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The Main Goals of China's Politics of Memory

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China's politics of memory focuses on the period of Japanese occupation between 1931 and 1945. The Chinese authorities describe it as a cumulative moment of "national humiliation" which started with, among other things, divisions of spheres of interest between the colonial powers in the 19th and 20th centuries. The merits of the Chinese Communist Party in the process of liberation from Japanese occupation are exaggerated in order to build up a belief within Chinese society that the party is also able to restore China to its rightful place on global stage. China's authorities also strengthen nationalist sentiment in society in order to reinforce support for their assertive foreign policy.

China's politics of memory is a state propaganda tool used to provoke certain reactions among society. The war with Japan and the experience of Japanese occupation are particularly significant. China underlines that it was the first state to put up armed resistance against the Axis powers, fought for the longest period and made the greatest sacrifices (more than 30 million casualties). The fate of the Chinese people experienced during Japanese occupation is compared to the annihilation of European Jews by Nazi Germany and is frequently labelled a "Chinese Holocaust".

Conditions of Politics of Memory. Exploitation of history in politics has a long tradition in China. It serves as a means to explain the key role of CCP in the Chinese political regime, something which became especially important after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. The party had to relate itself to the achievements of Mao's policy and revise previous sources of legitimacy, such as the struggle against internal enemies. On one hand, it recognised the necessity of withholding information that Mao's regime was responsible for more deaths than the Japanese occupation, in order to avoid undermining the belief that the party's policy was just. On the other hand, emphasising the positive aspects of Mao's policy (in line with the CCP's interests) was difficult due because Chinese people remembered the tragedies of Mao's rule. The party decided to use a formula that Mao's policy was 70% right and 30% wrong.

Another impulse in politics of memory was the adoption of a narrative on economic development and China's opening up to the world since late 1970s. The situation was further complicated by the 1989 protests in Beijing and other cities. These protests undermined the party's position in society, and the brutality with which they were suppressed damaged China's international image. Thus, in their relations with society, China's authorities decided to refer to historical experiences. They emphasised the opportunities arising from China's development and the re-establishment of its global position. The first stage of this "rejuvenation" was the CCP's victory over Japan. The culmination of the process is supposed to be achieved with the accomplishment of "centenary goals" (increase of GDP per capita by 2021 and reaching a specified level of state development by 2049) established by Xi Jinping.

The Significance of the Japanese Occupation in Politics of Memory. Xi underlined the particular importance of politics of memory during the 2015 celebrations to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The Chinese authorities had previously changed school curriculums so that they emphasised the continuity of repression of the Chinese nation in the 19th and 20th centuries, and during Second World War. In

2014, new national holidays were established: 3 September became Victory over Japan Day, 13 December was named in memory of the Nanjing massacre, and 14 August became the international day of remembrance of “comfort women” (from Korea as well as China), who were sexual slaves for the Japanese army. In 2017, the authorities changed the official name of the conflict with Japan to “The 14-year Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-fascists War”. They decided to recognise 1937, not 1931, as the first year of the conflict. This was intended to strengthen (despite historical facts) a narrative of key CCP achievements during the war with Japan, and the party’s victory over Axis countries. In May, a “Heroes and Martyrs Protection Law” entered into force, punishing criticism of war heroes, destroying monuments or denying the official version of history. China’s authorities created or modernised many museums and places of memory of Chinese martyrdom, such as The Museum of the War of the Chinese People’s Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in Beijing. The CCP’s Central Committee Propaganda Department oversees the proper narrative in the politics of memory, using preventive and repressive censorship, party memos and media control, leaded by the Xinhua agency.

The International Dimension. The dissemination of Chinese politics of memory abroad is conducted by diplomatic missions, Confucius Institutes and local associations of Chinese minorities. Every year, several thousand people with Chinese origins (mostly living in the U.S. and Taiwan) receive invitations from the CCP to participate in summer camps organised in China. These camps include, among other things, history lectures. The 2017 demonstrations by Chinese people living in Paris, following the police shooting of a French citizen with Chinese roots, showed the effectiveness of this policy. Banners were covered with slogans referring to “humiliation by the West” and “rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”.

Politics of memory is frequently used by China as an instrument to apply pressure on other countries. This was visible in 2010 and 2012, during disputes with Japan over islands in East China Sea. The Chinese media engaged in aggressive rhetoric, and provocations led to attacks on Japanese goods and staged demonstrations. Every visit of a Japanese prime minister or cabinet member to the Yasukuni shrine (commemorating Japanese wartime commanders) in Tokyo is publically criticised by China as proof of Japan being unable to accept its past. China uses this argument to contain Japan’s political influence. These actions are not linked to financial demands; for example, in 1972 China refused to accept wartime reparations and Japan has transferred to China more than \$30 billion in development aid since then.

Due to concerns about being perceived as supportive of anti-Japanese politics of memory, most EU leaders (with the exception of the Czech President Miloš Zeman) and U.S. President Barack Obama declined to attend the 2015 celebrations in Beijing to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of Second World War. In 2014, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for the same reasons, refused to accompany Xi on a tour of the Holocaust memorial in Berlin during his official visit to Germany.

The Chinese authorities use politics of memory in diplomacy, and to strengthen national sentiment among Chinese society. This was extremely visible after, for example the NATO bombing of China’s embassy in Belgrade in 1999, and the Hainan incident in 2001, involving the forced landing of a U.S. intelligence plane on China’s Hainan Island. As a result of these and similar events, nationalist sentiment deepened and public attacks on foreigners were reported. Thus, China’s authorities may be afraid that over-provoking national pride can hurt relations with other countries. In the context of trade dispute with the United States, a consumer boycott of American products has been considered but is unlikely to happen. If such nationalist sentiment gets out of the government’s control, it could mean financial losses for Chinese entities (shareholders in U.S. companies) and disappointment among Chinese citizens that could turn them against the government.

Conclusions. China’s politics of memory above all serves the purposes of consolidating the political system based on one-party rule, and explaining the CCP’s development concept. According to the government, unrestricted access to uncensored historical evidence has to be exclusive. Unfettered access to such information could undermine the CCP’s monopoly, leading to a slowdown of China’s political and economic development. Most of China’s political claims concerning, among other things, sovereignty over the South China Sea or Taiwan, are based on manipulation of history. The concept of politics of memory shared and disseminated by the Chinese authorities limits the possible grounds for compromise with the U.S. and the EU on matters such as observing the constitution, fair trade cooperation or environmental protection. Possible concessions towards partners could be seen as damaging to the “rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”, undermining the CCP’s position as a guarantor of accomplishment. That is why the Chinese authorities will continue to use manipulated historical reasoning to reject potential criticism of Chinese legal and political solutions.