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“Century of humiliation” and its influence on modern Chinese politics with special emphasis on China — Japan relations

Abstract

The author strives to examine the influence of historical events of the 19th and 20th centuries on the current political situation in the People's Republic of China. Both the current foreign and domestic policy pursued by the PRC is determined by history, especially by the so-called “century of humiliation”, on which the author has focused. All signs point to China becoming a global superpower within the next several years; due to this fact, concern with the policy pursued by China seems to be a crucial issue. Historical policy and history are of great significance – not only have they transformed Chinese international relations, shaped by the Communist Party of China, but also impacted the attitudes of citizens. The conclusions of this paper have been drawn from the analysis of modern history of China and current political events. The author claims that there is a strong connection between the tensions in relations between China and Japan, the aforementioned historical events and the aversion of China towards Japan, which is still prevalent in the foreign policy of the Communist Party of China. These considerations are based on papers concerning the “century of humiliation”, such as *The "Century of Humiliation", Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order* by Alison Adcock Kaufman and *Never Forget the National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* by Zheng Wang and current political events.

Keywords: Century of humiliation, China, international relations, Japan.

Introduction

The picture of current international relations and policies globally are not a result of the last couple of years alone. They are strongly determined by historical events, cultural differences, and overall distinctions in civilisational development of countries. The PRC is, by all accounts, on the verge of becoming a global superpower in a matter of a couple of years. Due to this fact, being concerned by the

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policy pursued by China and factors motivating it seems to be a vital issue.

China's current leadership has said it wants to reboot the relationships between the major powers on a new model i.e. to base them on three pillars: non-confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation. However, over the past years, the first commitment (non-confrontation) seems to have been somewhat doubtful¹. The reason for this is the increasingly nationalistic tone in the rhetoric of Chinese Communist Party, which influences the country's international relations and its state policy. This manifests itself in many fields and in many cases, but this kind of rhetoric usually alludes to the so-called "century of humiliation". I claim that this event strongly correlates with hostility in relations between China and Japan, which we are facing, because of the still ongoing aversion towards the Japanese held by the Chinese and fuelled by the Communist Party of China's foreign policy.

These considerations and conclusions are based on papers concerning the "century of humiliation", such as *The "Century of Humiliation", Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order* by Alison Adcock Kaufman and *Never Forget the National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* by Zheng Wang and current political events.

What is the "century of humiliation"?

Wang Zheng in his book states that "History is a religion to the Chinese." The explanation of this statement is as follows - the majority of Chinese do not practice any religion, so the influence of religion over Chinese is not as great as for some other countries, so history (including historical narrative and education) has performed some of the roles of religion in China². If we accept this point of view and consider history as a sort of religion for the Chinese, then it become easier to recognise the "century of humiliation", sometimes also called the "century of shame and humiliation" as an equivalent of the resurrection of Jesus for Christians. It is without any doubt the most important, and still alive in many minds, part of a "religion".

¹D.W. Kearn, 'China's Rise: Rhetoric and Reality', *HuffPost*, 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-w-kearn/chinas-rise-rhetoric-and-_b_8338416.html (accessed 30.12.2017).

² Wang Zheng, 'In China, "History Is a Religion"', *The Diplomat*, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/in-china-history-is-a-religion/> (accessed 30.12.2017).

The period in question represents the most dire and tragic time in the Chinese nation’s history, when from 1839 to 1949 the Middle Kingdom was under almost continual assault from external and internal forces.³

Throughout the ages, China was quite a well-developed and powerful country. The rulers were not really concerned with civilisations outside China. This situation changed dramatically in the 19th century, when China, as a result of actions undertaken by western powers, was effectively relegated to a semi-colonial country. The Chinese were not prepared and therefore did not know how to respond adequately to the forces they encountered, which resulted in such painful losses.⁴

Prior to 1839 the only foreign trade allowed was restricted to the Canton, where all foreign merchants had to transact business through official intermediaries. The inconveniences of this, mainly the prohibition of barter sale of tea and the seizure of about 20,000 boxes of opium by Chinese authorities, were the main causes that led to what is known as a First Opium War (1839-1842). The event is considered the beginning, lasting 110 years, of the “century of humiliation”.⁵ Great Britain sent gunboats up the Yangtze River to compel, by force of arms, China’s rulers to open their ports and markets to the opium trade. This experience and subsequent interactions with other western nations spurred similar demands for wider trade access in China. It revealed China’s vulnerability to the west and highlighted imperial China’s military and diplomatic weakness in the face of western powers.⁶ The war had such a huge impact on Chinese society that history textbooks on the mainland and on Taiwan still divide Chinese history into two categories – “pre-Opium war era” and “post-Opium war era”.⁷

³ Davis Florick, ‘China’s National Century of Humiliation: Context for Today’s Tensions’, *Hum. Secur. Cent.*, 2016, <http://www.hscentre.org/asia-and-pacific/chinas-national-century-humiliation-context-todays-tensions/> (accessed 30.12.2017).

⁴ M.Anderson, *Documentary: China’s Century of Humiliation*, 2011.

⁵ M.Anderson, *Documentary...*

⁶ A.A. Kaufman, Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on “China’s Narratives Regarding National Security Policy” - *The “Century of Humiliation” and China’s National Narratives*, 2011, <http://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf> (accessed 10.03.18).

⁷ See, e.g. X. Jianjun, H. Shaohua, *Daxue Junshi Jiaocheng*, Changsha: Zhongnan University Press, 2004.

Yet, the term the "century of humiliation" perhaps would not have been around had it not been for the Second Opium War (1856-1858 and 1859-1860), even though the pretext for it, from our perspective, may be absurd.⁸ Chinese authorities seized a Chinese ship with Chinese crew onboard on charges of opium smuggling and piracy—albeit one has to keep in mind that the ship had been registered in Hong Kong, which was a British colony. When the crew were arrested, the British demanded the China release the Chinese crew. Even though China complied, this incident was used for propaganda purposes as *casus belli*. The British began a bombardment of the Chinese forts around Canton and eventually blasted open the city walls.⁹

China lost the war against the combined forces of the UK and France and as a result in 1860 in Beijing signed the Treaty of Tianjin. Among many other things, one of its provisions was to open Chinese ports to trade with the UK and France, also for the trade of opium. Merchants from the UK, France, Russia, and the USA received privileges in trading with the Chinese.¹⁰

The reason I consider the Second Opium War more important to the coinage of the term the "century of humiliation" is because this "humiliation" narrative is not entirely a Chinese creation. In 1860 the British army attacked Beijing's Summer Palace,¹¹ even though it had no military significance. The Summer Palace was an exquisite array of buildings, lakes, and parks, and served as the primary residence of the imperial court.¹² It was one of the most beautiful places in China and a big part of the national legacy. The destruction of the Summer Palace was an act aimed to crush emperor Qing's pride and humiliate him. Moreover, as the historian James Hevia in *Wealth and Power* explains, "it was an object lesson for others who might contemplate defying

⁸ Sometimes Second Opium War is treated as two, separate conflicts - the Second Opium War (1856-1858) and Third Opium War (1859-1860).

⁹ Kallie Szczepanski, 'The First and Second Opium Wars', *ThoughtCo.*, 2017, <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-first-and-second-opium-wars-195276> (accessed 31.12.2017).

¹⁰ Sebastien Roblin, 'The Opium Wars: The Bloody Conflicts That Destroyed Imperial China', *Natl. Interest*, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-opium-wars-the-bloody-conflicts-destroyed-imperial-china-17212?page=2> (accessed 31.12.2017).

¹¹ In Chinese - Yuánmíngyuán - 圓明園.

¹² Matt Schiavenza, 'How Humiliation Drove Modern Chinese History', *The Atlantic*, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/10/how-humiliation-drove-modern-chinese-history/280878/> (accessed 31.12.2017).

British power”.¹³ The main reason for the attack was to crush Chinese morale. The ruins of the Summer Palace, known today as the Old Summer Palace, are on display in Beijing, the capital of China, and constantly remind citizens of the humiliation that had been experienced.

Alongside these external affairs, Chinese authorities had to deal with internal problems as well e.g. the Nian Rebellion, Dungan Revolt or Panthay Rebellion. But the most important was the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), brought about by the unfavourable provisions of the Nanjing treaty, which ended the First Opium War and the introduction, by force, of Christianity into China. It lasted for 14 years, ravaged 17 provinces and took an estimated 20 million lives. The Qing dynasty was so weakened by the rebellions that it was never again able to establish an effective hold over the country¹⁴ (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.).

There was also a relatively minor historical event in the 19th century, the Sino-French war (1884-1885), which halted China's self-strengthening movement in its tracks¹⁵. The reason for the conflict was the desire of both countries to maintain control over what is today Vietnam. As a result, China had to recognise a French protectorate.¹⁶

The last major event in 19th century was *jiawu* – the Sino-Japanese war, over control of Korea, which was a Chinese tribute state. Even though many foreign observers expected China to win, Japan easily defeated China. Based on the provisions of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, China was forced to cede Taiwan, Liaodong Peninsula and the Penghu Islands to Japan. Senkaku Islands were not part of the treaty, but Japan annexed these islands to Okinawa Prefecture in 1895. Moreover, China was obliged to pay a huge indemnity (an amount that in 1895 was the equivalent of \$150 billion in today's money), permit the establishment of Japanese industries in four treaty ports, and recognise

¹³ Orville Shell, John Delury, *Wealth and Power: China's Long March to the Twenty-first Century*, New York: Random House, 2013.

¹⁴ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. *Taiping Rebellion*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Taiping-Rebellion> (accessed 31.12.2017).

¹⁵ Stuart Heaver, 'When China and France went to war: 130 years since forgotten conflict', *Post Mag*, 2014, <http://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/article/1578428/no-charm-intended> (accessed 31.12.2017).

¹⁶ Patryk Franiel, 'Wojna Chińsko-Francuska 1884-1885. Operacje na morzu', *Nowa Strategia*, 2015, <http://www.nowastrategia.org.pl/wojna-chinsko-francuska-1884-1885-operacje-na-morzu/> (accessed 31.12.2017).

Japanese hegemony over Korea¹⁷. This war was especially meaningful since Chinese had always considered Japan its “student”, a civilisation inferior to their own - hence losing against them is considered by many Chinese the most humiliating incident throughout the “century of humiliation”.

The shame was further compounded in the first two decades of the 20th century by independence movements in Tibet and Mongolia, the definitive fall of the Qing dynasty and by further Japanese incursions into Manchuria, demanding expansion of their control of Manchuria and of the Chinese economy by creating Manchukuo – a puppet state of Japan. China lost effective control over nearly a third of its territory and had to struggle with massive rebellions and uprisings, chief among others, the notorious Boxer Rebellion,¹⁸ but the most important for this considerations is the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). The resistance of China to continuous Japanese expansion caused the breakout of the conflict. In this case the *casus belli* had taken place on Marco Polo bridge when in July of 1937 Japanese troops provoked the Chinese to open fire on its soldiers. The war led to up to 20 million Chinese casualties¹⁹. One event in particular sows massive discord in China-Japan relations, even to this day, i.e. the Nanking Massacre. The Japanese massacred approximately 300,000 people. Thousands of civilians were savagely killed, females enslaved as so-called “comfort women” (sex slaves). What is more, the Japanese also conducted human experimentation in China.²⁰

The victory of the Communist Party of China and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 by Mao Tsetung ended the “century of humiliation”.

The “Century of humiliation” in modern Chinese narrative

The use of the past in China has a big impact on society as a whole, mainly due to its role in the educational system. Even though,

¹⁷Hays Jeffrey, ‘Sino-Japanese War, Facts Details’, 2016, <http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat2/sub4/entry-4291>.

¹⁸ Alison Adcock Kaufman, ‘The “Century of Humiliation,” Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order’, *Pacific Focus* Vol. 25, 2010, p. 1–33.

¹⁹*The Second Sino-Japanese War*. Alpha Hist. <http://alphahistory.com/chineserevolution/sino-japanese-war/> (accessed 1.12.18).

²⁰*The Second Sino-Japanese War*. Alpha Hist. <http://alphahistory.com/chineserevolution/sino-japanese-war/> (accessed 1.12.18).

as was pointed out before, China has a scabrous history full of undeserved suffering, the history textbooks still manage to twist and omit it to fit the narrative. History is being used as a political tool, and at the high school level, the Chinese must follow the doctrine imposed by Communist Party of China.²¹ In 1991 the CPC began the ‘Patriotic Education Campaign’. The campaign was targeted mainly at Chinese youth, but Beijing called upon the entire nation to study China’s humiliating modern history and how much the country has been changed by the Communist revolution.²² The party has revised the history textbooks since 1991 in order to replace the old class-struggle narrative with an official “victory narrative” (read: China winning independence), which blames western countries for China’s suffering.²³ This strongly influences the collective memory of Chinese society, which, in turn gives it a kind of national identity framework and channels its values and objectives, which in turn shape the future in the name of the past.²⁴ This kind of indoctrination of nationalistic attitudes with a simultaneous incitement of aversion towards the external world is typical for non-democratic regimes. The CPC realised that there is a link between the “Century of humiliation” and legitimisation of its power. It realised this the hard way as before it started to emphasise the nationalistic aspect, China had struggled with a crisis of public confidence that culminated in the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations that were brutally thwarted by the regime. To ensure its effective rule the CCP had to be considered a defender of the national interest against the influence of western imperialism. History education on national humiliation is an effective device for the regime to legitimise the one-party state.²⁵

²¹ See: Howard W. French, ‘China’s Textbooks Twist and Omit History’, *N. Y. Times*, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/06/world/asia/chinas-textbooks-twist-and-omit-history.html> (accessed 01.03.2018).

²² W. Zheng, ‘National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 2008, p. 783–806.

²³ Gerrit W. Gong, *Memory and History in East and Southeast Asia: Issues of Identity in International Relations*, Significant Issues Series, Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2001.

²⁴ Gong, G.W., *Memory and History...*

²⁵ W. Zheng, ‘National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 2008, p. 783–806.

At the XIX Communist Party Congress Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, was re-elected to the post of Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China – the highest possible post in the party. He was also elected head of the Military Council. Moreover, he will probably hold the position of President of China indefinitely, after the abolition of the term limit, while many of his supporters have filled key posts in bodies such as the Central Politburo of the Communist Party of China and the Central Military Commission.²⁶ It is said that this makes Xi the most powerful Chinese leader in decades.

Xi's Political Report, that opened the above-mentioned Congress, included the phrase the "Great Rejuvenation" – by which he means restoration to the rightful, great power status of China, a predominance it enjoyed and lost due to the "Century of humiliation" – 27 times.²⁷ The same man, during his speech, in the former Concerning the ex-British colony of Hong Kong, on the 20th anniversary of its return to China, Xi recalled how the British victory in the First Opium War of 1839-42 – in which Hong Kong Island was ceded to Britain – set in motion decades of humiliation for China. He said also that Hong Kong should do more to boost "patriotic education" which has been opposed by local residents who fear losing their identity.²⁸ It seems that as long as Hong Kong maintains its autonomy – according to a treaty signed by UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher in 1984 it should keep its unique rights until 2047 – the Chinese authorities will not stop recalling the phrase a 'Century of humiliation' and using it as a propaganda tool thereby keeping open the wound in relations between China and UK. However, Xi is not the only Chinese leader that has used the concept of national rejuvenation, because almost every generation of Chinese leaders has used the national humiliation narrative and the goal

²⁶ Information derived from Polish Press Agency, "*Najpotężniejszy od czasów Mao.*" *Xi Jinping umocnił swoją władzę*, TVN 24, 2017, <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiatea,2/chiny-xi-jinping-umocnil-wladze-po-zjezdzie-partii-komunistycznej,784672.html> (accessed 01.03.2017).

²⁷ Doshi, R., *Xi Jinping just made it clear where China's foreign policy is headed*. Wash. Post, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/10/25/xi-jinping-just-made-it-clear-where-chinas-foreign-policy-is-headed/?utm_term=.d0780c7a6c36 (accessed 1.3.18).

²⁸ Neil Connor, 'China's Xi Jinping recalls national "humiliation" to Britain as he seeks to stir patriotism in Hong', *The Telegraph*, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/01/chinas-xi-jinping-recalls-national-humiliation-britain-seeks/> (accessed 01.03.2018).

of rejuvenation to mobilise the Chinese populace to support their revolution or reform.²⁹

Within the scope of state policy, the current president recalls the “century of humiliation” in army-related matters. Xi has embarked on an overhaul of the military and a clampdown on corruption throughout the military and the party. In doing so, he points to the First Sino-Japanese War that was lost due to the weakness of the Chinese army whose grave sin was corruption.³⁰

The impact of the “century of humiliation” is visible also in China’s approach to the issue of human rights. In the western culture sphere, human rights are understood in rather a uniform way. Those are inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated rights that are possessed by everyone and stem from human dignity. Democratic countries consider this approach as the only right approach and therefore exert strong pressure on China when it violates human rights. That pressure has provoked a strong nationalistic response. As Robert Weatherley says, “This is evident in at least three ways, which taken together constitute a rejection of Western pressure as an unwelcome form of cultural imperialism, a means of imposing an alien mode of thinking on China”. The three reactions are:

1. portraying western criticism as a violating of national sovereignty of China;
2. accusing the west of gross hypocrisy on the subject and claiming that CCP has developed its own, specific to China, model of human rights.³¹

In fact the sense of humiliation is so deeply rooted in the Chinese psyche, that even today, when China is considered one of the great superpowers, many Chinese still behave as if they are being bullied and abused – therefore building a strong nation that no one can mistreat is the most important agenda, far more relevant than protecting

²⁹ Wang Zheng, ‘In China, “History Is a Religion”, *The Diplomat*, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/in-china-history-is-a-religion/> (accessed 30.12.2017).

³⁰ *China’s Leaders Draw Lessons From War of ‘Humiliation’*. 纽约时报中文网, 2014, <https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20140729/c29leaders/en-us/> (accessed 01.12.2018).

³¹ R. Weatherley, ‘Defending the Nation: The Role of Nationalism in Chinese Thinking on Human Rights’, *Democratization*, Vol. 15, 2008, p. 352-355.

human rights.³² As Allison Graham says, “During the 1990s when many Western thought leaders were celebrating the «end of history» with the apparent triumph of market-based democracies, a number of observers believed that China, too, was on the path to democratic government. Today, few in China would say that political freedoms are more important than reclaiming China’s international standing and national pride”.³³ There are voices that the Chinese view of today’s world is that nations must “humiliate or be humiliated”.³⁴

The “century of humiliation” is evoked even when it comes to fields that, at first glance, seem unconnected directly with the colonial invasion of the west, such as sport. It manifests itself, for example, during the Olympics. In theory, this is an event that is all about universal values and noble sporting competition. But that is not the case for China. As Professor Wang Zheng says, explaining the medal haul at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, “this is because of the lingering memory of national humiliation that the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) elite can legitimise their rule through sports. Gold medals in international sports have been effectively used as the currency of CCP legitimacy. Comparing today’s achievements with that of old China, as in the article «From ‘Sick Man of East Asia’ to ‘Sports Big Power’» has been a common method of the CCP propaganda machine. It is a great achievement for China to go from just one participant and no medals in 1932 to 100 medals and 51 golds in 2008. The success of the CCP government and China’s rejuvenation in power and wealth can be illustrated by the world-leading count of 51 gold medals”.³⁵ Concluding – for China, the Olympics is not just about sport. They see here a link to redemption for the suffering experienced during the “century of humiliation” and legitimisation of the CCP. Winning international competitions is the way to show to the world the progress that the Chinese nation has made throughout the years.

³² Helen Wang, ‘Century of Humiliation’ Complicates US-China Relationship’, 2015, <http://thehelenwang.com/2015/09/century-of-humiliation-complicates-us-china-relationship/> (accessed 01.03.2018).

³³ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?*, Boston-New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017, p. 122.

³⁴ W.A Callahan, ‘National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism’, *Alternatives*, Vol. 29, 2004, p. 199–218.

³⁵ Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

The influence of the “century of humiliation” on Sino-Japanese relations

The Asia-Pacific region struggles with many security dilemmas and challenges, such as the nuclearisation programme of North Korea and the ongoing tensions between Pakistan and India, but one of the most significant is China-Japan relations. This is the longest standing tension in the Asia-Pacific region and, for the first time in history, both countries are superpowers at the same time, and the most influential actors of Western Asia. For the aforementioned historical reasons and fuelled by the Chinese authorities’ nationalistic rhetoric, relations between the two countries are rather frosty, not only at the governmental level, but also on the societal plane. The three most captivating and interconnected issues concerning China-Japan relations are: Japan’s prime minister’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, historically significant affairs concerning the attitude of Japan towards its past and the disputed territories of Senkaku Islands (in Chinese - Diaoyu Islands).

The first issue – the Yasukuni Shrine is a Shinto shrine that commemorates the two and a half million Japanese who died in service of Japan, the majority of them – during World War II. The reason it arouses controversy is that among the commemorated are war criminals sentenced by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Tokyo.³⁶ In 2001 Junichiro Koizumi, the prime minister of Japan, after a few years of not doing so, resumed paying an official, annual visit to the controversial shrine, and since then China-Japan relations have cooled. This was further aggravated by tensions concerning the Senakaku Islands, the disapproval of Japanese history textbooks and the proposal that Japan be granted a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, with cities across most of East Asia breaking out in anti-Japanese protests in 2005.³⁷ The above-mentioned factors are connected with the the fact that, as China claims, Japan has not come to terms with its own past. Japanese officials and textbooks have even questioned whether Japanese military actions in China and Korea could

³⁶ ‘Yasukuni war shrine: what is its importance ?’, *The Telegraph*, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/10538086/Yasukuni-war-shrine-what-is-its-importance.html> (accessed 01.05.2018).

³⁷ Johnatan Watts, ‘Violence flares as the Chinese rage at Japan’, *The Guardian*, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/17/china.japan> (accessed 01.05.2018).

be called “invasions” and whether there was a “massacre” in Nanjing.³⁸ The bid for a permanent seat on such an influential body as the UN Security Council triggered alarm bells in China and Korea, because Japan, as they claim, still hadn’t repented sufficiently over its wartime atrocities and was trying to whitewash them³⁹.

In 2006, when Shinzo Abe took over the prime minister office, he promised to cease paying visits to Yasukuni Shrine, with resulted with a slight improvement in China-Japan relations, but in 2012 Abe decided to visit the shrine again. China was outraged and Beijing stated that: "only by Japan earnestly and squarely facing, deeply reflecting upon its history of invasion and clearly distancing itself from militarism, can China-Japan relations realise healthy and stable development".⁴⁰

The second of the issues – a dispute over Senkaku Island stems from the fact that both countries lay claim to the disputed territory. It reaches back to the beginning of Japanese colonialism when in 1885 Japan, claiming that the islands do not belong to anyone, incorporated them into its territory. One would think that the islands, which are basically seven uninhabited rocks in the East China Sea, would not stir up international relations, but in the 1960s information about oil deposits and fishing grounds near the archipelago came into the spotlight.⁴¹ Recently, in 2012, the conflict escalated due to the decision of Japan’s government to buy and nationalise three of the biggest islands that belonged to private owners. This resulted in a violent anti-Japanese protest in China, where thousands of protesters took to the streets across the country, burning images of Japanese flags, attacking Japanese-made cars and smashing windows of Japanese-owned businesses. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that "the illegal behaviour of Japanese

³⁸ Wang Zheng, “‘Missing Histories’: History Education and China-Japan Relations”, *The Diplomat*, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/03/missing-histories-history-education-and-china-japan-relations/> (accessed 01.05.2018).

³⁹ Johnatan Watts, ‘Violence flares as the Chinese rage at Japan’, *The Guardian*, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/17/china.japan> (accessed 01.05.2018).

⁴⁰ Barney Henderson, ‘Why do Japan and China have such a frosty relationship ?’, *The Telegraph*, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/11221248/Why-do-Japan-and-China-have-such-a-frosty-relationship.html> (accessed 01.05.2018).

⁴¹ David Pilling, ‘Azja, Japonia, Chiny i dziedzictwo problemu historycznego’, 2012, <http://forsal.pl/artykuly/642171.azja-japonia-chiny-i-dziedzictwo-problemu-historycznego.html> (accessed 01.05.2018).

rightwingers has violated China's territorial sovereignty”.⁴² It seems that for China it is not just about financial interest, but also to show that they will not be subjugated to foreign powers. China for centuries treated Japan as its “younger brother” or “student”, therefore conceding to Japan would be seen for the Chinese as dishonour and making the CCP appear to be letting down nationalistically minded Chinese. The conflict is a serious threat that has repercussions for the overall situation in Western Asia.

Moreover in 2014 The People’s Liberation Army navy held a memorial ceremony at the coast of Weihai, where China was defeated in 1894, to mark the 120th year since the start of the First Sino-Japanese War.⁴³ In recent years China has increased its investments in strengthening the maritime power of the Chinese army. According to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission’s Annual Report to Congress by 2020, China could have as many as 351 submarines and missile-equipped surface ships in the Asia Pacific, *ipso facto* outnumbering the US navy. As an explanation for such intense naval buildup, the Chinese point to the failures of the Qing Navy and its loss against a modernised Japanese navy – using the “century of humiliation” as a justification for such a military development. It’s worth mentioning that alongside building ships China also invests in long-term strategic infrastructure in a variety of Asian and African countries to increase force projection.⁴⁴

Conclusions

The “Century of humiliation” has had a massive impact not only on the foreign and national policies of China, but also on national self-confidence and attitudes towards other nations. It seems that the whole political system of the People’s Republic of China is based on the legitimacy to rule that the Communist Party of China derives from the

⁴² Tania Breningan, ‘China protests over Japanese activists’ visit to disputed island’, *The Guardian*, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/19/china-protest-japan-senkaku-diaoyo-island#comments> (accessed 01.05.2018).

⁴³ Peng Yining, ‘Navy holds memorial ceremony for Jiawu War’, *ChinaDaily*, 2014, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-08/27/content_18498324.htm (accessed 25.09.2018).

⁴⁴ Hans Lei, ‘The Ghost of China’s Past: How the “Century of Humiliation” Influences China’s Naval Buildup’, *Brown Political Review*, 2017, <http://www.brownpoliticalreview.org/2017/11/ghost-chinas-past-century-humiliation-influences-chinas-naval-buildup/> (accessed 25.09.18).

suffering experienced at the hands of western and Japanese incursions. Hence, it is highly unlikely that China will simply “move forward” from historical grievance, because, as Zheng Wang says “[...] historical memory of past humiliation is not just a psychological issue or something only related to perception and attitude. It is a key element of constructing the Chinese national identity”.⁴⁵ Therefore, the “century of humiliation” manifests itself in China in almost every aspect of life and cannot be simply abandoned from the national narrative.

China-Japan relations have been particularly unstable. Despite all the aforementioned issues, both countries are currently strongly connected economically, which prevents possible serious conflicts for the time being. However, this is the first time in history that simultaneously both China and Japan are superpowers. With Japan being demilitarised due to article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and a new Chinese generation coming into power, the situation might get more tense. This new generation taking over the reins was strongly indoctrinated with nationalism and aversion to Japan. This is a generation for whom the Japanese were portrayed as those who robbed, murdered and raped their way across China. Hence, it is unclear whether China will resist calls for settling scores of long-held grievances or not, even though since the establishment of diplomatic relations, Japan has made some friendly gestures to develop better relations with China⁴⁶. Without any doubt the “century of humiliation” will not simply fade into obscurity from public life and international relations for both Chinese citizens and officials. As Chu Yimin, a People's Liberation Army general and political commissar said, “The wounds are increasingly healed over, but the scars remain, and what we need most of all nowadays is to awaken an intense sense of humiliation, so that we never forget the humiliation of our country and military, and turn knowledge of this into courage”.

⁴⁵ Wang Zheng, ‘In China, “History Is a Religion’, *The Diplomat*, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/in-china-history-is-a-religion/> (accessed 30.12.2017).

⁴⁶ See E. Dryjańska, Główne problemy w stosunkach Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej z Japonią, *Forum Polityczne*, Vol. 8, 2008.

