Village Loudspeakers to Virtual Chatrooms: 
Mass Media and Multigenerational Memory in Sino-Japanese Relations

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From the Mukden Incident and Japanese aggression that set World War II in motion, to today’s territorial dispute raging in the East China Sea, Sino-Japanese relations in the modern era have been dictated by a lengthy, largely antagonistic, and incredibly complicated history. Considered “the most emotional issue” by many Chinese, public opinion towards Japan has fluctuated dramatically over the past half-century. Contemporaneously, China’s media landscape has decentralized and fragmented—evolving from the monolithic Communist Party mouthpiece of the Mao era, to fledgling commercialization and privatization under Deng, to the vast communities of young netizens and micro-bloggers that have proliferated in the new millennium. My project explored the triangular relationship between public opinion, the media, and the Chinese government, arguing that as China’s media landscape has diversified, so has public opinion towards Japan. Once a simple reflection of the Party line, Chinese sentiment towards Japan today is not uniformly negative, but rather possesses significant gradations between and amongst generations.

The funding I received through the Grua/O’Connell Grant for Independent Research allowed me to travel to China for two and a half weeks over winter break to continue archival research and fieldwork that was critical in producing a thorough and successful honors thesis. During the first leg of my trip, I was based at the National Library of China in Beijing where I was able to access complete, unedited collections of Chinese newspapers and periodicals. I then traveled south to Nanjing, the city that was brutally ravaged by Japanese troops in 1937-1938. Now home to the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall and Museum, Nanjing is a city fraught with history, and still scarred by the Japanese occupation. During my time in Beijing and Nanjing, I recorded over 20 interviews with Chinese people of different ages. Many of their insights were powerful and vivid, giving my research an invaluable human aspect. I am incredibly grateful to Bowdoin and the Grua/O’Connell Grant for Independent Research that gave me the opportunity to further my learning and research abroad.

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