### Supplementary Data— Process of the Mixed Method Analysis of Weibo’s Verified Users’ discussions on Sino-Japanese Relations

This study collected and analyzed online posts Sino-Japanese relations between 2011 and 2017 through the keyword mining of the terms ‘Sino-Japanese relations’ (*zhongri guanxi*) and ‘China-Japan’ (*zhongri*), and using a data-scraping tool. Because the large number of posts on Sino-Japanese relations prevented close analysis of each individual post, a stratified sampling strategy was adopted. The author stratified samples according to day; this stratification ensured the appropriate representation for the various groups when the subsamples are based on the size of the groupings in the populations. As the aim of this study is to examine China’s online *influentials’* general, persistent perceptions on the issue—rather than on specific bilateral crisis or event—a stratified sampling based on each day guaranteed that an appropriate numbers of Weibo posts were drawn from homogeneous subsets (each day) of that population. Taking this strategy, a sample of five posts for each day was randomly collected, totaling 12,775 posts on this topic. After excluding invalid content, the sample size for this study was reduced to 10,850.

The research method used to examine Weibo’s verified users’ online practices involved a combination of quantitative analysis, which was used to code Weibo users’ profiles, and a qualitative approach that was adopted to code their posts/viewpoints. There were four stages that made up the mixed content analysis of Weibo’s verified users’ comments on Sino-Japanese relations: (1) confirming questions, variables and measurements; (2) constructing a protocol; (3) data coding; (4) data analysis and reporting.

***Stage 1: Confirming questions and variables***

The key questions of this study are: “Who are online *influentials* in today’s China?”, “what are they saying regarding politically significant issues?”, and “how their discussions are restricted within any boundary?” To answer those questions, the occupation/institution of Weibo’s verified users was selected as a crucial variable. The results of previous research investigations of the composition of Weibo’s verified users by randomly selecting 300 big Vs (Svensson 2014) have provided a guideline and reference for quantitatively testing the users’ profiles. Svensson (2014) has examined the occupations and institutions of big Vs, categorizing them into the following five types: (a) those who worked in the media sector, (b) those who came from institutions of higher education, (c) those who worked in business sector, (d) individuals from government bodies and Party institutions, and (e) others. This variable and the five sub-categories were directly applied in this study.

The viewpoints that Weibo’s verified users employed when discussing Sino-Japanese relations were chosen as an important variable. When coding this variable, it used a qualitative analysis method rather than a quantitative (hypothetico-deductive) approach because the authors aimed to discover emergent patterns that could better capture the specific characteristics and diversification of China’s online *influentials’* attitudes on the issue of Sino-Japanese relations. Qualitative analysis is oriented to concept development and to supplementing or supplanting prior theoretical claims. This approach follows a recursive and reflexive, rather than linear, movement between concept development, sampling, data coding and interpretation (Berg, 1989). During the qualitative analysis process, “categories and variables initially guide the study, but others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study, including an orientation toward constant discovery and constant comparison of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances” (Altheide & Schneider, 2013 p.26). When adopting a qualitative approach, providing good descriptive information is as important as, if not more important than, counting and distributing items and topics into categories.

***Stage 2: Constructing a protocol.***

The two coders of this study (both are native Chinese speakers) first spent a week becoming familiar with the data through reading some randomly chosen posts on this topic. Then the two coders began to construct a protocol and coding schemes. Some basic categories included in the protocol included the date, length, and supplementary data. Then, two important variables were listed: the user’s occupation, which was preset and relatively fixed, and the discourse/narrative on Sino-Japanese relations, which was loosely defined and open to revision. Then, the protocol was tested by collecting data from a small proportion (500 online posts) of the total sample. The coders revised the protocol and selected several additional cases to further refine it. Eventually, the discourse/narrative variable showed to be consisted with two subcategories involving the ‘conflict-focused discourses’ covering controversies and antagonism between China and Japan, and the ‘pragmatism-driven viewpoints’ that called for a more rational thinking and policy toward Japan. The full protocol sheet is shown later.

***Stage 3: Data coding.***

When a protocol was set, coding of the data commenced. Two coders collected the data using preset codes and noting many descriptive examples. During the coding process, the data analysis software MAXQDA was used to facilitate data coding and storage. About halfway through the sample, two coders examined the data to permit emergence, refinement, or collapsing of additional categories. Then the coders made appropriate adjustments to other data and completed the data collection.

***Stage 4: Data analysis and reporting and intercoder-reliability***

After the data collection phase, the present researcher performed the final data analysis. Features, statistics, and over-time trends of variables are analysed and reported. Rigorous training and careful coding protocol development were also conducted to achieve intercoder reliability. In addition, reliability checks were executed twice during the coding process (the first reliability check occurred in the protocol development stage, and the second took place about two-thirds of the way through the sample). Reliability coefficients of Cohen’s *kappa* were applied with the help of the computer grogram *Com kappa3*. The Cohen’s Kappa showed that inter-coder reliability was high (K = .82).

**Reference**

Altheide, D. L., & Schneider, C. J. (2013). *Qualitative media analysis* (Vol. 38). Los Angeles: Sage.

Berg B. L. (1989). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Svensson, M. (2014). “Voice, power and connectivity in China’s microblogosphere: Digital divides on SinaWeibo”. *China Information*, *28*(2), 168-188.

**Protocol for Weibo verified users’ posts on Sino-Japanese relations**

1. Date:
2. Source:
3. Original post
4. Repost
5. User’s occupation:
6. Media agencies
7. Public intellectuals (scholars, writers, critics, and individual media workers)
8. Governmental bodies and officials
9. Commercial sectors
10. Cultural industry
11. Other
12. Supplementary data
13. Including external hyperlink
14. Not including external hyperlink
15. Theme:
16. Sino-Japanese War history and war-related issues
17. Sino-Japanese contemporary territorial dispute and other geopolitical conflicts
18. Japan’s domestic political and economic issues
19. Japan’s international engagement
20. Sino-Japanese governmental cooperation
21. Sino-Japanese people-to-people exchanges
22. Contemporary Japanese culture and society
23. The Chinese state’s policy towards Japan