

**“WEAR A KIMONO TODAY, ENSHRINE WAR
CRIMINALS TOMORROW”: POLITICIZATION OF
KIMONO ON A CHINESE ONLINE FORUM**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>In this thesis I examine Chinese internet commentators’ response to the ‘Suzhou kimono incident’. My goal was to ascertain what the incident reveals about sartorial politics in China today, and how kimono has been politicized in the online debate. Additionally, I set out to discover how contemporary Chinese national identity is constructed within the anti-Japan discourse surrounding the Suzhou kimono incident. The material analyzed consists of anonymous online comments on the Chinese NetEase website.</p> <p>I lay out the key concepts of anti-Japanism, sartorial politics, nationalism and national identity. The research was done within the framework of poststructuralist discourse analysis. I followed Lene Hansen’s method, according to which discourses arise in foreign policy debates. As debates take place, meanings are assigned to people, objects and events. Through this process identities are articulated for both the Self and the Other. To further narrow the method I have also utilized Ole Wæver’s theory on securitization. Finally, to bring the focus on Sino-Japanese relations, I have included Shogo Suzuki’s argumentation on Japan as China’s ‘victimizing other’.</p> <p>Through my analysis, I demonstrate that kimono is a highly politicized item in China. Additionally, it carries gendered and national meanings, mostly related to the national shame rooted in the comfort women issue of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Also, I make the point that contemporary Chinese national identity is entwined with seeing Japan as its Other.</p>	
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Tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastelen kiinalaisten internet kommentoijien reaktiota tapahtumaan, joka tunnetaan nimellä “Suzhoun kimono välikohtaus”. Tavoitteeni on selvittää, mitä välikohtaus kertoo Kiinan ajankohtaisesta vaatetukseen kohdistuvasta politiikasta, ja miten kimono on politisoitu analysoitavassa internetkeskustelussa. Lisäksi tarkastelen kuinka nykyaikainen kiinalainen kansallinen identiteetti muodostetaan Suzhoun kimono välikohtaukseen liittyvässä Japanin vastaisessa diskurssissa. Analysoitavana materiaalina käytän kiinalaiselta NetEase sivustolta löytyviä anonyymejä kommentteja.

Määrittelen tutkielmaan keskeisesti liittyvät konseptit: Japanin vastaisuus, vaatetukseen kohdistuva politiikka, nationalismi ja kansallinen identiteetti. Tutkimuksessani noudatan poststruktuurialaisen diskurssianalyysin viitekehystä. Seuraan Lene Hansenin metodologiaa, jonka mukaan diskurssit nousevat esiin ulkopoliittisissa väittelyissä. Väittelyissä ihmisiin, objekteihin ja tapahtumiin liitetään erilaisia merkityksiä. Tämän prosessin myötä artikuloidaan identiteettejä itselle ja toisille. Olen rajannut metodista viitekehystä edelleen keskittymällä Ole Wæverin määritelmään turvallistamisesta. Lisäksi, pystyäkseni tuomaan tutkielmani fokuksen Kiinan ja Japanin välisiin suhteisiin, olen sisällyttänyt metodiosioon Shogo Suzukin teoretisoinnin Japanista Kiinan “uhriuttavana toisena”.

Analyysissäni demonstroin, että kimono on erittäin politisoitu esine Kiinassa. Kimonoon myös liitetään sukupuolittuneita ja kansallisia merkityksiä, jotka pääosin kumpuavat Kiinan ja Japanin välisen sodan aikaisesta seksiorja ongelmasta. Tuon lisäksi esille, että nykyaikaisessa kiinalaisessa kansallisidentiteetissä Japani nähdään Kiinan vastakuvamaisena toisena.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

On August, 10th, 2022, a Chinese woman wore a kimono while out and about in the East coastal city of Suzhou, China. She was cosplaying as a character from a Japanese anime (an animated TV-show), and was taking pictures with a photographer. However, she was approached by a police officer who, on a video that has been recorded by a bystander, can be heard saying: (in Chinese) “If you would be wearing Hanfu [Chinese traditional clothing], I never would have said this, but you are wearing a kimono, as a Chinese. You are Chinese!” After this, the video cuts off as the woman is grabbed by the police officer. The woman was taken to a local police station and questioned for five hours. While at the station, her phone was also searched, and her kimono confiscated. The official reason for detaining the woman was “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”, a loosely worded offense in the Chinese law. The law is often resorted to when arresting people who behave in a way that could be seen as “dissident” behavior. (Luo, 16.8.2022) After her release, the woman said online that she did not wish to discuss the events which took place at the police station, only saying that she was “educated” (Davidson, 16.8.2022).

Almost a year later, in September 2023, the National People’s Congress presented a new law proposal titled Public Security Administration Punishments Law of the People’s Republic of China. A particular clause related to the Suzhou kimono incident, and of interest to this thesis, can be found in chapter three (Acts Violating Public Security Administration and Their Punishment) of the law proposal:

Article 34: Those who commit any of the following acts are to be detained for between 5 and 10 days or be fined between 1,000 and 3,000 RMB; and where the circumstances are more serious, they are to be detained for between 10 and 15 days and may be concurrently fined up to 5,000 RMB:

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(2) Wearing clothing or bearing symbols in public places that are detrimental to the spirit of the Chinese people and hurt the feelings of the Chinese people, or forcing others to do so (China Law Translate, 2023)

Clause 2 of article 34 thus seems to directly address any future incidents similar to the one which happened in Suzhou. The law proposal stipulates that there can be clothing or symbols “detrimental to the spirit of the Chinese people”, or ones that “hurt the feelings of the Chinese people”. The article also determines the possible fine that can be measured for the culprit, or how long they can be detained if found guilty of this charge. Whereas the woman in Suzhou was detained and questioned for five hours, in the law proposal the detention can vary from five to fifteen days.

The Suzhou kimono incident, as it came to be known, sparked a rapid online discussion with regards to the police officer’s decision to detain the woman. Consequently, appearing in public while wearing a kimono in China became a topic of heated debate on the internet (Finnane, 12.9.2023). Some Chinese social media users have been galvanized by the incident, questioning whether such a reaction to a cosplaying person is exaggerated or not (Luo, 16.8.2022). As the consumption of Japanese cultural products, such as manga and anime has increased, cosplaying has become a more popular hobby, and a way to express one’s identity in China. Now it appears that wearing certain clothing, which has historical and ‘foreign’ associations (as a part of such a hobby or outside of it), has been politicized, and can be deemed to be a political act or a form of political expression, instead of an individual pastime interest. Meanwhile, in the West, media commentators linked the Suzhou incident to growing tensions between China and Japan (see Davidson, 16.8.2022, or Finnane, 12.9.2023). My assumption in this thesis is also that it is the turbulent history and conflicted cultural memory of Sino-Japanese relations that contributed to the Suzhou

kimono incident taking place. This is also reflected in the analysis of the NetEase comments, which this thesis sets to accomplish.

1.2 Research motivation

The Suzhou kimono incident caught my interest in the course of the Asian studies I have done as a minor for my degree. The focus of my studies has mainly been on China, and I have been fascinated by its long, continuous history. The last hundred years in China constitute a vast and eventful time period; as a result of the political and economic reforms undertaken since the 1990s, China has now become the second largest economy in the world (Pettis, 4.12.2023). In my opinion, China's massive global impact means that it is important to know and understand it better, including its domestic political, cultural and legal developments. This is not always easy for the European public, as due to its one-party system and intricacies of its history, China can appear like a "big unknown" to most Westerners. Combined with both economic and political power factors, this means that China often appears to the Europeans as a "mystifying" Other. Indeed, during my studies on China, I learned about phenomena that, on the first glance, seemed incomprehensible. This was also the case when I first learned about the Suzhou kimono incident: a police officer, seemingly reacting to an arbitrary impulse, detained a woman wearing a kimono in public. Understanding the contexts and meanings of this incident has thus been my motivation in choosing to focus on this research topic. I have come to realize that, as is often the case with China, the story is not quite as simple as it may first seem. Such is the case with the Suzhou kimono incident; it exemplifies how a nation's past can continue to impact its current events, and in particular, how anti-Japanism shapes public views and attitudes in China today.

1.3 The focus and research questions

In this thesis, I analyze comments that people have left on a blogpost titled “After the Suzhou Kimono Incident, the girl was suspected of being treated unfairly at the police station”, which describes the events of the Suzhou kimono incident. The blogging platform is a Chinese website NetEase. I have analyzed the comments after converting their contents to English using artificial intelligence translation. After reading through each comment, I have chosen the ones that most evidently contain anti-Japan sentiments. Although the number of all comments is over a thousand, most of them are not of notable analyzable substance, as many commentators reply to each other, or the original writer called ‘New Ball Society’, with comments that are not of great analyzable sustenance for a thesis of political science.

The research questions I look for in the data are:

- 1) What does the Suzhou kimono incident show about ‘sartorial politics’ in China today; how has kimono been politicized in online debates as an item that has both gendered and national meanings?
- 2) How is contemporary Chinese national identity constructed in the anti-Japanism discourse in the case of the Suzhou kimono incident?

I seek to answer these questions through the analysis of selected NetEase comments by applying the methodology of discourse analysis. Theories and concepts related to my research include: anti-Japanism, sartorial politics, nationalism and national identity and securitization.

An important qualification is needed on whether research material consisting of comments on an online forum about public visibility of a kimono are ‘political enough’ to be part of the field of political science. Indeed, I can envision such material being utilized in analyses in different fields, such as sociology and linguistics. However, in choosing this thesis topic, I follow a claim made by Fairclough and Fairclough about how internet forums can function as platforms where “citizens avail themselves of their right to publicly criticize government policy

for failing to meet legitimate commitments and obligations". These rights, commitments and obligations function as the catalysts for action taken by political actors. (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 33) In the material selected for this thesis the online commentators are not discussing government policy – yet. However, the introduction of the Public Security Administration Punishment Law in 2023 demonstrates that the discomfort of the public with regards to the Suzhou kimono incident is also reflected in government policy. Therefore, the internet forum comments analyzed in this thesis do qualify as political material, as the ‘cycle’ of citizens exercising their right to criticize leading to political action described by Fairclough and Fairclough is detectable.

1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis has been divided into five chapters. After the introduction, I will present the key concepts in the background chapter (chapter two). These concepts include anti-Japanism, sartorial politics, and nationalism and national identity. The purpose of the background chapter is to present some of the history of the relationship between China and Japan, as a context affecting the online commentators’ attitudes towards the Suzhou kimono incident. Next, in chapter three, I present my chosen method of discourse analysis. I further focus the methodological discussion on the concept of securitization, as in the online comments it appears that the kimono and other Japanese symbols have the potential to be interpreted as a security threat in China. Also in chapter three, I discuss the idea of Japan as China’s ‘victimizing other’, the origin of which is again rooted in the history of the two countries’ relationship. Chapter four is the analysis and the exploration of my research questions. Finally, in chapter five I present my conclusions on the research and suggest possible future research directions related to my topic.

2 BACKGROUND: KEY CONCEPTS

In this chapter I discuss key concepts related to my research. These concepts include anti-Japanism, which is a sentiment of resistance towards Japan mostly found in the East Asian countries that were subjected to Japan's imperialism from late 19th century to the end of WW2. In the first subchapter I will describe the theory of anti-Japanism, and then the history of the events that has led to the expression of anti-Japanism in China in the second subchapter. In the third subchapter I will briefly discuss the concept of sartorial politics, or politics related to clothing, which is an important aspect of the Suzhou kimono incident, and the following law proposal. Finally, I will present the theory on nationalism and national identity, which are essentially related to doing discourse analysis. By being familiar with all these concepts, I will be able to decipher more nuanced meanings in the comments analyzed later in chapter four.

2.1 The Concept of Anti-Japanism

In his book *Anti-Japan: The Politics of Sentiment in Postcolonial East Asia* (2019), Ching argues that colonialism and imperialism are the historical roots of anti-Japanism in East Asian countries, but that the 'outlet' for the sentiment differs in each country. He suggests that anti-Japanism in East Asia is an aftermath of Japan's failed, albeit destructive, attempt at subjugating and occupying parts of the region. Ching divides East Asian anti-Japanism into two parts: 'resist-Japan' and 'anti-Japan'. 'Anti-Japan' was a phenomenon in former colonies, such as Korea and Taiwan. As a post-war sentiment, it was later replaced by anti-Communism, when the effects of the Cold War and its consequential side-choosing of 'anti' or 'pro' communism spread from the United States and Soviet Union. 'Resist-Japan', however, is the term that Ching introduces to specifically outline the Chinese version of anti-Japanism. Its historical background is not a colonial experience per se, but the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), when China became the target of Japanese imperialism and militarism.

(Ching, 2019, p. 3-4) It is important to note, that according to Ching, anti-Japanism is never merely about Japan and the given country's relations with Japan, but also a vehicle for articulating the country's own identity (Ching, 2019, p. 35).

According to Ching, anti-Japanism consists of four interrelated attributes. Firstly, anti-Japanism is greatly affected by a set of "competing claims and narratives about Japan, or the 'idea' of Japan". These claims and narratives are often exaggerated and hyperbolic versions of historical truth. (Ching, 2019, p. 12) Essentially, this involves taking an idea associated with Japan or the Japanese, such as their economic success or history of wartime atrocities, and making it the center of how the country or its people are described. Such a process seems to be behind the emergence of such terms like 'economic animals' or 'Japanese devils' (*riben guizi* in Chinese).

The second attribute of anti-Japanism according to Ching is that it connotes a "set of performative acts and representations". The acts can refer, for example, to national anti-Japanese protests and demonstrations, which are social events during which these representations are created, utilized and reproduced. During such demonstrations, anti-Japanism manifests through language included on posters and other cultural and social material created for the occasion, including slogans chanted by the participants. (Ching, 2019, p. 12)

Thirdly, Ching lists emotions and sentiments as an important aspect of the emergence of anti-Japanism. Notably, emotions and sentiments are the core of any attempt at influencing national positions about historical conflict, be it 'anti' or 'pro'. According to Ching, emotions and sentiments help make anti-Japanism sustainable, and to "produce collective catharsis". Whereas the previous attribute of performative acts and representations takes place at the level of society and is created by people, emotions and sentiments are more easily incited by politicians through speech acts. However, it must be remembered that emotions and sentiments cannot be fully managed top-down. They are highly dependent on personal histories and collective memories. (Ching, 2019, p. 12)

Lastly, Ching argues that anti-Japanism is also affected by “a set of temporary fixes to political, economic and social crises”. This is because, as mentioned before, in its core, anti-Japanism is more about the national society of the country in which it takes place than about Japan itself. Thus, anti-Japanism can be used as a way of presenting domestic issues in a particular way, by e.g. locating the cause of specific problems outside the nation. (Ching, 2019, p. 12)

2.2 Historical Outline of Anti-Japanism in China

The discourse of anti-Japanism in China takes as its point of reference the mid 20th century history, and national memory of Japan’s aggression against China. The historical background of anti-Japanism in China began when China was invaded by Japan in 1937. For some years before that, since 1931, the countries had engaged in fighting, as Japanese troops were stationed in Manchuria, North China. At the start of the invasion in July 1937, Japan was able to make its way from the coastal city of Shanghai to China’s capital at the time, Nanjing, fairly easily, reaching Nanjing in December 1937. Once in Nanjing, the Japanese troops began a six-week period of looting, raping and killing local Chinese civilians. This event has come to be known as the Massacre of Nanjing, or the Rape of Nanjing. The number of casualties is estimated differently depending on sources, between 40,000 and 300,000, making the Massacre of Nanjing one of the worst war crimes in world history (History.com, 2023).

Eventually, the Japanese in China surrendered in September 1945. Soon afterwards, the Chinese, who had been internally divided into the Chinese Communist Party led by chairman Mao, and members of the Kuomintang led by Chiang Kai-Shek, descended into a civil war (Britannica, n.d.). As a result, the Kuomintang was forced to give up its rule over China (Republic of China at the time), and retreat to the island of Taiwan (Cheung, 4.12.2016). On October 1st, 1949, Chairman Mao established the People’s Republic of China on mainland China (Mühlhahn, 2019, p. 15).

The history and collective memory of the Massacre of Nanjing continues to cause problems and divisions between China and Japan. Although the massacre became a suppressed topic after the war in both China and Japan, as noted by Ching, it gained more attention after the publication of popular books on the topic in the 1980s and 90s. In the 2000s, the Chinese Communist Party also began to be more vocal about that history, and utilized it at times to strategically construct China as a historical victim of Japan's aggression in its discourses. Additionally, Chinese people responded with anger to Japanese prime ministers' visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, where deceased Japanese soldiers are commemorated. In particular, in 2005 the former prime minister Koizumi Jun'ichiro's visit to the shrine caused massive anti-Japan protests in China. (Ching, 2019, p. 5)

Importantly, in the aftermath of China's economic and hegemonic rise, the power relations and popular attitudes towards Japan have shifted. China has employed anti-Japan discourse under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party, mostly due to Japan's repression and war crimes against China during the Second Sino-Japanese War. According to Ching, China aims to build a narrative of hurt inflicted by Japan on China and South Korea, while leaving Taiwan out of the narrative. This is linked to China's denial of Taiwan's status as a separate political entity, and to China's long-sought goal of "uniting" China. (Ching, 2019, p. 117) Additionally, according to Wang, the display of museums, monuments and memory sites in Japan in honor of the Second Sino-Japanese War and its orchestrators makes it impossible for the Chinese public to forget imperial Japan's aggression towards China. Furthermore, the memories remain vivid in stories, and can be tapped into by politicians or other public figures and artists. The memories can even be evoked through the indirect use of symbols. (Wang, 2012, p. 204) However, the strong presence of public reminders related to the Sino-Japanese war can be a strategic choice by the political elite to keep China's victimhood discourse at the forefront of national identity formation.

Characteristically of such villainization of the other, the Japanese have been assigned a derogatory name by the Chinese, as described by Ching. This name is *riben guizi*, which translates as 'Japanese devils'. Another epithet used to describe Japan is *xiao*

riben, meaning 'little Japan'. In the Chinese language, *gui* refers to a ghost or a spirit. Initially, the term *guizi* was associated with Westerners after the Opium Wars of 1839-42 and 1856-60. At that time the term for describing foreign aggressors came to be *yang guizi*, meaning 'foreign devils'. As Japan invaded China in 1937, they were called *dongyan guizi*, 'eastern devils', to differentiate between the Westerners and the Japanese. However, the term *guizi* became inseparable from the Japanese during and after the ensuing war, as China emerged victorious. (Ching, 2019, p. 39) Within the postsocialist Chinese society of the 2000s and onwards, the term *riben guizi* has evolved from referring to the Japanese imperialists, mainly soldiers, to all Japanese people (ibid., p. 48).

When closely scrutinized, these terms are more revealing of China, the speaker, than of Japan. Certainly, calling the other 'a devil' creates a disconnect, and differentiates between the speaker and the other's actions or characteristics. A devil is someone who acts in a prohibited way, as a rule-breaker, and an evil character. This means that the speaker, by using that term for their opponent, identifies themselves as moral and good, and a victim of the devil's actions. The term 'little Japan' is derogatory in a different way, as it is associated with attempting to belittle the other. This also creates a connotation that helps to identify the speaker, the Chinese, as bigger and more powerful in comparison. Both terms of *riben guizi* and *xiao riben* are expressive of the Chinese people's emotions towards the Japanese. These feelings can range widely from envy to hatred and deprecation (Ching, 2019, p. 38).

Gustafsson (2015) has approached China's anti-Japanism as a manifestation of anti-Japanism within the Chinese government. He argues that the Chinese state has become increasingly anti-Japanese, admitting that it is in some part due to public incidents and displays of anti-Japanism. These include the 2005 demonstrations against Japan wanting to join the United Nations Security Council, the 2010 demonstrations against the arrest of the captain of a Chinese fishing vessel in Japan, and the 2012 demonstrations concerning the ongoing geopolitical claims of the Senkaku or Diaoyu islands. According to Gustafsson, the occurrence of demonstrations against a neighboring country does not necessarily mean being 'anti'

that country. Instead, he links the national outbursts of anti-Japanism in China to patriotic education, which deliberately creates anti-Japan sentiments. Most importantly, the materials depicting Japan in Chinese schools either deny or leave out Japan's peacefulness after the war. Similar discourse is utilized by Chinese leaders. (Gustafsson, 2015, p. 119)

2.3 Sartorial politics

Sartorial politics is a term that captures situations and discourses when clothing becomes an object of political interest and contention. Roces and Edwards state in their book *Politics of Dress in Asia and the Americas* (2010) that clothing is an "important signifier of ideological values and political aspirations", and a way to create a division of "us and them" in political power struggles (Roces & Edwards, 2010, p. 2). They note that even today, clothing is a visual cue for status, identity and legitimacy, and it can include or exclude "individuals or groups from political power, citizenship or prestige" (ibid., p. 3). Indeed, when considering the visual cues which people can detect from one another's bodies through gazing, ethnicity, aesthetic beauty (which of course is also subject to individual preferences), bodily proportions, and sex come to mind as key qualities. These qualities we are born with, and some, such as height, we are unable to alter. Clothing, on the other hand, provides a way in which we choose to present ourselves to others. Thus, clothing offers a means to signal one's identities and values, which can be "put on one's body" for display, and subsequently taken off in mere seconds.

According to Roces and Edwards, trans-cultural interactions have shaped the decision-making process regarding clothing through globalization, colonialism and imperialism (Roces & Edwards, 2010, p. 3). Whereas clothing was initially "a marker of civilization" at the beginning of the Europeans' colonization of Asia and South America, and then an indication of "the degree of civilization", it later came to be a characteristic of "modernity and modernization" (ibid., p. 7-8). While the development of sartorial history in more general terms is beyond the focus of this

thesis, what is of interest is an incident in which different kinds of meanings were assigned by the Chinese in an online debate to a Chinese woman wearing a kimono in China. Here I also take note of Roces and Edwards's claim that, for the political elites, sartorial politics is a way to both impose identities, and also to prevent or make shaping new identities more difficult. At the same time, this can come into conflict with how, from an individual point of view, clothing is a means to express one's identity in public spaces (ibid., p. 16). If the political elites are not aware of the masses' preferences, and prohibit or endorse the wearing of clothing that clashes with the wishes and identities of the masses, resistance can occur. In order to avoid this, the elites should only prohibit the wearing of clothing that is not of relevance to the majority of their supporters. Similarly, when choosing what kind of clothing to endorse, the elites should choose carefully in order to not upset the masses. By prohibiting the wearing of kimonos in China, the political elites have assumedly deemed to gain more popular support than resistance.

2.4 Nationalism and national identity

When studying anti-Japanism in China, it is important to understand the theory regarding the formation of national identity. In his book *New Chinese Nationalism: Pride, Politics and Diplomacy* (2004), Gries delves into Chinese nationalism. He emphasizes the importance of both leaders and masses' input in creating and upholding nationalism. Gries argues that current Chinese nationalist politics work with a claim-response dynamic, which in itself is not exclusive to China. Within this dynamic "popular nationalists both support and challenge the state's claims to legitimacy—and issue their own rival nationalist claims, while the Party both suppresses and responds to challenges to its nationalist credentials". (Gries, 2004, p. 119) However, by suppressing legitimate nationalist claims, the Chinese Communist Party can 'lose face'. On the other hand, by handling popular nationalist claims in a successful manner, they can 'gain face'. In other words, popular support for the Chinese Communist Party and its authority can be dependent on the way it deals

with different nationalist claims set forth by the public. (ibid., p. 120) Adding to this, Gries notes that the stage on which nationalist claims are handled is not merely the Chinese soil. Gaining face within the international society is equally important for convincing the Chinese people of the Chinese Communist Party's claim for legitimacy (ibid., 121).

Considering national identity, Spencer and Wollman define national identity as “the extent to which people may be seen or see themselves as members of a given nation” (Spencer & Wollmann, 2002, p. 57). They stress that while creating identities involves identifying with those who are similar, it is simultaneously also about identifying, and differentiating oneself from, those who are different. This is specifically true for group identities, when categorizing who can and who cannot be a part of the group into “those who are similar enough to be included, and those who are different and are therefore to be excluded” (ibid., p. 57). For Spencer and Wollman the process of forming national identity happens via social categorization. This takes place

from primary socialization through various kinds of public interactions and relationships, to market and employment relationships, and eventually to organized politics and official classifications which may clearly categorize groups and help constitute particular identities (ibid., p. 60).

Thus, because of social categorization, national identities are moldable over time, rather than fixed and rigid. In the case of Chinese anti-Japanism, this perspective on identity formation can be seen in the development of Sino-Japanese relations. For example, the ‘victor’ narrative of chairman Mao’s era (1943-76) was slowly changed to a ‘victim’ narrative, which blames the West and Japan for China’s hardships, during the 1990s (Gries, 2004, p. 48). This is an example of a change in identity over the period of three decades, but assumedly with the modern mass and social media, a shift in identity could be achieved faster.

Billig provides an alternative theorization for how national identities are created in his book *Banal Nationalism* (1995). He states that all states must have their own

collective memory, which comprises their history. However, collective memory functions as a combination of both remembering and forgetting. According to Billig, the forgetting operates on two levels: on one hand, violence related to the nation's history is forgotten (and there has always been foundational violence involved in the creation of nation states), and on the other, the current reminders of history are also bypassed or forgotten. Billig calls these current reminders of the past 'flaggings', and states that they are so numerous (e.g. the state flag hanging in a public building), that the citizens do not pay much attention to them as they encounter them in daily life. Thus, due to an oversaturation, the reminders of nationhood or national identity become everyday objects to the citizens. Billig calls such nationalism embedded in everyday life "banal nationalism". (Billig, 1995, p. 38)

In this thesis, I suggest that a key aspect of the Suzhou kimono incident, and of its subsequent online discussion, is nationalism. I will assume that national identity is shaped through both social categorization, as suggested by Spencer and Wollman, and through banal nationalism, as suggested by Billig. Much of it has to do with the fact that in China people undergo patriotic education, with education efforts being further still raised under president Xi Jinping's rule (Lau & McCarthy, 2024). Such education generates social categorization. On the other hand, China is also (similarly to many other countries) a place full of banal nationalism, in the form of flags and other symbols. In the light of the Suzhou kimono incident, it is also interesting to note how banal nationalism can operate in a reverse manner. Although banal nationalism is supposed to be about forgetting and getting used to the constant symbols of the state's own national identity, the Suzhou incident demonstrates a hyperfocus on a symbol of another nation instead, which is interpreted as a threat to the Chinese nation. Neither the people who were involved in the incident in Suzhou, nor the commentators online were able to 'forget' the things which the kimono represents. Moreover, it should be noted that such hyperfocus is only given to kimono, even though there are numerous other Japanese symbols in China, such as Japanese commercial products and brands.

In this chapter, I have presented the concepts which are related to my research questions and data. In order to fit each concept into my research, anti-Japanism is needed so that the history of Sino-Japanese relations can be understood from the Chinese perspective. Secondly, sartorial politics is the realm which deals with the politics of clothing, and the Suzhou kimono incident is an example of politicizing clothing. Lastly, nationalism and national identity are a way to describe how the citizens of a state identity themselves, and understanding this is vital for performing discourse analysis.

3 THEORY AND METHOD

The methodology used in this thesis is poststructuralist discourse analysis. It is based primarily on Lene Hansen's book *Security as Practice* (2006), which describes how to use discourse analysis to examine foreign policy. As discourse analysis is utilized in many different fields, also outside of political science, in this thesis the focus is on the discourse analysis of securitization. The use of the concept of securitization stems from the so-called Copenhagen School, and specifically from the work of Ole Wæver. What exactly is meant by securitization is explained in a separate subchapter below. Lastly, the chapter will focus on the Self and Other binary as part of the debates about discursive securitization in the context of Sino-Japanese relations, based on Shogo Suzuki's article.

Discourse analysis is a relevant and suitable methodology for this thesis because the material analyzed, consisting of anonymous online comments, evidences formation of a nationalist discourse. With the help of discourse analysis, I have been able to identify and examine the anti-Japan discourse which unfolds in the comments. Additionally, the tools of discourse analysis help dissect the underlying self-other binaries within the comments. As discourse analysis is also closely related to the concept of securitization, it is a useful method for detecting what kind of security concerns are related to a woman wearing a kimono.

Discourse analysis is not a method solely used in political science, but also for example in sociology, cultural studies and linguistics. The material I have chosen to analyze in this thesis was originally composed in Chinese, which I cannot speak or read. I have translated the comments from Chinese into English using artificial intelligence (AI) tools. As an ideographic language, Chinese lends itself well to AI generated translation from a technical point of view. At the same time, as AI development becomes more and more advanced, it is likely that AI generated translations are exceedingly used in official settings in the future. However, non-native speakers like myself cannot possibly understand all metaphors and

colloquialisms used in texts written by native speakers. Chinese internet-slang can also change with rapidity due to the swift censorship operated by the Chinese Communist Party, which can create difficulties for translating. These limitations to my analysis and methodology are thus laid out upfront.

Since discourse analysis is a popular method among linguists, concerns might arise with regards to using AI based translations for analysis. However, here it is important to keep in mind the difference between discourse and language. For such a crucial definition I quote rather lengthily from Barbara Johnstone's 2018 book *Discourse Analysis*:

Calling what we do "*discourse analysis*" rather than "*language analysis*" underscores the fact that we are not centrally focused on language as an abstract system. We tend, instead, to be interested in what happens when people draw on the knowledge they have about language, knowledge based on their memories of things they have said, heard, seen, or written before, to do things in the world: exchange information, express feelings, make things happen, create beauty, entertain themselves and others, and so on. This knowledge – a set of generalizations, which can sometimes be stated as rules, about what words generally mean, about what goes where in a sentence, and so on – is what is often referred to as "*language*," when language is thought of as an abstract system of rules or structural relationships. Discourse is both the source of this knowledge (people's generalizations about language are made on the basis of the discourse they participate in) and the result of it (people apply what they already know in creating and interpreting new discourse). (Johnstone, 2018, p. xvii).

Instead of focusing on language as "an abstract system of rules or structural relationships" as defined by Johnstone, because it seeks to trace the politics of linguistic statements and expression, this thesis focuses on discourse, which Johnstone defines as "people's generalizations about language [...] and the result of it [when] people apply what they already know in creating and interpreting new discourse" (ibid., p. xvii). Due to this focus, I have chosen to analyze the Chinese comments without a working knowledge of Chinese. This is because the key information is the message of the comments, and Chinese syntax and other linguistic forms are secondary. What matters is finding out what the commentators' mean, rather than how they express it. With all this said, however, I fully encourage any

scholar of China studies (including myself) to learn the Chinese language in order to deepen their knowledge on this fascinating area of study.

3.1 Poststructuralist discourse analysis

In her book *Security as Practice* (2006), Hansen demonstrates how within the poststructuralist discourse analysis, discourses arise in foreign policy debates. As these policies are articulated, meanings are connected to contexts, people and occurrences discussed. This process of establishing meanings shapes the identities which are given to both the Other, and to the Self (Hansen, 2006, p. 5). It is important to note that within the poststructuralist view, language is considered to be “relationally structured and ontologically productive”. Together with the discursive epistemology utilized in poststructuralist discourse analysis, this produces a view within which identity is seen as relationally constructed. (ibid., p. 15) The poststructuralist view on identity formation therefore differs from the rationalist or constructivist view in that discourse is viewed as the means through which identity and policy (which are inseparable) are conveyed. Thus, according to Hansen, the poststructuralists see no causal effect between identity and foreign policy, which is the core view of the rationalists and constructivists (ibid., p. 24).

Hansen describes the process of identifying basic discourses. They “construct different Others with different degrees of radical difference; articulate radically diverging forms of spatial, temporal and ethical identity; and construct competing links between identity and policy” (Hansen, 2006, p. 46). It is beneficial to identify only two or three basic discourses within a given debate. As a starting point for identifying a basic discourse, Hansen urges the analyst to familiarize themselves with the larger discourse by reading a large variety of texts, preferably from different media and genres. Secondly, the basic discourse should be a key representation of identity within the chosen discourse. As examples for this Hansen lists “geographical identities, historical analogies, striking metaphors, or political concepts”, but admits that a wide variety exists as language develops. Next, the

analyst ought to look into the conceptual histories of the chosen representations. This helps to understand how the representation under scrutiny came to exist, but also how competing representations have faded from the discourse. (ibid., p. 47)

In poststructuralist discourse analysis, identities are created through processes of linking and differentiation. These processes often take place simultaneously through the “discursive juxtaposition” of appreciated and devalued signs. The result is the aforementioned relational identity of the Self that positions itself against, and differentiates itself from, its Others. However, due to the unstable nature of language, the identities themselves hold the possibility of destabilization. The ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ esteem of a given sign is therefore not inherent or permanent. (Hansen, 2006, p. 17-18) Hansen also makes the point that the differences between the Self and Other are not always radical, but that the identities can be laid out on a spectrum (ibid., p. 34).

For Hansen, the most relevant manifestation of security discourse takes place at the level of national or state security. In this context, she identifies the dichotomy between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of the state. She also shows how, by linking and differentiation, states may attach positive signs such as “progress, order, democracy, identity, ethics, and universal rights” to the state itself. Meanwhile, the outside can be described as “anarchy, power, repetition”. Thus, the two sides, national and international, support the dominant notions of the Self and its opposite, Other. (Hansen, 2006, p. 30)

Naturally in the case of China, democracy is not an attribute attached to the state itself. Instead, the discourse may focus on the downsides of democracy on the ‘outside’, for example bureaucracy, ineffectiveness, and inner disagreements within its apparatus. Still, the linking and differentiation between the inside and the outside of the state does take place, only the signs that are considered desirable and unwanted may differ from the discourse which is produced in a Western state. Hansen points out that as a result of this dichotomy, the security discourse takes

shape. Within the discourse, the nation as a Self is constructed, and it needs to be protected from the threatening Other. In fact, the process of security discourse formation is essential for the state because it helps shape the state's own identity. Thus, security becomes vital for the state, as it only knows what it is and is not through the comparison with the Other. (Hansen, 2006, p. 30)

According to Hansen, the methodological starting point for discourse analysis is searching the chosen text for signs which articulate a "clear construction of the Other [...] or of the Self". These can be simple nouns, adjectives or a combination of both. During this process the analyst must also look at the connection that these signs have to the larger discourse. Hansen gives an example of analyzing the term 'savage', the use of which can differ between source materials. At the same time, different sources can have it in common that they regard the 'savage' as synonymous with otherness: it is a negative construction that allows the Self to identify as civilized, human and progressive. (Hansen, 2006, p. 37-39)

Next, there are three aspects to how discourse analysis is manifested as an "explicit articulation of identity in a web of signs" (Hansen, 2006, p. 39). Firstly, even though the Self is usually constructed in comparison to the Other, there may be instances when such juxtaposition is not made explicitly. In such cases, Self is constituted by qualities that are the opposite to what is attributed to the Other. Secondly, Hansen identifies the phenomenon of "shorthand" the signs which are attached to different discourses. This means that as certain discourses become more popular overall, some of the identifying words can begin to cover a larger meaning. This can only happen after certain signs have been attached to a certain identity for long enough. For example, most people know what the term 'American Dream' consists of without having to elaborate on the meaning. Thirdly, Hansen brings up the phenomenon of discursive disappearance, which can happen if identities cease to be relevant in the discourse. (Hansen, 2006, p. 39-40) The last point is specifically important for researchers focused on a certain discourse for a longer period of time. As the material for analysis in this thesis is a sample taken from a limited temporal

moment, discursive disappearance cannot be identified and analyzed. Attention can of course be given to *how* the discourse at hand has changed from the past, but that would require a deep knowledge of the past discourses from the analyst.

Finally, regarding the methodological understanding of discourse analysis, Hansen points out the importance of identifying spatial, temporal and ethical constructions of identity. These aspects manifest themselves within national security discourse. As the state of the Self is differentiated from the outside world, the state is seen as a location for progress, unlike the outside world. Additionally, the state is viewed as a place in which responsibility can be divided amongst the people and the state, whereas in the outside world there is no such responsibility. Naturally, the specific words 'spatial', 'temporal' or 'ethical' might not be used in the discourse which is being analyzed, and it is up to the analyst to identify these connections. Hansen calls the three aspects "analytical lenses that bring out the important political substance of identity construction". Within different texts and circumstances, certain aspects may be more prominent than others. However, within foreign policy discourse usually all three aspects are articulated. (Hansen, 2006, p. 41-42)

Due to the importance and ubiquity of spatial, temporal and ethical aspects of identity articulation listed by Hansen, they ought to be scrutinized in more detail and in relation to the topic of this thesis. Firstly, the spatiality of identity is concerned with borders, and with differentiating one state from another. It is the core of 'us and them', or Self and Other, distinction. Although some spatial identities relevant to the context of this thesis can be easily detected (e.g. Japan or orient), others can be more ambiguous, such as 'women' or 'humanity'. Secondly, temporal identity can be expressed for example through development or change. According to Hansen, the manifestation of temporal identities within foreign policy discourse can be divided into discourses of progress and intransigence. In a discourse of progress, possibilities of political, financial and cultural development are located within the state, whereas the outside can be constructed as a place that lacks these possibilities, and potentially is identified solely with possibilities for conflict and war. With regard to temporality,

it is important to pay attention to how the Other is described in relation to the Self: is there a similarity, or is the Other “stuck” and underdeveloped? Lastly, ethical identity is manifested in the responsibility that is articulated through foreign policy discourse. For example, decisions made with the ‘national interest’ in mind could include ethical identities designated for both the Self and the Other. As with other examples, Hansen suggests that labelling a conflict as ‘genocide’, or an intervention as ‘humanitarian’ is crucial for establishing “the Self’s articulation of (non)responsibility towards the Other”. (Hansen, 2006, p. 42-44) Within the data I analyze in this thesis, all three aspects of identity articulation can be detected. Some commentators are particularly focused on the integrity of China as a state that should not manifest any signs related to Japan. Temporal identities, on the other hand, are expressed especially with the derogatory naming that the online commentators use for the Japanese. Finally, ethical identities are particularly expressed in relation to the Nanjing massacre.

3.2 Securitization

Securitization is a large concept which has generated a vast amount of theoretical literature (see for example Balzacq, 2011, or Peoples, C. & Vaughan-Williams, N, 2015). In this thesis the focus is on the politicization of the Self and Other binaries, which arise within security discourse. Therefore, this thesis does not delve deep into how the concept of securitization functions and is understood beyond the problem of political identity. However, a short overview on the concept is provided below.

One of the key contributors to the conceptualization of securitization, Ole Wæver, notes that for a long time, traditional military threats have been the main threat to state security. However, as state interests have widened and become more varied in the post-war era, and especially since 1989, and as the purpose of a state has no longer been to secure the life of its citizens but also their quality of life, the scope of potential security threats has also become more expansive and varied. Thus, security threats can be economic or political, as well as military and existential. This can be

seen in the reframing of the concept of 'war' as 'defense', and finally as 'security'. All threats to security, coming from different domains of life, share the potential of overturning the political order, and are as such given the same urgency as military threats in modern states. Thus Wæver defines a security threat as "something that can undercut the political order within a state and thereby alter the premises for all other questions". (Wæver, 1995, p. 4-5)

According to Wæver, it is the elites (political leaders, decision-makers) who have the power to declare something as a security threat. With such a declaration, the elites have the capability to gain control at the level of discourse over a given issue. This is the process of securitization. Additionally, abusing the power of securitization for selfish gains cannot be avoided. (Wæver, 1995, p. 6) Based on this, Wæver argues that the main focus of security studies should be precisely the process of securitization (and de-securitization). Questions to consider include for example:

"When, why and how elites label issues and developments as 'security' problems; when, why and how they succeed and fail in such endeavors; what attempts are made by other groups to put securitization on the agenda; and whether we can point to efforts to keep issues *off* the security agenda, or even to de-securitize issues that have become securitized?" (ibid., p. 8).

Wæver also presents the concept of societal security, which is related to how individuals "identify themselves as members of a particular community". Wæver separates societal security, with identity as its main focus, from political security, which centers on sovereignty. The loss of either sovereignty or identity would be devastating for the state. Issues that feature as potential threats for societal security (according to selected discursive positions) are: immigration, integration, and cultural imperialism, as these have potential to alter identity. To protect themselves from these 'threats', states resort to strengthening the existing identities. This results in culture that resembles security policy. (Wæver, 1995, p. 15)

Lastly, there remains the question of who has the authority to address threats to societal security. Wæver's answer is that basically anyone can speak on behalf of the

society, and voice what they feel like are threats to the society as a whole. Unlike with political security, there are no elites who constitute the 'correct' authority to speak on issues of societal security. However, when actors and institutions do choose to speak on societal security, a hierarchy will always exist, and thus some issues are better heard by the rest of society than others. Oftentimes issues become more widely discussed when they receive societal backing by others. (Wæver, 1995, p. 17)

The Suzhou kimono incident follows such a model of a threat to societal security receiving more societal backing. After the police officer detained the woman wearing a kimono, his colleagues at the police station decided to search the woman's phone and confiscate the kimono. Thus, the colleagues of the officer agreed with him that the woman was detained rightfully. In other words, the officers provided societal backing for what the first officer had deemed as a threat to societal security. Later, the incident became viral as stories and video clips of it spread on the Internet. The incident even generated a law proposal for banning the wearing of clothing hurtful to the national spirit. Thus, the kimono incident received massive societal backing, and the act of wearing a kimono (by Chinese women) has truly been treated like a threat to the societal security of China.

3.3 "Othering" in Sino-Japanese relations

In order to get a better idea of how identity creation and Othering is done on a practical level, the last part of this chapter will discuss Othering in Sino-Japanese relations. In his article, Shogo Suzuki delves into how the Japanese are being 'othered' within the Chinese public discourse. According to him, states and people are "moral agents", whose "behavior is strongly affected by historical memories". He particularly sees Japan's imperialist history as an influential factor in China's historical memories. Suzuki also argues that by utilizing Japan as its Other, China gains legitimacy for its "victimized" national identity. (Suzuki, 2007, p. 24-25)

However, Suzuki revokes the popular belief that the Chinese elites can tap into the historical memories of the people as they please in order to weaponize them. Instead, he sees historical memories as more deeply embedded within Chinese society. Japan's role as China's Other can be traced as far back as late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when China was in the process of identifying itself as a sovereign state. As China was the target of Western imperialism, it came to think of itself as a 'civilizational entity', mirroring in many aspects the West. This was then challenged by Japan's imperialism, as "Japan shared a similar culture with China, and therefore could not be opposed on cultural terms like the Western powers". The difference was that Japan threatened "the very existence" of China, instead of its culture. Thus, Japan became China's "statist Other", and China sees itself as an "un-Japanese state". (Suzuki, 2007, p. 28)

Suzuki argues that Japan, along with the former Soviet Union and United States, has been China's 'victimizing other', and has therefore impacted the formation of China's national identity. According to Suzuki, the effect of the patriotic education campaigns and other "elite-level activities aimed at bolstering Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy" should not be ignored when it comes to the wide societal acceptance of the victimhood in China. (Suzuki, 2007, p. 38) Suzuki identifies three main reasons for why such a shared view on Japan as the victimizing Other exists. Firstly, the military conflicts between China and Japan during WW2 are the 'freshest' in the minds of the Chinese people. As noted by Suzuki, since 1949, China has had armed conflicts with multiple other states, but they have not been as harmful to the Chinese people as the war with Japan. In addition, Japan's historical belittling of China and its continuous refusal to offer apologies for crimes of aggression and war crimes, has increased the victimizing Other identity. (ibid., p. 38-39) Secondly, actions and stories related to "historical revisionism" regarding the war gain wide public and media attention in Japan. Naturally this looks disappointing and suspicious in the eyes of the Chinese. Thirdly, in relation to the previous point, the Chinese are highly sensitive to "any form of debate or action that may deny its 'victim' identity". (ibid., p. 39)

In this chapter, I have presented the theory and method which are used in my thesis. The broader method is discourse analysis, and following Lene Hansen's book *Security as Practice*, I have narrowed the method to consist of poststructuralist discourse analysis. Within poststructuralist discourse analysis, policy and identity are conveyed through discourse, and this is the assumption I hold when analyzing my chosen material. I have also included Ole Wæver's view on securitization in this part of the thesis. This is because the process of securitization can be detected in my analysis, as the online commentators build an image of a kimono as a potential security threat. Through the process of securitization, objects, events and people can be made into security concerns, or if they were concerned as such in the past, they can be "neutralized". Lastly, to tie the theoretical lens even closer to Sino-Japanese relations, I briefly describe Shogo Suzuki's theorization of how, due to tumultuous history between the two countries, China sees Japan as its 'victimizing other', and has greatly affected the formation of China's national identity.

4 ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I analyze comments from a Chinese website belonging to NetEase. It is a company that provides Internet and video game services, such as online communities and content, e-mail services, and games for both PC and mobile devices (Forbes, n.d.). The website used for this thesis resembles a blog platform. There, registered users can write their own opinion pieces, which other people can comment on, either anonymously or with a username.

One of the articles that appeared on the blog platform was composed by a username New Ball Society (新球社) and titled “In the aftermath of the Suzhou kimono incident, the girl was suspected of being treated unfairly at the police station”. The article discusses how a Chinese woman was allegedly treated by Suzhou police after she was detained and taken to custody on August 10th, 2022. The reason for detaining the woman was that she wore a kimono when out and about in an architecturally Japanese style neighborhood, posing for pictures. In Chinese law there is an offense called “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”, which assumedly has been loosely formatted to be applicable to different forms of (what is deemed as) dissent behavior (Rui, 25.8.2021). This was also the offense used against the woman in the kimono. The event was covered in Western media outlets too, for example in the Guardian (see Davidson, 16.8.2022), and the China Project (see Luo, 16.8.2022), a New York based news platform focused on China.

The article written by New Ball Society was published on NetEase on August 18th, 2022. Since then, it has provoked a reaction from the Chinese readers, as on March 25th, 2024, it has received 1,117 comments, and 41,351 likes and dislikes. Most of the interactions with the article have taken place around the time of its publication in August 2022. On the NetEase discussion forum, the data attached to each comment includes a commentID, a nine-digit number series. In addition, the commentator’s nickname and location are shown. The location and nickname can be entered by the

commentator themselves. Some choose not to display neither a nickname nor a location, and are thus called “Unknown user”. The analysis is split into two subchapters, the first of which contains comments that see kimono as a politicized object which contains signs of imperialism and domination, while the second includes comments that depict how contemporary Chinese national identity is constructed within the anti-Japanism discourse. With the analysis, I will show that selected public responses politicize clothing in ways that are both nationalist, anti-Japanist and gendered, and how anti-Japanism is intertwined within the contemporary Chinese national identity.

4.1 Kimono as a sign of imperialism and domination

The first comment analyzed here focuses on the location of Suzhou as a historical site:

A few decades ago, a massacre also occurred in Suzhou. Thousands of Chinese people died in a few days. A few decades ago, Japanese soldiers took bayonets and forced Chinese women to wear kimonos as comfort women. A few decades later, Today, on the bones of countless dead Chinese people, a girl put on a kimono and stepped on the bones of Suzhou people, taking photos and checking in. The technological products, cars, machines, etc. imported from Japan are indeed useful, and some are really cost-effective. I can't understand the clothes worn by a comfort woman. Of course, you are free to wear clothes, but I can't sympathize with a Chinese girl who takes the initiative to wear comfort women and tramples on the bones of her ancestors. (有态度网友0sskQA)
(NetizenWithAttitude0sskQA)

In the comment above, the commentator claims that a massacre has occurred in Suzhou. However, after thorough research, I could not find any information about a massacre committed by the Japanese in Suzhou. It could be that the commentator is in fact referring to the Nanjing massacre. Suzhou is located on the East side of China, between the coastal city of Shanghai and the ancient capital of Nanjing. Nanjing and Suzhou belong to the same province of Jiangsu, and the distance between the two cities is only around 200 kilometers. Despite the woman in the kimono being in another city from where the WW2 massacre happened, the commentator repeatedly

calls the woman's actions as "stepping on the bones of Suzhou people" and "trampling on the bones of her ancestors". The confusion of the two places shows that while the comment is factually inaccurate, the commentator interprets the clothing in relation to historical memory of Japanese occupation, and specifically the Chinese national memory of Japanese war crimes against the local populations.

Next, the commentator reminds the readers that Japanese soldiers forced some Chinese women to wear a kimono and act as 'comfort women' during WW2. The term 'comfort women' refers to the system of sexual slavery instituted by the Japanese state during the war. This also included Chinese women. Again, the commentator brings up collective memory of what was forcefully done to the Chinese (in this case, only women) by the troops of imperialist Japan. In their text, the commentator constructs, compares and contrasts two figures. On the one hand, there is the historical figure of a Chinese 'comfort woman', enslaved by the Japanese army, and forced to wear a kimono to appear pleasing to the Japanese soldiers. Here, the kimono also functioned as a sign of China's submission to Japanese domination. On the other hand, the commentator brings up the contemporary Chinese woman wearing a kimono willingly, while showing 'ignorance' about the historical meaning of the clothing. According to the commentator, the meaning of the kimono is determined by history, and cannot be altered in the present: it is that of Japanese violence and domination over China.

Furthermore, the highly emotional tone of the comment conveys how painful the memory of 'comfort women' is to some groups of the Chinese nation. One of the emotions brought forth in relation to that memory is shame. When the commentator brings up an event which is associated with shame in the national memory, into their discussion of a female clothing choice, they strive to implicate the woman in Suzhou into that collective shame. While she wore the kimono voluntarily, the woman in Suzhou is branded by the commentator as someone who brings shame upon the Chinese nation. The collective shame is manifested in the woman's appearance, since

she is seen as the embodiment of China's domination and inferiority in relation to Japan.

In the end, the commentator does admit that clothing is a decision made by the wearer, and for now can be done without adhering to specific rules. Still, they find it offensive that specifically a Chinese girl would choose to wear a piece of clothing which (in the commentator's opinion) is so strongly linked to the painful period of China's history. However, the commentator brings up Japanese technological products, cars and machines, and exempts them from the logic they applied to the wearing of kimonos, stating that such products are "useful, and some are really cost-effective". There seems to be no nationalist judgment of these products or those who use them. This is quite a telling contradiction, in my view. Economically speaking, buying Japanese products can be more detrimental to China than women wearing traditional Japanese clothes, as purchasing them benefits Japan's market, while taking money out of the Chinese economy. This can be damaging to the economy of China. Wearing a kimono, however, does not take away from China in a financial sense, as the issue of kimono is purely sentimental and history-based (as it is not even clear whether in this case the kimono was produced in Japan). It is interesting that the commentator decides to focus on the kimono instead of the economic aspect of buying Japanese products. Ultimately only a woman can wear a kimono, and the technological products mentioned by the commentator are perhaps more 'masculine' in their public perception (which is not to say that women do not use them). In this way, the commentator is also making the kimono a gendered issue, in which it is the Chinese women who are 'wrongdoers' and potential traitors of the nation. Meanwhile, men (often the targeted audience and main consumers of technological products) are allowed to use Japanese products without being seen as national traitors or renegades.

Next, there are three shorter comments, which all focus on the alleged date when the woman wore the kimono in Suzhou, August 15th. The comments here form part of the larger discourse to which the first comment also belongs:

"It doesn't matter what you wear on a normal day, but if you wear a kimono during a sensitive period (the 77th anniversary of the Anti-Japanese War), you are looking for trouble for yourself!" (Unknown User #1)

"The key depends on the time. If you go to the bustling avenues of Japan and wear Hanfu at this time, it will have a different flavor." (Unknown User #2)

"Everyone knows what a kimono represents. Wear it on August 15th to show off. If you get knocked down and can't take care of yourself, you'll be considered lucky." (一桌麻将)
(Mahjong Table)

The idea conveyed in these comments is that by wearing a kimono, the woman in Suzhou seems to have aligned herself with the Japanese nation, instead of her own people, the Chinese. In addition to politicization of the place where the incident occurred (as in the comment first analyzed), here we find language that politicizes its timing. In other words, to wear a kimono around August 15th, which is celebrated as the date of the Victory over Japan Day ('V-J Day'), is signified as national treason. Although some of the commentators agree that the kimono could be worn without objection during a 'regular' day, here it is the timing that made the wearing of the kimono by the woman in Suzhou so problematic. August 15th is celebrated as the anniversary of Japan's surrender in WW2, as on that day in 1945 Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's surrender via a radio broadcast (Britannica, 2024). By connecting the anniversary of Japan's surrender in the war with the kimono, the commentators interpret clothing as a sign of Japanese pride, and hence as Japan's defiance in the face of the defeat in spite of the official surrender.

In the last comment, the commentator MahjongTable goes as far as to suggest that it would not be completely wrong for bystanders to attack a person wearing a kimono around the date of August 15th. By suggesting this, the commentator justifies the use of physical violence, which has the symbolic meaning of erasing the Suzhou woman's nationality, and even humanity. In other words, the commentator insinuates that by choosing to wear a kimono, the Suzhou woman has chosen to side with Japan, and has thus become stripped of basic human right to physical autonomy. Attacking her would not be an act of aggression but, symbolically, an act of defending the nation, its integrity and its pride.

The following commentator equates wearing a kimono in China to wearing a Nazi German military uniform in Israel:

"Then do you dare to wear a World War II German military uniform and travel to Israel?" (色温6500) (Color Temperature 6500k)

This is a significant and politically charged comparison. A kimono has been a part of the Japanese clothing tradition for centuries. Historically, it has not had associations with military clothing. Modern military uniforms, however, are a matter of more recent identification of clothing with war and combat. Wearing a uniform designates the person as a combatant, and changes their status in international law. The comment suggests that wearing a kimono in China is a kind of provocation and an outrage because a kimono is interpreted as a symbol of the Japanese army.

In addition, the commentator Color Temperature 6500k contrasts wearing a kimono in China with wearing a German WW2 uniform in Israel. Here the commentator brings forth Japan as China's victimizing other. During WW2, the Jewish community in Germany and in the countries it occupied were the target of a genocide launched by Adolf Hitler. Around six million Jewish people were killed, and only one third of the Jewish population in Europe survived (Holocaust Encyclopedia, 2023). Wearing a German military uniform to Israel would thus be very inconsiderate, and would signify blatant disrespect to the victims of the genocide. Doing this would also signal that the act has been very carefully planned, as German WW2 uniforms must be difficult to come by. To say that a Chinese woman in a kimono is in any way similar to such an act, means that the commentator sees China as an equal victim with European Jews.

The following three commentators all make a point that wearing a kimono can lead to worse, equally treasonous things:

"How can national sentiments be blasphemed? How can millions of wronged souls be forgiven? The hatred for the Japanese devils is irreconcilable. There is no room for negotiation! The descendants of China can no longer give in, they will push further. Wearing

kimonos today, they will enshrine war criminals tomorrow! These bastards should be locked up and reflect!" (三无居士讲数学) ("Layman Talking About Mathematics")

"Now you can wear a kimono, tomorrow you can wear a military uniform, and the day after tomorrow they all wave the sun flag. In the end, the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum does not exist and has become an illegal construction. This is their purpose." (有态度网友0sgeoZ) ("NetizenWithAttitude0sgeoZ")

"Kimono cannot be allowed to be spread over the land of China, and Japanese ideology cannot be allowed to survive on the land of the motherland." (有态度网友0sIFIG) ("NetizenWithAttitude0sIFIG")

The first commentator makes a claim that there is a collective Chinese hatred towards the Japanese. They rally up the collective spirit of no longer "giving in", which means that allowing women to wear a kimono in China is constructed as a form of surrender. In fact, they declare that anyone wearing one should be "locked up and made to reflect," which suggests that the wearer's choices are wrong, criminal, and an expression of ignorance about history. Thus the commentator seems to have no objection to the woman in Suzhou being detained, and her phone searched. The second commentator creates a chain of consequences and escalating events, in which wearing a kimono in China is seen as leading to wearing a Japanese military uniform, and eventually to waving the Japanese flag on Chinese soil. Here the kimono becomes a sign of the beginning of another Japanese invasion. The commentator fears that allowing small indicators of Japanese culture on Chinese soil will almost surreptitiously lead to the dissipation of the Chinese state. Equally, they predict that in consequence the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum might be demolished, which means that an act of wearing a kimono today means being complicit in the erasure of the history of the Nanjing massacre. Lastly, the third commentator equates the wearing of kimono in China to spreading "Japanese ideology", and they wish to prevent this. The commentator politicizes the traditional Japanese clothing as a sign of an attempt at Japanese domination over China.

These three commentators see wearing the kimono by Chinese women as the first step towards allowing Japan to spread its influence into China. What may seem as an innocent act of wearing a piece of Japanese clothing becomes an opening and a trigger for far more severe unpatriotic acts. To wear a kimono means to welcome

other acts of treason. This connection is evident in all three comments above. The first commentator states that the wearing of a kimono can lead to war criminals being enshrined. As mentioned earlier, the second commentator states that wearing a kimono can result in abandoning the Chinese flag and replacing it with the Japanese one. The last commentator equates the kimono with Japanese ideology, which could mean a different political system from the one-party communist state system, which is currently in place in China. The clothing is securitized as a potential threat to national communism.

What the commentators seem to completely bypass here is the fact that Japan has a strong cultural influence globally, which is what has likely influenced the clothing choice of the woman in Suzhou. There are art forms and aesthetics unique to Japan, such as manga, the Japanese style of comic books, and anime, the Japanese animation films. These are widely consumed by non-Japanese individuals, and specific mangas and animes can have vast fanbases. By wearing a kimono individuals can express their identities and personal interests, as the woman in Suzhou did by dressing up as a character from a Japanese anime. These anti-Japan responses available on the NetEase forum, however, only see the act of wearing a kimono through a lens of political security. By doing so, the act becomes blasphemous and a gateway to committing treasonous acts against the nation.

Another commentator does raise the theme of the impact which Japanese culture has on China and Taiwan:

It's time for those who identify with kimono women to reflect (excluding those who deliberately whitewash them). What you don't know is that many children who have watched Japanese anime since childhood have taught themselves Japanese language, accepted Japanese music and culture, and identified with it...Now that Taiwanese identify with Japan, it is actually the result of colonial culture, don't think of the issue of women wearing kimono as a simple issue of clothing culture. (有态度网友0ikRrw) ("NetizenWithAttitude0ikRrw")

The commentator is aware of how much Japanese culture can serve as an identifying point for young people, and that it might even encourage them to learn Japanese.

Because of Japan's colonial history, however, such cultural influence is also political, they argue, because it can be a form of expansionism, or even imperialism. The commentator links the cultural impact to colonial history, taking Taiwan, which was previously colonized by Japan, as an example. The comment states that women wearing kimonos is not a simple issue of clothing culture. In this way, the commentator equates Taiwan's colonial history, and the Taiwanese alleged yearning for Japanese culture and language today (i.e. a desire 'to be Japanese' rather than Chinese), with women wearing a kimono. In a way, the starting point for the development of Japan's cultural dominance, similarly to Taiwan, is argued to be allowing women to wear a kimono in public. Mentioning Taiwan in the discussion of the kimono further politicizes clothing as a security issue because of China's claims, both within China and globally, of Taiwan being a part of China. Here the popularity of Japanese culture becomes a threat to the identity ties between Taiwan and China. Consuming Japanese culture is blamed for (what China views as) Taiwan's 'separatist ideas'.

Some commentators placed the kimono incident in a larger context of having a Japanese-style street in Suzhou:

"That street is full of Japanese culture, who do you respect?" (香精加水) ("Essence and Water")

"Let's tear down Japan Street first, and then we'll talk about this!" (慈溪当地较为英俊的人) ("The more handsome people of Cixi")

"If you dare, close the whole street." (精加水) ("Fine water")

"Isn't it even more unpatriotic to establish that Japanese-style street in Suzhou?" ("Unknown User #3#")

Indeed, if a woman wearing a kimono is deemed problematic, similarly an entire street with Japanese architecture should be considered so. As some commentators said, having such a street is even more 'unpatriotic' compared to one person wearing a kimono. When a kimono has become such a highly politicized item, it is surprising that the street itself has not received more criticism from the commentators. The street and its surrounding buildings in Suzhou are immobile, and more difficult to

remove, compared to the clothed body of one individual. Also, the street may have remained undemolished for this long as it is a 'non-personified object'. This means that it is difficult for the street to have a human representative or a voice, whereas a kimono has the body and voice of the individual who is wearing it. The closest to having these human features that the Japanese street can come to are perhaps the vendors who own businesses on the street. Additionally, the kimono is also a gendered object, as mentioned before, whereas architecture and small businesses are not so obviously female-labeled.

Lastly, one commentator makes a simple statement about why wearing a kimono in China should be banned, while wearing a Hanfu in Japan should be allowed:

"The Chinese have never harmed the Japanese, so they don't care if you wear Hanfu in Japan, but the Japanese have invaded all Chinese people, causing great harm to the nation. Do you understand?" (有态度网友0gqzor) ("NetizenWithAttitude0gqzor")

This statement equates the right to wear a certain piece of clothing, and the history of the country in question. Since China has not tried to conquer Japan, the commentator claims the Chinese are allowed to wear a Hanfu in Japan. This is because Hanfu does not come with similar imperialist associations, and has not been politicized in the same way as the kimono. However, since Japan was an invader and aggressor, the kimono should not be worn in China. This is because a kimono is not a neutral cultural item, but a product loaded with meaning, and capable of inciting emotions. Again, the kimono is presented as a symbol of the wrongdoing and consequent trauma that resulted from the imperialist Japanese troops' invasion of China. In this way, the commentator's interpretation overrides any other possible meanings, such as clothing as a means of expressing one's individual identity and cultural appreciation.

4.2 The self-other binary and anti-Japanism

Some commentators were concerned about the general attitude towards Japanese things in China:

"Why is the mentality of a victorious country inferior to that of a defeated country?" (程序正义好) ("Procedural justice is good")

"A victorious country is inferior to a defeated country in terms of cultural confidence!" ("Unknown User #4")

"We are a victorious country, not a defeated country. We can wear whatever we want. Shouldn't it be Japan who should feel inferior?" (半日闲5) ("Half a day of leisure 5")

"China is obviously a victorious country, but psychologically it is as fragile as a defeated country." (primewj)

These commentators emphasize the fact that in the history of the second Sino-Japanese War it was China who won, not Japan. Even though Japan's defeat in the war was most likely largely due to the effects of the atomic bombing of Japanese cities by the US, China did make a military and symbolic contribution to the Allied nations' defeat of Japan. By surrendering to the Allied armies, Japan was forced to withdraw from China, granting China victory.

The people who wrote these particular comments are not partaking in the politicization of kimono in a similar manner to those analyzed in section 4.1. These commentators take the political meaning of kimono as something that has already been established prior to the online debate through the state response to it. The first actor to partake in the politicization of kimono was the police who reacted to the woman in Suzhou, arresting her. What the commentators hope to change here are the wider societal attitudes towards Japan and Japanese items. The problem, from their perspective, is that even though China has won the war against Japan, Chinese people continue to act as if they were inferior to and shamed by the Japanese. If the Chinese people could overcome this attitude, China and the Chinese could act in a way which is 'appropriate' for the winning party; without being affected by the sight

of Japanese items. At the core of these comments is concern for the fact that such an insignificant object as a kimono can cause so much commotion and hurt feelings among the Chinese. Ultimately, as suggested by one commentator, Japan should be the party who feels inferior to China, not the other way around. These commentators believe that by granting a woman wearing a kimono all this attention, the Chinese are revealing their low self-esteem when it comes to matters related to Japan. As mentioned in section 2.1, anti-Japanism is often more telling of the country of origin than about Japan itself. This was evident in the comments above.

The following person discusses the kimono incident by approaching the kimono as a potentially ironic object:

Our ancestors defeated the Japanese devils. Therefore, wearing a kimono is also a matter of confidence. It is like dancing on the enemy's grave. If you were defeated, wearing a kimono would make you a traitor and forget your ancestors. However, in that case, it is not a matter of wearing it if you don't want to, or wearing it if you want. Just like when the three eastern provinces fell, you didn't even have a choice whether to learn Japanese or not. The ancestors fought bloody battles so that their descendants could confidently wear whose national costumes they wanted to wear, instead of looking like weak and pitiful people with low self-esteem. (馄饨还是滚刀面) ("Wonton or rolling noodle")

Unlike some of the previous commentators, this person sees the act of wearing a kimono as an expression of Chinese people defying Japan, and reminding them of their loss in the war. They deem wearing a kimono equivalent to "dancing on the enemy's grave", and a matter of national confidence. They encourage the Chinese as the winning side to embrace the kimono as a way to further humiliate the Japanese. In a way, I think that they are correct in saying that the attitude should be different had China lost the war. In that case, there might not be an option to not wear the kimono: parts of China could have been lost to Japan forever, and Japanese laws and customs would rule there. The commentator also uses the derogatory name "Japanese devils" (which I outlined earlier) to describe the Japanese. Here the commentator refers to the imperialist Japanese troops, which was the original reference point for 'Japanese devils', as mentioned in section 2.2, instead of using the term to refer to the Japanese people at large.

Finally, I want to draw attention to language that establishes a self-other relation between China and Japan by explicitly expressing anti-Japanism in the form of derogatory naming:

“–For such **Japanese dogs**, they can only be treated as animals.–” (Emphasis mine) (有态度网友0gg8ug) (“NetizenWithAttitude0gg8ug”)

“–Our ancestors defeated the **Japanese devils**. Therefore, wearing a kimono is also a matter of confidence. It is like dancing on the enemy's grave. –” (Emphasis mine) (馄饨还是滚刀面) (“Wonton or rolling noodle”)

“–Multiple polls show that more than 90% of Japanese people hate China. Moreover, **the devils** have been making small moves: whenever China is hit by a disaster and the Chinese people from all directions come together to support them, strange news will always be sent from Japan ‘in a timely manner’ –” (Emphasis mine) (f8位置错了呢) (“F8 is located wrong”)

“–Be wary of **the devils**, we cannot abuse kindness. We must pay attention to the insidiousness, cunning, despicableness and wolfish ambitions of the **Japanese devils!**–” (Emphasis mine) (f8位置错了呢) (“F8 is located wrong”)

“–How can national sentiments be blasphemed? How can millions of wronged souls be forgiven? The hatred with the **Japanese devils** is irreconcilable.–” (Emphasis mine) (三无居士讲数学) (“Layman talking about mathematics”)

In the comments above, the derogatory names used for the Japanese are ‘Japanese devils’, and ‘Japanese dogs.’ The history of the name ‘Japanese devils’ has been discussed previously in this thesis in section 2.2, and here it points to labeling the Japanese as a menacing, wrong-doing actor. It must be kept in mind that the term ‘devil’ in Western culture probably brings up different connotations than in China and Japan. There, the word ‘devil’ refers to a mean spirit, whose goal is to persecute others. Hereby ‘devil’ refers to a party who acts in an immoral way.

The other derogatory term used in these comments is the phrase ‘Japanese dogs’. There was no mention of this name in the literature on anti-Japanism in English or Finnish that I was able to identify while researching for this thesis. Here, my lack of knowledge of Chinese language sources hinders my ability to further research the use of this term. In the Chinese comments, the character 犬 (quǎn) is used for dog instead of 狗 (gǒu). In Japanese, the character 犬 (inu) is used for dog, and the

NetEase commentators may have chosen to use the same character on purpose. Equating one's Other with an animal comes with many undesirable connotations. Despite its many positive associations, the word 'dog' can often be seen used in a derogatory way. Negative qualities that are associated with a dog are submissiveness, the role of a follower (as in response to a human being its leader), and being the receiver of commands. By calling the Japanese 'dogs', the commentators are opposing it to a Chinese self who is human, and therefore civilized and in control. The Japanese 'dog other' is inhuman, thereby undeserving of humane treatment, and is subject to how the human master treats it.

5 CONCLUSION

The thesis sought to ascertain how the sartorial item of a kimono is politicized, and how contemporary Chinese national identity was constructed within the anti-Japanism discourse regarding the Suzhou kimono incident. I chose to analyze 24 comments or excerpts of comments which were specifically anti-Japanese in nature. My analysis has demonstrated the importance of sartorial politics centered around the item of Japanese kimono in relation to the formation of national identity in China.

In order to understand the context of my analysis better, I presented some key concepts regarding the research topic in chapter 2. These included anti-Japanism, and its history, sartorial politics, and nationalism and national identity. Next, in chapter 3 I described the theory and method of discourse analysis, particularly as approached in Lene Hansen's book *Security as Practice* (2006). According to the poststructuralist discourse method, policy and identity are conveyed through discourse, and this was my approach when performing the analysis. This has also led to a discussion of the theory of securitization as a discursive process of creating security topics out of people, objects and events. This is done by utilizing the self-other binary in national identity formation, more specifically, in the context of Japan as China's victimizing other.

The analysis chapter (chapter 4) was split into two sections. In the first section I analyzed the chosen comments from the viewpoint of the first research question: "What does the Suzhou kimono incident show about 'sartorial politics' in China today?" and "How has kimono been politicized in online debates as an item that has both gendered and national meanings?" Through my analysis of the comments, I have shown that the kimono was indeed a politicized item, and that it was assigned the meanings of Japan's imperialism and domination. This was done by equating the (voluntary act of) wearing of kimono today to the comfort women system established by the Japanese troops during WW2. It was clear in the analyzed

material that the memory of comfort women is entwined with pain and shame in Chinese society. However, my analysis has led me to conclude that equating the figure of a contemporary kimono wearer with a 'comfort woman' from the past is an attempt to extend these collective emotions and memories onto contemporary women. Thus they are made into vehicles of Chinese nationalism today.

My analysis has also shown that in addition to the gendered body, place and temporality are important carriers of meaning in regard to anti-Japanism and Chinese nationalism. I have demonstrated that some commentators crafted the kimono as a politicized object due to the location where the woman wore it, and the time of year when she chose to wear it. The location was the city of Suzhou which is part of the same prefecture as the old capital Nanjing, where the Nanjing massacre took place in 1937. While the cities are some 200 kilometers apart, it was striking that some comments equated or even confused them with each other. The politicization of the date in question was done because the day when the women appeared in the kimono, August 10th, was close to the day when the Japanese emperor announced Japan's surrender in WW2, August 15th. The Japanese style architecture of the street in Suzhou, where the woman had her photograph taken, was also a factor in the politicizing discourse. All these connections made by the commentators between the kimono, the city of Suzhou, the date of August 10th and 15th, and the Japanese architecture exemplify the dynamics of politicization of objects and events. The key signifier in that discourse is Japan as China's 'victimizing other', since the politicization of the kimono in the Suzhou incident pivoted upon collective memory of Japan's wrongdoings during WW2.

Finally, the analysis in this thesis also focused and explained the second research question, of how the self-other binary functions in regard to anti-Japanism and Chinese national identity. Here, the comments expressed worry about China's 'inferior' identity when confronted by signs related to Japan. They highlighted that China was the winner of WW2, or the Sino-Japanese war, and should therefore not be troubled by the sight of a Chinese woman in a kimono. Additionally, the

comments included derogatory naming for the Japanese, by calling them 'Japanese dogs' and 'Japanese devils', which I took to be a crude and distinct expression of anti-Japanism and of the self-other binary. I concluded that by using this derogatory language, the comments also expressed distinctive features of Chinese national identity: regional leadership and being 'more humane'.

All in all, I estimate that my effort to analyze the politicizing discourse of the Suzhou kimono incident has been successful. What at first glance seemed like a peculiar and isolated incident in the news was depicted in the course of my analysis as an event seeping with questions of memory, collective emotions, and history (that stemmed from almost ninety years ago). It has been a prolific example of how a country as powerful as China is still partially bound by detrimental events from its past in regard to its national identity. Finally, my analysis has also suggested that there is a need for further research on the topic, including other representations of the Suzhou incident, its relevance for the proposed Chinese law concerning 'public offense' of wearing or showing troubling 'foreign' symbols, or other events expressive of anti-Japanism in China.

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