, details of germ warfare, etc. They learnt about this history through various channels, such as documentaries, books and links to various websites. Among them, the most discussions revolved around the topic of the Nanjing Massacre. Some netizens clearly understood when the Nanking Massacre took place, the death toll and the specific events. "Two Japanese lieutenants beheaded over 100 people with swords; the Japanese executed 4,000 so-called Chinese soldiers in plain clothes; the Japanese killed over 300,000 innocent people, which is 5% of the number of people who died in the massacre during the four-year period; and the Japanese army raped about 20,000-80,000 women." Netizens repeatedly mentioned the 300,000 people who lost their lives during the period, using many concrete figures to visualise the brutal war atrocities committed by the Japanese. They also learn about the brutal sword fights, mass graves and the series of tortures, rapes, murders and executions that took place during the Nanking Massacre. In addition to this, netizens also learn details about Unit 731 and germ warfare. "Unit 731 was a secret biological and chemical weapons research and development unit of the Imperial Japanese Army that carried out deadly human experiments during the Second World War and was responsible for some of the most notorious war crimes committed by Japan. And cholera, anthrax and plague caused by the germ warfare carried out by Unit 731 are estimated to have killed more than 400,000 Chinese civilians." Others have provided details of the Japanese invasion during the Battle of Zhejiang-Gan. "Men who did not escape in time were tied up and forced to work as porters, carrying equipment and looting. The sick and elderly died like mules on the side of the road." The details are shocking and the brutality is horrific.

4.2. The Public's Level of Awareness and Perception of The War Between China and Japan

4.2.1 The Public's Perception of The Sino-Japanese War Varies

Firstly, some netizens are very knowledgeable about the history of the Japanese invasion of China and are able to expose Japanese atrocities with detailed descriptions, such as details of the Nanjing Massacre, details of Unit 731, etc., and share this history on social media. However, there are also some netizens who believe that the Sino-Japanese War is little known and has a

low presence. Foreign history textbooks deliberately omit the Anti-Japanese War to hide the shame of history, leaving most people with no knowledge of this period of history. "Many young Japanese people know little about the history of the War of Resistance against Japan because the Japanese government and some Western countries have chosen to cover up, distort and whitewash history. Foreign history textbooks pass over the history of the War of Resistance against Japan, letting you know that Japan invaded China in 1937 and that's about it. Since then everything about the Chinese battlefield has simply disappeared from the books, and some foreigners are not even sure whether China existed at the time of the outbreak of World War II. Literature on the subject of World War II rarely mentions China's war against Japan, because it is a disgrace. "There are even many people who have never heard of the Second Sino-Japanese War or know that China was involved in it. Westerners seem to forget about the war in China and focus on German atrocities, forgetting that China suffered twice as many atrocities as Japan. This is not just 'Western ignorance', it is widespread ignorance."

In addition, some netizens knew something about the Communist and Nationalist parties, the main subjects of the war. For the Communists, some netizens mentioned that "during the war, the Communists used defence in depth, space for time, and guerrilla warfare against a technically superior enemy. It also tried to use geographical features to gain local numerical superiority and destroy divisional Japanese armies, and succeeded in some battles" and "The Communist Party's contribution in the war against Japan is often overlooked." Against the Kuomintang, one user mentioned that "the Kuomintang played a greater role in fighting Japan during World War II. Nor should we forget China's courage in Shanghai (200,000 men from the excellent Nationalist forces died), who held off the Japanese for a crucial three months. Shanghai alone took 3 months and greatly demoralised the Japanese." Of the Communist collaboration, one user mentioned that "China's leader, the Nationalist Chiang Kai-shek, and his unlikely ally, the Communists, refused to surrender and retreated inland to continue the resistance."

4.2.2 Popular Perceptions of Historical Issues

4.2.2.1 Historical Issues as an Important Factor Affecting National Relations

The issue of the historical understanding of this war remains one of the important points of contention in current Sino-Japanese relations. It is indeed uncommon in the history of international relations for the issue of history to occupy an important place in the relations between the countries of China and Japan. "Hostility between China and Japan has always lingered because of the many atrocities committed during World War II, especially the Nanjing Massacre and the comfort women. Unless Japan formally accepts this history, the relationship between Japan and the victimised countries will never change." The issue of the history of Japan's invasion of China includes multiple layers of connotations; it is not simply a historical issue, but a major issue of principle that will directly affect reality and future development. On the surface, the Sino-Japanese historical issue is a matter of Japan's apology to China, but in fact it contains the dimension of historical facts. During World War II, the Japanese invading Chinese army committed many inhumane and brutal crimes in China, but during and after the war, some right-wing people in the Japanese government and civil society have been trying to cover up, distort and deny these historical facts, and at the most basic level of historical facts, China and Japan This will certainly affect the international relations between China and Japan.

4.2.2.2 There Is Much Discussion and Controversy Surrounding Whether the Japanese Army Committed Heinous Crimes.

While recognising the atrocities committed by the Japanese army in the war, most netizens condemned the atrocities committed by the Japanese army, which in their view was inhuman and barbaric. They denounced Japan as a war monger, considered Unit 731 infamous and defined the Nanjing Massacre as a genocide. "The cruelty of the Japanese army during World War II was mind-boggling, the brutality of the Japanese soldiers was horrific, the Japanese

committed all kinds of atrocities as bad as the Nazis, the Japanese were horrible everywhere they invaded, especially to the Chinese people and other Asian countries they were no better than the Nazis, there was no justification for this hellish behaviour. " In the opinion of most netizens, the Japanese treated their colonies with incredible cruelty, evil and barbarism, "compared to the British and French who actually made them look quite mild and reasonable". Meanwhile, in response to the Japanese invasion and atrocities against China during the War of Resistance Against Japan, some netizens hoped that Japan would face up to history, admit the atrocities and sincerely apologise. They believe that "genocides such as the Nanjing Massacre and its victims deserve equal attention and sympathy from the media. All victims and their families deserve respect and attention, and a fair and sincere apology, and Japan should not just deny the violence against them. It is useless to make and issue immature statements of apology, and Japan should follow the example of the German leaders and ordinary people who apologised sincerely. Unless the Japanese Emperor and government offer a sincere apology and acknowledgement of the crimes committed, it will be difficult for China and those of Chinese ancestry to forgive."

Some netizens believe that Japan's denial of the invasion of China is an attempt to change history. In response to the fact that so many Japanese war criminals were never prosecuted and that Japan is still allowed to deny things like the Nanjing Massacre, netizens feel sad that this is a shame that no country wants to suffer. In response to the fact that so many people's families died in the Nanking Massacre, some netizens cannot understand that Japan is still denying the Nanking Massacre and they are trying to downplay and even deny the parts of it.

But on these social media, there are also discordant voices of right-wingers who deny history, deny war atrocities, advocate downplaying war crimes and forgetting everything. The voices of right-wing forces denying the facts of the invasion of China are still very much in the air. Ignoring the protests of the Chinese people and Asian countries, the Japanese right-wing forces continue to create fallacious arguments to rehabilitate Japan's war of aggression, distort history, glorify aggression, deny Japan's war crimes and war responsibilities, and try every possible means to create a "fictional theory" of the Nanjing Massacre.

4.2.2.3 The Status and Role of China's Resistance

Most netizens believe that China's resistance made a huge contribution to World War II, that China's protracted war of resistance deserves a lot of credit, and that without China the history of World War II would have been completely rewritten. "The value of China's total resistance lies in the fact that China gave time to the British, Soviet and American powers when they needed it most. At a time when all three countries faced the dilemma of fighting on two fronts, China solved the problem. It was China's total resistance to the war that greatly limited Japan's strategic moves in other directions. At the same time, as the war between China and Japan became full-scale and protracted, the pace of Japanese rearmament was completely disrupted, the Japanese economy deteriorated further, and the focus of Japanese strategic deployment continued to be out of balance. China's courageous resistance may well have saved the world from fascist tyranny. The decision by the Communists to unite against Japan changed the fate of Asia."

Despite China's enormous contribution to World War II, the role played by the Chinese resistance in the Second World War is often forgotten and overlooked. "China's role in the Second World War is almost unwritten. For many, China's contribution to the Allied victory in World War II is best left out of the public and well known. The West seems to have forgotten about China's war effort and instead focused on German atrocities. China did a lot, but their efforts are rarely mentioned in history courses. In the West, only Britain, the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Russia and even the French who surrendered during the war are given more credit for the Second World War than those who died in China."

5. METHODS OF DISSEMINATION

Modes of communication are the methods and forms used by humans to convey information. In ancient times, the means of transmitting information were simple, usually in the form of knotted ropes, fire, drums, music and dance. Later, language and writing were created, a creation that allowed human communication to transcend the limits of time and space, thus expanding the depth and breadth of communication. The main forms of human communication are inward, interpersonal, organisational and mass communication.

The new media era is relative to the traditional media. It is a new media form developed after the traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television, and is a communication form and media form that uses digital technology, network technology and mobile technology to provide information and entertainment services to users through channels such as the Internet, wireless communication networks and satellites, as well as terminals such as computers, mobile phones and digital TV sets. In the era of rapid development of new media, the form of information dissemination is characterised by diversification and real-time.

The new media era offers more diverse ways of communication, including videos, photos, posting messages, question and answer responses, and so on. This article focuses on content about the Sino-Japanese War on the following five major social media platforms.

YouTube, the world's largest video search and sharing platform, is rich in video material, with a lot of discussion below the videos and a high level of user participation and activity. Twitter, as an online social networking and microblogging service in the US, is an important portal for many users who care about current affairs and news, and is the fastest and most convenient channel for news dissemination. Facebook is an American social networking site and is one of the world's hottest social networking software. It is an application that provides online photo and video sharing and social networking services. These social networking sites have users from all over the world, with a high level of user activity and a large group, and the information obtained can objectively reflect the attitudes and views of foreign netizens towards the Chinese resistance. At the same time, the audience can not only read targeted information from the platform, but also write down their own feelings about the information on the platform and communicate with each other. Most importantly, compared to traditional media, users of social media platforms are not only limited to text and pictures in the transmission process, but can also express visual information and a series of content associated with it in the form of video and motion pictures and audio, truly achieving interactive communication, fast communication and mass communication.

6. COMMUNICATION AUDIENCE

6.1. Audience Concept

The classic concept of audience comes from Lasswell, one of the four founding fathers of communication science. In the "Five Ws" model he posed the question of "to whom" communication is addressed. The audience is the recipient of the message, the object of the communicator, the market for the media and the subject of rights. In the new media environment, this mode of communication has been changed. In the early days, before the emergence of the Internet, the mass media such as radio, television and newspapers were the main mode of communication, and in this mode the audience was in a passive position with regard to the reception of information. In the new media environment, every individual becomes the centre of information dissemination, and every individual can become the recipient of information.

6.2. Audience Analysis

The effect of the foreign communication of the national image is closely related to the audience, and only a good audience analysis can get the corresponding communication effect. From the perspective of audience, the audience for the overseas dissemination of China's anti-war image is also the netizens. The "audience as a group" is a rebuttal by social science researchers to the "audience as a mass" proposed by the early cultural elites. They existed in various forms of groups. They existed in groups of various forms, and these groups influenced the effectiveness of mass communication. In addition to the tradition of empirical research, the tradition of interpretive research also suggests that society is made up of many cultural communities, with different cultural communities having their own historical traditions, identities, habits, ways of behaving and expressions. Different cultural communities may interpret the same events differently. Therefore, as the audience for the overseas dissemination of China's anti-war image, there are also certain differences among internet users. From a national perspective, audiences in developing countries with friendly diplomatic relations with China are more receptive and have a better appreciation of China's anti-war image than audiences in developed Western countries; from the perspective of the composition of audiences in the same country, there are still differences between audiences in the same country due to differences in age, economic and social status and educational level. Those with a higher education level have more channels to learn about the war than those with a lower education level, and may have a higher level of knowledge, while those with a higher economic and social status are also more interested in the political history of other countries. In terms of the international communication of China's image of the war, there is no specific, uniform standard that applies to all audiences.

These differences have become a major reason for the difficulty of foreign propaganda for China's resistance war. On the one hand, China's comprehensive national power is not strong enough to have a strong voice, and the West still dominates in terms of public opinion. For various historical and practical reasons, the West discriminates and misunderstands China. For political purposes and the West's natural rejection of the socialist system and ideology, the West has long been arrogant and prejudiced against China; on the other hand, due to the differences in ideology and the influence of Western political propaganda, many overseas netizens still have stereotypical impressions of China; moreover, due to the differences in cultural backgrounds and systems, the China's foreign public opinion propaganda channels and methods are not innovative enough, and overseas netizens have limited knowledge about China's war of resistance, which may result in the effectiveness of China's foreign propaganda work being minimal, and overseas people not being interested in the topic of China's war of resistance, or even unable to truly understand it.

Therefore, when studying and exploring the path of China's image communication to the outside world, we should take the audience as the starting point and decide the communication methods and contents according to the characteristics of different audiences. Firstly, we should pay attention to audience research and adapt to the integration of social and cultural customs of other countries. Overseas communication of China's image is not only international communication, but also cross-cultural communication, as there are great differences in history, politics, economy and culture around the world, and the concept of communication audiences also differs. We should understand their cultural taboos and develop different communication strategies according to their audiences. Otherwise, the content may be misunderstood and the facts may be distorted, resulting in the opposite effect of publicity. Secondly, importance should be attached to audience feedback, to strengthen the interactive relationship, to achieve two-way interaction. In addition, the initiative of the audience should be given full play, and the quality and efficiency of China's image promotion to the outside world should be improved by

constantly learning from the experience based on audience feedback. Through audience feedback, we should understand the real attitudes and views of the audience, provide timely explanations and explanations for their misunderstandings and misconceptions, and make targeted adjustments to choose publicity content and publicity methods that are more acceptable to the audience (Zhang, 2009). Finally, the political nature of anti-Japanese war propaganda should be diluted based on facts and avoid "reporting the good news but not the bad". In the process of communicating China's anti-Japanese war image to foreign countries, there is nothing wrong with trying to present the most perfect and positive image of oneself, however, this may not be easily accepted by Western audiences due to the existence of conceptual differences. In the West, where individualism is the norm, Chinese propaganda is less likely to be well received and accepted by Western audiences, who may be suspicious of the content of the propaganda.

In summary, the new media has provided more opportunities for the expression of civil discourse, making the overseas communication of China's anti-war image richer and more diverse in terms of subjects, methods and content. However, the results of civil discourse on the dissemination of the country's image are not all positive. Because of the virtual and anonymous nature of the Internet, many people treat the Internet as a place outside the law, and some people with ulterior motives use the Internet to act recklessly and make false statements to discredit China. In response to this, it is all the more important that we take practical action to counter the doubts of overseas public opinion, use diversified means of foreign public opinion propaganda, strengthen our capital operations and create a "sounding board" for China abroad.

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