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China

# How dangerous is Chinese Nationalism?

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**When four Americans were stabbed in Jilin on June 10, I bought the CCP foreign ministry spokesperson's comment that it was an 'isolated case'. Then when another knife attack targeted at a Japanese school bus in Suzhou happened in the same month. I could still tell myself that China has a huge population so there must be more lunatics than smaller countries. Nevertheless, I started doubting my judgement after a Japanese school kid got killed in Shenzhen in September. This month, the victims of latest cowardly attack carried out by Chinese murderer were three kindergarteners in Zurich and the tragedy happened on China's National Day. Now I am quite sure that this is a seriously worrying trend.**

The CCP police don't seem to want to publicize the motives in the first three cases, but many people believe that those attackers were influenced by nationalistic sentiments. For example, the Suzhou attack was clearly incited by online hate speech against Japan; and the Shenzhen attack occurred on September 18, which is the anniversary of Japanese invasion of Manchuria and always associated with 'national humiliation' and 'anti-Japan' in the official Chinese nationalist narrative. Also, unlike inside China, the western media can find and publish more details about the Zurich attacker:

The exact motive for his actions remains elusive at this point.

But just before the attack, around noon on October 1st, the assailant posted a long text on social networks.

In it, he first described his sexual fantasies with a woman he met, saying how much he missed her, as well as the time they spent together.

The text also mentions his love for his home country and its ruling Party [\[3\]](#)

It is also reported that the 23-year-old man had been very angry about a lecture on Taiwan sovereignty organized by the University of Zurich in the week before the crime, and cursed on the Internet: 'Shame on Taiwan independence! Taiwan province belongs to China!' [\[4\]](#)

Of course nationalism was always part of our education, but it was not so horrible in the past.

I remember back to the early 2000s, I found a hand-made poster on the notice board of my high school library, which was about boycotting Japanese products. Its eye-catching slogan was: Every yuan you spend now buying Japanese goods will become a bullet to kill your countrymen in the future!

However, no one took the boycotting action seriously and Sony Walkman was still the dream music player of every school kid at that time. Generally speaking, those who stuck to strict 'made in China only' principle were considered a special kind of unpopular geeks – this is shown in a documentary about them [\[5\]](#).

Besides, there was no call to harm foreign civilians at that time, while today you can easily find cold-blooded comments advocating killing on Chinese social media.

A Chinese media recently posted a short video to analyze the ridiculous propaganda on the internet against the Japanese schools in China [\[6\]](#), but the first and second most liked comments were 'What on earth are the Japanese

## How dangerous is Chinese Nationalism?

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schools in China teaching?' and 'They must be demolished.' respectively.

However, I still believe that the population is not as crazy as Nazi Germany or Japan at the height of militarism. Here is an example: The Japanese consumed a lot of luxury goods during their bubble economy era so they now have a very large second-hand stock. In recent years, importing vintage or even FMCG jewelry (and all kinds of other stuff) and selling them online in China has been a very popular trade, especially during the period of COVID Lockdown when most of other businesses were hard to operate. Chinese consumers love them - even they know clearly that these goods had been pre-owned and worn by Japanese. Who can say no to Burberry accessories at five euros? Students, housewives and unemployed youth all flock to this trade and try to make a profit on TikTok or other online flea market apps.

This is the typical 'two-faced Chinese' - on one hand, people "harmonize" (or accept) nationalist rhetoric; on the other hand, they care more about material interests in their private lives. In recent years, we saw farces about boycotting Korean supermarket chain, boycotting American brands, boycotting French companies, etc. But none of them lasted more than a couple of months.

This is understandable. In a country where people got arrested and sentenced for insulting table tennis Olympians [\[7\]](#) or martyrs [\[8\]](#) online, you must follow its 'political correctness'.

In a recent interview, an IT expert who used to work for the CCP's internet censorship department said that for a long time in the past, hate speech on the Chinese internet targeting race, nationality, gender or sexuality were tacitly endorsed and even guided by the authorities. [\[9\]](#)

Just like many other governments in the world and in history, the CCP stirs up nationalism to consolidate its rule. By creating some outside enemies, it tries to prove that the Chinese people need its protection, which means the need of building big battleships, cutting-edge stealth jets and more nukes. A classical Animal Farm trick – the human farm owner (American imperialists, Japanese militarists, British colonialists, Taiwanese separatists, etc.) is coming back!

However, a typical nationalist rhetoric also promises affluence and prosperity. Just like Hitler once promised that every German family would own a Volkswagen car. In 2021, Xi Jinping announced that China's battle against poverty had achieved a comprehensive victory on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP. But in the August of 2024 the youth unemployment rate is 18.8%. [\[10\]](#) Although the CCP wanted the Chinese people to hate the U.S. and Japan, it definitely does not want them to start killing foreigners right now. The young people who sell second-hand Japanese goods for living is perhaps only an irony - what is worse is that the anti-foreigners nationalism will push the developed countries to further distance themselves from China: divestment, making changes in their supply chains, and avoiding China as a tourist destination.

The cases of killings also reflect the desperation of Chinese society. There are a much greater number of indiscriminate killings of Chinese on top of the killings of foreigners. The attacks on foreigners are not just the result of nationalist hatred, but also the result of overall decadence of society, which has left many individuals in a state of despair and hopelessness. If the economy continues to deteriorate, this kind of chaos and brutality will exacerbate and nationalism could become the trigger for even greater tragedies. We have seen many such examples in the history.

And there is another danger: Xi's subordinates may only present him with selected public opinions, which will make him believe that the nationalist brainwash works and make bad decisions.

Putin once seriously believed that Ukrainians would greet Russian tanks in Kiev waving the tricolor. On the Chinese

## How dangerous is Chinese Nationalism?

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internet, you can also find insane talks about that Taiwanese will line up for PRC ID cards the day after the PLA landing.

Sober people can tell the difference between jokes and intelligence, we can only keep fingers crossed that the same goes for our Great Leader.

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[1] [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2024-06/12/content\\_117248810.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2024-06/12/content_117248810.htm)

[2] <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202406/1314795.shtml#:text=Two%20Japanese%20citizens%20who%20are%20hurt%20in%20attack,protect%20the%20safety%20of%20foreigners%20in%20this%20country.>

[3] <https://www.thelocal.ch/20241002/what-we-know-about-chinese-student-who-stabbed-children-in-zurich>

[4] <https://udn.com/news/story/7332/8273460>.

[5] <https://tv.apple.com/hk/movie/%E5%B0%91%E5%B9%B4%E5%B0%8F%E8%B6%99/umc.cmc.ufpbeps286pvm9al0f8wa4su>.

[6] [https://www.douyin.com/search/%E6%97%A5%E6%9C%AC%E4%BA%BA%E6%9C%89%E5%BE%88%E5%A4%9A%E5%AD%A6%E6%A0%A1%E5%9C%A8%E6%88%91%E4%BB%AC%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%90%97?modal\\_id=7417071283369708815&type=general](https://www.douyin.com/search/%E6%97%A5%E6%9C%AC%E4%BA%BA%E6%9C%89%E5%BE%88%E5%A4%9A%E5%AD%A6%E6%A0%A1%E5%9C%A8%E6%88%91%E4%BB%AC%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%90%97?modal_id=7417071283369708815&type=general).

[7] [<https://english.news.cn/20240817/5c7e3ff43b9046d4b3d06e4ff258f16d/c.html>].

[8] <https://govt.chinadaily.com.cn/s/202212/09/WS6392e22a498ea274927aad5a/courts-step-up-efforts-to-protect-reputations-of-heroes-martyrs.html>

[9] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hatVCKjTY30&list=PL6q6LZQfl79jg2CPZoh1tYxJmvmzqey53&index=11>.

[10] <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/09/23/chinas-youth-unemployment-hits-fresh-high-in-august-as-economy-slows.html>.