Three Approaches to Emotion and Affect in the Aftermath of the Zhuhai Incident

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In mid-September of 2004, a Japanese tourist group staying at a five-star hotel in Zhuhai, China, hired several hundred local prostitutes for a multiple-day orgy. The resulting debauchery—witnessed by Chinese guests at the hotel—was already sufficient to invoke allusions to the behavior of the Japanese Imperial Army sixty years earlier. But the timing of the incident made it particularly provocative: it overlapped with the "9-18," the 18 September anniversary of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Consequently, the "Zhuhai prostitution incident" garnered so much public attention in China that the Foreign Minister of People's Republic of China (PRC), Li Zhaoxing, summoned the Japanese ambassador for the express purpose of conveying "the Chinese public's strong indignation (愤慨)."[1]

Albeit relatively insignificant in the overall history of Sino-Japanese relations, the "Zhuhai incident" nevertheless offers a valuable window onto the relationship of discourse to emotion and affective dynamics. At the time, it generated profuse amounts of discourse: media reports, online postings,[2] and even diplomatic exchanges. In these,

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[1] "Li Zhaoxing shou ribenren she jiti piaochuan yin zhongguo minzhong qianglie fenkai," *Zhong Xin Wang*, 28 September 2003, accessed at: http://news.sohu.com/88/03/news214060388.shtml on 30 March 2016. The PRC also issued warrants for three Japanese citizens, although Japan refused extradition (Przystup 2004:119-120).

[2] On Sina.com, the story garnered "more than 14,700 comments" in under two days; Netease (bbs.163.com) had "nearly 96,000 messages." See: "Chinese up in arms over Japanese tourists 'orgy' at southern China hotel," *Agence France Presse – English*, 28 September 2003; Chow Chung-yan and Irene Wang, "Reports of Japanese orgy in Zhuhai spark outrage," *South China Morning Post*, 29 September 2003, 1. Original postings on NetEase, Sina, Sohu, and the Strong Nation Forum (强国论坛) appear no longer accessible. Tianya, however, still has searchable records.

we can observe discourse that both appears emotional and explicitly references emotional terms.

That said, there are multiple ways discourse can be taken as "emotional". This paper lays out three specific approaches. The first takes discourse as *indicative of emotion*, as offering evidence of and insight into the emotional state of its author or utterer. The second examines the potential for discourse to be *provocative of emotion*—that is, constructed to elicit emotional reactions from its audience—by use of particular symbols, themes, and narratives. And the third focuses on discourse as *invocative of emotion*, or in other words, as capable of deploying emotions as socially—and even politically—consequential referents. Although actual discourse rarely falls neatly into only one of these categories, each denotes analytically distinct ways discourse can be "emotional". Below I address each in turn, employing the Zhuhai incident and its aftermath for heuristic illustration.

Before embarking, a word to definitions. The term affective dynamics denotes "the range of ways embodied mental processes and the felt dimensions of human experience influence thought and behaviour." In contrast, emotions are "socially recognized, structured episodes of affectively valenced response, such as joy or fear… a sub-category of patterned affective reactions" (Hall and Ross 2015:848).

Emotionally indicative discourse

Discourse can be indicative of emotion and affective dynamics by using emotional terms to directly communicate internal states, i.e. "I am happy" or "I am angry." It can also indirectly indicate emotion and affect through terms or phrases with emotional connotations, as with the declarations "I want to rip his head off" in response to an insult, or "I want to be left alone" after the loss of a loved one. In either case, however, treating discourse as emotionally indicative necessitates explicitly theorizing the observable correlates of emotional and affective experience. Direct expressions of emotion only can serve as indicators if we assume that actors have access to their internal felt states, can recognize them, and are communicating them in a forthright manner. Indirect discursive indicators also require a theory of emotional reactions: for instance, that aggressive responses to perceived insults or the desire to withdraw after loss correspond to specific, stereotyped emotional reactions such as anger or grief,

respectively. Whether engaging in a close interpretive reading or simply counting words coded as emotional, we need a clear theory of what discursive configurations offer evidence emotions are in play. And as noted in the forum introduction, such propositions need to be informed by the relevant historical and social context.

To illustrate, there were ample examples of directly indicative emotional discourse in the context of the Zhuhai incident. Consider the reported reaction of a Chinese hotel guest: "The sounds of the [carnal] voices entering my ears first made me upset (烦乱), then made me angry (愤怒), and lastly shame (耻辱) hit me like an avalanche."[3] Or consider the well-circulated, purportedly eye-witness account posted online by a "translator": "[the Japanese men cavorting with Chinese prostitutes] completely outraged (激怒) a usually even-tempered me".[4] Other online reactions also explicitly expressed emotions, some only single words, such as "sadness" (悲哀), "shameful" (可耻), or "angry" (愤怒).[5]

There were also numerous indirect manifestations of emotion. Many online comments conveyed a desire for violence or aggression such as, "I am going to organize the same type of tourist group to go to Japan," "Wish that the Central Military Commission will in the near future give the order to attack Japan, I will be the first to enlist!" or "Exterminate the Yamato race, kill all Japanese, do not leave any alive!"[6] These correspond to stereotypical outraged or humiliated reactions (Löwenheim and Heimann 2008; Saurette 2006).

We need, however, to be careful in taking these indicators at face value. It is one thing to feel an emotion, another to express it (Hall 2015). People may express what they believe themselves to be feeling, but they may also claim emotions for reasons of social desirability, to present a certain image, or even to strategic or commercial ends (Hall 2015; Hochschild 2003; Koschut 2014). The latter reasons do not rule out sincerity, but they can cast doubt.

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[3] "Guochiri zhuhai laile riben 'maichuntuan' mujizhe nujie chouju," *Zhengzhou Wanbao*, 5 September 2003, accessed at: http://people.com.cn/GB/shehui/1062/2112848.html on 29 March 2016.

[4] "Choulou de ribenren he choulou de zhongguoren," accessed at: http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-news-9460-1.shtml on 29 March 2016.

[5] Comments from: "[Ershou] Zhuhai: Guochiri laile riben maichuntaun 26 ri (zhuanzai)," 26 September 2003, http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-56-540288-1.shtml, accessed 29 March 2016.

[6] Ibid.

We must therefore look not only to the *what* of discourse, but also the *who*, *when*, *where*, and *why*. For instance, if we view emotions such as outrage as eliciting a sudden vehement outburst, we should also expect emotional expression to follow this pattern. Correspondingly, the sudden mass of postings right after the news broke would suggest that for some the emotion was genuine. As comments were anonymous and—assuming not all from party shills, which the volume argues against—voluntary, we also have reason to think that real sentiments were involved. The timing, location, circumstances, and identity of the actors involved can thus play a role in building the case that certain discourses indicate actual emotion.

But so what? Demonstrating the presence of certain emotional reactions accomplishes little, apart from solving an analytical challenge—as the forum introduction notes, we need to pay attention to effects. Ascertaining the existence of emotions is of value only to the extent that they play a significant role in process or outcomes of importance to us, or, alternately, are themselves evidence of other variables. The Zhuhai incident arguably was without significant geopolitical consequences, but even still evidence of emotional reactions is of interest.

For one, emotional reactions can reveal pre-existing affective concerns, beliefs, and dispositions. Indeed, contributing to the vehemence with which Chinese commentators responded was the belief that the timing was intentional. An online survey garnering 85,000 answers found, "Nearly 90 percent said the Japanese had conducted the sex tour to humiliate China on what Chinese already call their national day of humiliation…"[7] The immediacy with which some Chinese commentators jumped to such conclusions suggests that that their feelings allowed generalizations that exceeded available evidence (Mercer 2010:2).

This, in turn, suggests certain Chinese observers were affectively primed to believe the worst, indicating an already strong reservoir of negative sentiment towards Japan. Evidence of such a reservoir is important, as it reveals both political resources available to and constraints upon the PRC leadership (Reilly 2013; Shirk 2007). Admittedly, the respondents in an internet forum may not be the most representative, but as Shirk notes,

[7] Joseph Kahn, "China Angered by Reported Orgy Involving Japanese Tourists," *The New York Times*, 30 September 2003, A5.

the PRC leadership needs to worry not about the political center, but the fringes (Shirk 2007:44).

Lastly, emotional reactions can also leave behind affective residues that shape future perceptions and responses (Hall and Ross 2015:854-855). With each negative interaction, sensitivities can become heightened, lowering the threshold for the next. In this case, nationally dispersed negative emotional responses to the Zhuhai incident were part of a larger, worsening trend in Sino-Japanese relations at the time. Although diffuse consequences are difficult to prove, reactions to Zhuhai arguably helped set the stage for the major anti-Japanese protests that broke out across China in 2005 (Weiss 2014:127-159).

Emotionally Provocative Discourse

The various accounts, stories, and descriptions of the Zhuhai incident also worked to provoke emotions in their audiences. By presenting the behavior of the Japanese men involved as offensive, intentional, and reminiscent of the actions of the Japanese Imperial Army, reports and postings encouraged the indignation of their readers. By incorporating other potent emotional symbols—comfort women, the rape of Nanjing, and above all 9-18, "National Humiliation Day"—these discourses also drew upon the affective salience of a ready of body of symbols and narratives.

The events of Zhuhai were well suited to emotionally provocative narration. For one, lurid details of Japanese behavior spoke to pornographic curiosity and nationalistic rage while invoking a pre-existing assortment of affectively-laden, gendered images and discourses. As Callahan notes, there exists within the PRC an assemblage of "war pornography" involving explicit photographs and descriptions of Japanese wartime rape and sexual abuse (Callahan 2010:180). Such images and stories not only invite "voyeuristic consumption," they also play upon a patriarchal nationalism that depicts women "in negative ways as the violated national bodies that challenge national honor – and demand nationalist revenge" (Callahan 2010:179-180). These images thus exemplify the emotional links—long highlighted in feminist IR—that interlace nationalist ideologies with gendered understandings of women as objects of potential violation (Wilcox 2009, 225-238). Such themes are reinforced within the PRC by on a daily basis

through nationalistic television shows and movies. Consider the words of the "translator": "it was just like the images of molested women I see daily on television."[8]

Adding to this were the ways in which Japanese behavior was cast as a deliberate insult to Chinese. To cite the "translator" again: "we all know what type of people these people are: they are a group of Japanese who, from the bottom of their heart, despise China and Chinese."[9] They *purposefully* chose to pursue their debauchery on the eve of 18 September, National Humiliation Day—itself a potent symbol. This interpretation tapped larger narratives of Japanese who, despite having lost the war a half-century earlier, remained unrepentant and arrogant.

And yet why did the discourse take these provocative forms? Surely some wanted to spread their outrage. But emotionally provocative, scandalous stories also attract attention, and in the PRC Japanese perpetrators were both easily sensationalized and politically safe to target. The journalists involved could hope to translate said attention into reputational and career gains (Pugsely and Gao 2009:113). Newspapers also could benefit from such stories: "Having operated more than a decade in an increasingly commercialized and competitive market place, [Chinese newspapers were] hungry for newsworthy items, which can be used to increase sales" (Pugsely and Gao 2009:113). And websites had similar incentives to post such stories as "click bait."

As for the motives of "netizens" who posted and transmitted such emotionally evocative stories, we can only speculate. To attract attention? To be validated with responses? For want of interaction or even shared communities of feeling? Simple boredom? The answers are possibly any and all of these reasons. Regardless, the speed and breadth by which these stories circulated arguably marks their ability to provoke emotion: emotionally provocative stories are much more likely to go viral (Guadagno et al. 2013).

Emotionally Invocative Discourse

Discourse is emotionally invocative when it deploys emotions as socially—and even politically—consequential referents. Emotionally invocative discourse cites emotions to draw upon, leverage, and harness the social significance they possess. To examine

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[8] "Choulou de ribenren he choulou de zhongguoren."
[9] Ibid.

discourse as emotionally invocative is not to look in discourse for the evidence or cause of emotions, but to inquire into the purposes, implications, and consequences of emotions being made discourse's object.

To wit, actors in international relations frequently proclaim that a given collective—i.e., "the state" or "the people"—feels a certain emotion, often also claiming to speak on the group's behalf. As I have argued elsewhere (Hall 2015), states are institutional actors and as such do not "feel" emotions. And the lived emotional experience of groups in general is simply too complicated, transient, and messy to ever be adequately captured with singular emotional labels. Nevertheless, such assertions of collective emotions can and do serve important political purposes such as bolstering legitimacy, attracting support, or influencing and disciplining the behavior of others.

In the context of the Zhuhai incident, some of the earliest invocations of collective emotion came from the two reporters responsible for breaking the original story, Xiang Xianjun and Lin Wei. They were also among the first to report on the social and online reaction, labeling it "enraged" (震怒).[10] Arguably, such reporting was somewhat self-serving and possibly even materially motivated, as it enhanced the popular significance of their original articles on the incident and raised their profile.

Even so, this claim also quickly came to be reflected in official statements about the event as well: Foreign Minister Li and other Foreign Ministry representatives were soon also publicly denouncing the incident as eliciting "the Chinese public's strong indignation" (强烈愤慨).[11] These latter, official statements are of particular interest. By invoking the putative emotions of the public, the PRC government could claim to be speaking on its behalf, as both understanding and defending nationalist pride. At the same time, it was also pronouncing what the proper, patriotic emotional response should be.

In actuality, even a cursory review of the (still accessible) online reactions reveals significant variety and nuance, not uniform outrage. Some expressed disappointment with China, Chinese, and Chinese officials. One poster simply wrote: "Ah,

[10]Xiang Xianjun and Lin Wei, "Ribenke zhuhai maichun xu," *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, 28 September 2003, accessed at:
http://news.sina.com.cn/s/2003-09-28/03471829615.shtml on 29 March 2016.
[11] "Li Zhaoxing shou ribenren she jiti piaochuan yin zhongguo minzhong qianglie fenkai."

government … corrupt. Ah, prostitutes ... many."[12] Others were more thoughtful, introspective, and even sardonic. One post not only cast doubt on the Zhuhai incident as an intentional insult, it also ruminated on the roles of globalization and Chinese economic modernization in fostering transnational sex tourism.[13] Another, responding to calls to organize sexual revenge in Japan, mockingly wrote, "To use sperm to express nationalist hate, this can be described as ridiculous; to use sperm to express nationalist hatred, and this for something that can only be realized in fantasy, this can be described as sad."[14] Some even openly professed support for Japan in order to infuriate more ardent nationalists.[15]

All the same, official and journalistic sources quickly condensed popular responses under the label of "extreme indignation," thereby elevating this reaction and its political consequences over other possible responses. Granted, this was not wholly without foundation—many in the PRC did respond with indignation—but it was a very selective picture. And it also arguably reflected what, through the lens of nationalist ideology, reporters and officials expected and desired the popular response to be. But there were other purposes that were served by explicitly invoking this emotion, including the career interests of journalists or the broader efforts by the PRC government to shore up and guide nationalist support. And as a product of such invocations, "Chinese people's indignation" came to be asserted, circulated, and reiterated into commonsensical knowledge.

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[13] Ibid.
[14] "[Ershou] Zhuhai: Guochiri laile riben maichuntaun 26 ri (zhuanzai)."
[15] Ibid.

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