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# Chinese Cyber Nationalism During the Pandemic

## A Discourse Analysis of Zhihu

BY  
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PACIFIC FORUM

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## Issues & Insights

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# **Chinese Cyber Nationalism During the Pandemic: A Discourse Analysis of Zhihu**

*Talkeetna Saiget*

## *Executive Summary*

The COVID-19 global pandemic has elicited a rise in cyber nationalism in China, as the world's most populous nation outperformed the "scientifically" advanced western nations in the handling of the crisis. Chinese netizens on social messaging platform Zhihu cite upsurging cases of COVID-19 and death tolls in western countries as evidence of China's zero-COVID strategy success, and have generated a new trend of Chinese cyber nationalism. Within this new trend, positive perceptions of western countries and their ideologies declined greatly. As previous studies have predicted, Chinese netizens are becoming more and more disappointed in western countries and "have no choice but to side with China." This has also prompted China to be more confident in challenging the global narrative and seeking to guide the international order on COVID-related issues amid the China-US rivalry and thus facilitating a strong emotion of "China against the West." However, this strong surge of emotion does not accurately translate into support of Chinese President Xi Jinping's zero-COVID-19 policy.

## Introduction

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic in Wuhan, China on Dec. 29, 2019, nation states have enacted different strategies to combat this novel coronavirus. China has instituted a hardline zero-COVID policy that includes mass testing, relentless contact tracing, and strict lockdowns. This policy has led to far fewer deaths from the pandemic and stronger economic growth than seen in Western countries. For example, as of May 13, the John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center listed over 82 million cases and nearly 1 million deaths in the United States compared to 2.3 million cases and some 14,500 deaths in China.<sup>1</sup> Chinese President Xi Jinping proclaimed that “the pandemic once again proves the superiority of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>2</sup> The astounding results of his COVID-19 approach has brought nation-wide support to Xi Jinping and boosted Chinese confidence once again.

This paper explores Chinese cyber nationalism during the COVID-19 pandemic as the relationship between the United States and China has deteriorated due to a wide range of issues, including security, the economy, and trade concerns. The first section focuses on existing literature on the topic of Chinese nationalism, identifies debates and trends, and assesses how nationalism affects Chinese foreign policies. The second section of the paper tries to analyze Chinese cyber nationalism using mainstream online postings during 2022 on the topic of the United States’ performance on COVID-19. These postings are taken from the Zhihu (知乎) social media website. By comparing previous results of studies on Chinese nationalism to the current posts on Zhihu about the performance of the United States during the pandemic, the paper will attempt to answer the following questions: 1) How have Chinese perceptions of the United States changed? 2) Has the poor performance of the US during the pandemic created a new trend of nationalism? 3) How has this new trend influenced Chinese foreign policy?

## Literature review

Current literature analyzing and explaining the phenomenon of Chinese nationalism mainly relies on four approaches.<sup>3</sup> The first approach presupposes that Chinese nationalism is highly tied to Chinese foreign policy. Scholars analyze news

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<sup>1</sup> John Hopkins Medical University, The Coronavirus Resource Center <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>. Accessed May 13, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Rachman, Gideon. “Commentary: Will Xi Jinping Be Blamed for China's Zero-COVID Failures.” CNA. May 5, 2022. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/xi-jinping-china-third-term-zero-covid-blame-2663321>. Accessed May 10, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Zhao, Xiaoyu. A Discourse Analysis of Quotidian Expressions of Nationalism during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Chinese Cyberspace. *J OF CHIN POLIT SCI* 26, 277–293 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09692-6>

reports, incidents and propaganda to categorize Chinese nationalism based on its characteristics and specific traits such as “Confucian,” “confident,” “assertive,” “defensive” and “reactive” to name a few. As an example, the success of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics gained media attention of a “confident” and “competing” nationalism in China.<sup>4</sup> American scholar Allen Sues Whiting distinguishes Chinese nationalism as “affirmative, assertive, and aggressive.”<sup>5</sup> Various scholars have pointed out these labels are one-sided and lack systemic empirical research, as they only show one of the few dimensions of Chinese nationalism during a specific period.<sup>6</sup>

The second approach focuses on nationalistic movements such as the protest of the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, anti-Japanese demonstrations in 2005—which were linked to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute in 2012—the 2008 boycott of the French supermarket giant Carrefour and the 2017 boycott of the South Korean supermarket chain Lotte. These movements, combined with the more recent Chinese boycott of foreign companies such as H&M and Nike due to Western concerns of Xinjiang cotton, are seen as evidence of the rise of Chinese nationalism by many scholars as well as China observers. However, a few scholars have recognized that such studies pay attention only to dependent variables—a specific set of events that took place under the heat of contemporary hot-button issues.<sup>7 8</sup> Without surprise, the result of such studies only contributes to the mainstream view that “rising” Chinese nationalism is alarming and Chinese nationalists are violent and xenophobic.

The third approach takes an empirical view of Chinese nationalism through large-scale surveys and interviews. This approach is useful in understanding what people think about domestic and international affairs, as well as their attitudes towards nationalism. For example, Sinkkonen conducted a survey at Renmin University, Peking University, and Tsinghua University in China between April and June 2007 to analyze the opinions of 1,346 Beijing university students on nationalism, patriotism, and foreign policy.<sup>9</sup> There was an approximately 1:1 gender ratio among the students who participated in the study, all of whom came

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<sup>4</sup> Shambaugh, David. “China’s Competing Nationalisms.” Brookings. Brookings, July 28, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/chinas-competing-nationalisms>. Accessed March 2, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Whiting, Allen S. “Chinese Nationalism and Foreign Policy After Deng.” *The China quarterly (London)* 142, no. 142 (1995): 295–316.

<sup>6</sup> Zhao, Xiaoyu. A Discourse Analysis of Quotidian Expressions of Nationalism during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Chinese Cyberspace. *J OF CHIN POLIT SCI* 26, 277–293 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09692-6>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>8</sup> Johnston, Alastair Iain, “Is Chinese Nationalism Rising?: Evidence from Beijing.” *International security* 41, no. 3 (2016): 7–43.

<sup>9</sup> Sinkkonen, Elina. “Nationalism, Patriotism and Foreign Policy Attitudes Among Chinese University Students.” *The China quarterly (London)* 216, no. 216 (2013): 1045–1063.



from different backgrounds. The survey resulted in five conclusions. First, Chinese nationalism and patriotism are empirically distinct. Second, nationalism has stronger ties with foreign policy opinions than patriotism. Third, the study confirmed that the attitudes of Chinese students toward foreign policy differed depending on how nationalistic or patriotic the individual was. In addition, patriotism was associated with cooperative and internationalist attitudes, whereas nationalistic Chinese supported economic protectionism and a more prominent international stance. The fourth conclusion found that about 41% of respondents agreed with the government policy that Taiwan will not be allowed to become independent and that China will use force against Taiwan if it is deemed necessary. Questions regarding Taiwan seemed to have a unifying effect on the opinions of the respondents. Lastly, the study found that Party membership and place of origin divided the respondents, as Chinese Communist Party (CCP) “members and students from rural backgrounds were more nationalistic and patriotic than non-member”<sup>10</sup> urban students.

Lastly, the fourth approach has been an analysis of social media discourse on cyber nationalism, a recent trend in academic research as it avoids issues in existing approaches such as selection bias. Zhang, Liu and Wen analyzed more than 6,000 tweets from 146 Chinese opinion leaders on Weibo (微博). Contrary to the conventional wisdom that cyber nationalism is believed to have pushed the CCP to react more aggressively in diplomacy, the study found that online political discourse is dominated by anti-regime sentiments rather than by nationalistic views, with 76% of opinion leaders being critical of the CCP.<sup>11</sup> Nationalistic sentiment was strong among Japan-related topics, but not in US and Taiwan-related discussions. However, opinions on the US seemed quite tricky as they appeared to fall into two dichotomous camps. One held positive images of the US, the other was what Zhang *et al* calls the “face-slappers” who “slap” the US-admirers with facts about the United States.<sup>12</sup>

## Academic debates

“Rising nationalism” has gained a tremendous amount of attention among scholars, government officials, think tanks and the US media in recent decades. In the view of many China observers, Chinese nationalism has been rising ever since the 1990s when the CCP launched the Patriotic Education Campaign (PEC) and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1060.

<sup>11</sup> Zhang, Yinxian, Jiajun Liu, and Ji-Rong Wen. “Nationalism on Weibo: Towards a Multifaceted Understanding of Chinese Nationalism.” *The China Quarterly* (London) 235 (2018): 758–783.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 773.

nationalist works such as *China Can Say No* (中国可以说“不”) became a best-seller.<sup>13</sup> The Senkaku/Diaoyu island disputes in 2012 alongside massive anti-Japanese demonstrations in Chinese cities further demonstrated this view. In most narratives, rising nationalism is associated with the popular “China threat” theory, which generalizes China’s coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea and other maritime disputes. In a larger context, rising nationalism is evidence of a dissatisfied China challenging a US-dominated international order. In 2021, *The South China Morning Post* reported China’s younger generations have expressed strong nationalist sentiment, while supporting the government’s actions; but this sentiment also poses a significant challenge for the CCP.<sup>14</sup><sup>15</sup> The articles concluded that this trend appeared to be increasing as tensions between China and Western powers rose during the COVID-19 crisis. *The Diplomat* reported a trend of “nationalist cancel culture.” Furious netizens are policing public figures in the name of nationalism, as was the case of Zhang Zhehan, an actor whose career was ruined by netizens after a photo of him taken at the Yasukuni Shrine when he was a 3-year-old appeared on the internet. Cases of such are being cited as clear evidence of rising Chinese nationalism in cyberspace, and some fear that this perceived rising cyber nationalism is intensifying into a near xenophobic nationalistic sentiment throughout China.<sup>16</sup>

Skeptics of this view criticize such media for reporting or analyzing “rising Chinese nationalism” anecdotes from interviews with only a small number of Chinese, while not including any systematic evidence.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the “rising Chinese nationalism” discourse has dominated various news outlets and existing literature on this topic without asking the fundamental questions. How do we know Chinese nationalism is rising? And why?

Empirical studies offer a different view. In 1999, Yu and Zhao interviewed mainland Chinese protestors who demonstrate against the US bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Serbia in the same year. The results of the surveys

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<sup>13</sup> Duan, Xiaolin. “Unanswered Questions: Why We May Be Wrong About Chinese Nationalism and Its Foreign Policy Implications.” *The Journal of contemporary China* 26, no. 108 (2017): 886–900

<sup>14</sup> Mai, Jun, and Wang Amber. “China’s Generation N: The Young Nationalists Who Have Beijing’s Back.” *South China Morning Post*, August 29, 2021.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3146785/chinas-generation-n-young-nationalists-who-have-beijings-back>.

<sup>15</sup> Ma, Josephine. “Is China in Danger of Losing Control of Its Rising Nationalism?” *South China Morning Post*, April 6, 2021.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3128482/china-danger-losing-control-its-rising-nationalism>.

<sup>16</sup> Bingqing, Yang. “China’s Nationalist Cancel Culture.” *The Diplomat*, September 05, 2021.

<https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/chinas-nationalist-cancel-culture/>

<sup>17</sup> Johnston, Alastair Iain, “Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing.” *International security* 41, no. 3 (2016): 7–43.

showed that nationalism and anti-US sentiment were not nearly as strong as other motives, such as anger at the specific event, peer pressure and the excitement to participate in a political protest. Furthermore, Yu and Zhao offered two explanations for why the frequency of protests could not be a reliable indicator of rising nationalism. First, the motive of the participants may vary widely. Second, the more nationalistic group of individuals are more likely to participate in these demonstrations than those with a lower level of nationalism.<sup>18</sup>

By analyzing the Beijing Area Study (BAS), an annual cross-sectional study by Peking University on the values, attitudes, beliefs, opinions and expectations of Beijing residents, Johnston concluded several findings. First, Chinese nationalism has been relatively stable in many measures since the early 2000s. In some cases, levels of nationalism in Beijing in 2015 were lower than the early 2000s. Second, Beijing youth are less nationalistic than older generations, and those born after the 1970s constitute the least nationalistic demographic.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, another dominant assumption in the study of Chinese nationalism, which is especially prominent in Western academic studies, is that Chinese nationalism is orchestrated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after communist ideologies went out of fashion.<sup>20</sup> This top-down process is aimed at legitimizing CCP rule, which seeks to maintain full control over public opinion. The CCP has a long history of controlling China's media for its own goals, even dating back to pre-1949 times. The Yan'an Rectification Movement (整风运动) in 1942 is an example. Even after the days of Mao, nationalism has been utilized in the academic and public spheres to promote a strong image of the Chinese nation, as the nationwide patriotic education campaign (爱国主义教育) that puts heavy emphasis on atrocities committed by foreign nations may suggest. With a long

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<sup>18</sup> Yu, Zhiyuan, and Dingxin Zhao. "Differential Participation and the Nature of a Movement: A Study of the 1999 Anti-U.S. Beijing Student Demonstrations." *Social forces* 84, no. 3 (2006): 1755–1777.

<sup>19</sup> Johnston, Alastair Iain, "Is Chinese Nationalism Rising?: Evidence from Beijing." *International security* 41, no. 3 (2016): 7–43.

<sup>20</sup> Shirk, Susan L. *China Fragile Superpower*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2007.

history of Chinese authorities controlling the media, it almost comes naturally to assume that they are also constructing nationalist sentiments on the internet today.

However, this assumption has been challenged by many scholars.<sup>21 22 23 24 25 26</sup> Recent studies have agreed upon the view that nationalism isn't simply constructed by the government and elites of China. For instance, Cairns and Carlson (2016) conducted a discourse analysis on Weibo during the 2012 Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute, and found that the "harshest nationalist invective was directed not towards Japan but at a Chinese state they characterized as ineffectual and corrupt." Furthermore, these expressions "emerged from the bottom-up in direct response to real-world events and were not part of a public relations campaign orchestrated from Beijing."<sup>27</sup>

From a historical perspective, China's leaders are well aware of and haunted by the reasons for the fall of the previous Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China. Both of the two previous governments fell to the hands of nationalist revolutionary movements that accused weak leadership of the state for allowing foreign encroachment. They recognized nationalism as a double-edged force: it is a way to bolster the legitimacy of the CCP, but also a dangerous force that can also destroy the ruling regime. "The worst nightmare of Chin's leaders is a national protest movement of discontented groups – unemployed workers, hard-pressed farmers, and students – united against the regime by the sheer fervor of nationalism."<sup>28</sup>

## Online Chinese nationalism during COVID-19

Zhihu (知乎), literal translation "do you know" in classical Chinese, is a Chinese online forum equivalent to Quora, where questions are posted, answered, liked, saved and shared by users. Although similar to Baidu Zhidao (百度知道), Zhihu encourages users to engage in professional and in-depth discussions among

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<sup>21</sup> Shirk 2007

<sup>22</sup>Johnston, Alastair Iain, "Is Chinese Nationalism Rising?: Evidence from Beijing." *International security* 41, no. 3 (2016): 7–43.

<sup>23</sup> Bhattacharya, Abanti. "Chinese Nationalism and China's Assertive Foreign Policy." *The Journal of East Asian affairs* 21, no. 1 (2007): 235–262.

<sup>24</sup> Zhang, Yinxian, Jiajun Liu, and Ji-Rong Wen. "Nationalism on Weibo: Towards a Multifaceted Understanding of Chinese Nationalism." *The China quarterly* (London) 235 (2018): 758–783.

<sup>25</sup> Zhao, Xiaoyu. A Discourse Analysis of Quotidian Expressions of Nationalism during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Chinese Cyberspace. *J OF CHIN POLIT SCI* 26, 277–293 (2021).  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09692-6>

<sup>26</sup> Duan, Xiaolin. "Unanswered Questions: Why We May Be Wrong About Chinese Nationalism and Its Foreign Policy Implications." *The Journal of contemporary China* 26, no. 108 (2017): 886–900

<sup>27</sup> Cairns, Christopher, and Allen Carlson. "Real-World Islands in a Social Media Sea: Nationalism and Censorship on Weibo During the 2012 Diaoyu/Senkaku Crisis." *The China quarterly* (London) 225, no. 225 (2016): 23–49.

<sup>28</sup> Shirk, Susan L. *China Fragile Superpower*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2007.

various areas. Zhihu was launched in 2011 and it stands out from its competitors such as Baidu Zhidao and Yahoo! as it not only provides high-quality questions and precise and credible answers, but it also provides users various ways to interact with one another. According to the website ranking and analysis company AlexaChinaz, Zhihu ranked number 12 in China in May 2022 for the website with the most visits, immediately before Taobao, and after Twitter.<sup>29</sup> Before opening to the general public in 2013, Zhihu was a platform dedicated for elite groups, and only allowed users to register through direct invitation and referrals. According to a recent industry report, Zhihu had 370 million registered users in 2020 with over 260 million questions discussed. Among the 370 million users, over 80% were deemed active users.<sup>30</sup> Not only does Zhihu provide a platform for professionals in various fields to connect and exchange information and ideas through Q&A, it also offers interpersonal communications. Users can follow others through questions, comments and homepage of users. Thus, users tend to use Zhihu as a social media platform to build professional personal profiles (Wan, 2020). With users providing basic information such as educational background, location, qualifications and working experience, users can determine the credibility of the source. Song (2021) refers to Zhihu as an online community, a user-generated content platform that has similar functions to other social media platforms such as Wechat (微信) and Weibo (微博).<sup>31</sup>

Through research on user profiles, Zhihu represents youth public opinion as the number of users between 18-35 account for about 80% of the total number of users.<sup>32</sup> According to a user profiles report conducted on Zhihu in 2020, educated young people from urbanized cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen are more prone to use this social media platform.<sup>33</sup> An ordinary Zhihu user would be a young educated urban male entrepreneur who just got out of Tsinghua University and was seeking information on Zhihu to open his new company. The young urban and educated have always been a promising group for the CCP, as they are more willing to express their opinions on political matters than the less educated.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, understanding the influence of Chinese youth opinion and ideological perspectives might provide valuable insight into some of the limits that Chinese

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<sup>29</sup> Retrieved from: <https://alexa.chinaz.com/Top/>

<sup>30</sup> According to a report conducted by chyxx.com:  
<https://www.chyxx.com/shuju/202012/918291.html>

<sup>31</sup> Song, Ge. "The difference of willingness to express opinions on different platforms." (2021).

<sup>32</sup> Share of Zhihu users in China as of October 2021, by age group. Retrieved from  
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1288185/china-zhihu-s-user-breakdown-by-age-group/>.  
Accessed May 04, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Zhi Hu Yong Hu Shu Ju Fen Xi Bao Gao (Zhihu user data analysis report). 2020. *Zhihu column*.  
<https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/79521617>. Accessed April 17, 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Miao, Y. 2020. Can China be populist? Grassroot populist narratives in the Chinese cyberspace. *Contemporary Politics* 20 (3): 268–287.

policymakers face. It can also reveal the extent of support for the government, particularly among the middle class and entrepreneurs.

Sina's microblog Weibo has the largest user base in China<sup>35</sup> and has been a prominent area of study on Chinese public opinion and expressions. However, as scholars observed, Weibo has been used primarily as a platform of information acquisition rather than a platform for discussions. Weibo posts are also limited to 140 Chinese language characters per post, thus restraining users from fully expressing opinions. On the other hand, new users on Zhihu can only post up to 15 answers per day to prevent spamming. However, there are no character restrictions within each post. In this regard, compared to Weibo, Zhihu users can express their opinions freely without limits. Zhao Xiaoyu points out that Weibo has been heavily "polluted" by the 50-Cent Party (五毛党), which is a censorship organ purportedly run by the CCP propaganda arm. Of the 50-Cent Party posts on commercial sites, 53.98% were on Weibo. Therefore, analyzing tweets on Weibo might not reflect unstained opinions.<sup>36</sup> Thus, with fewer restrictions and gaining less attention by the Chinese government, Zhihu provides an ample space to capture a comprehensive nationalist expression and comparatively more authentic opinion of the United States.

This paper aims to explore the perceptions of the United States among Zhihu Chinese netizens in 2022. I will be using the same methodology used by Zhao Xiaoyu in a similar discourse analysis on Zhihu that was conducted in 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic. I will also be using the analytical tool NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software and implement Zhao's coding strategy. I will conclude this paper by comparing my results with those of Zhao in order to see if Chinese opinions of the United States have changed over the past two years of the pandemic and if so, have they inspired a new trend in China's cyber nationalism. Zhao explored what and how people speak about nationalism on Zhihu at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic from January to May 2020. By analyzing four discussion questions posted on Zhihu, Zhao found that Chinese netizens showed a tough stance when dealing with external provocations and a sense of pride in China's handling of the pandemic (53.2%), but comments of direct or indirect disapprovals of China's actions also existed. Among this trend, Chinese perceptions of the US plummeted greatly.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, in their paper on Chinese cyber opinion leaders on the United States, Zhang *et al* found that opinions varied between pro-American and anti-American.

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<sup>35</sup> Song, Ge. "The difference of willingness to express opinions on different platforms." (2021).

<sup>36</sup> Zhao, Xiaoyu. A Discourse Analysis of Quotidian Expressions of Nationalism during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Chinese Cyberspace. *J OF CHIN POLIT SCI* 26, 277-293 (2021).  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09692-6>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

“Nationalist sentiment may arise as the dominant pro-US narrative is called into question by greater exposure to more information. In this way, some people claimed they were forced to become patriotic when they realized the bias of liberal discourses.<sup>38</sup>”

This paper will only analyze two questions posted in 2022 on Zhihu. I used search terms “coronavirus” (新冠), “pandemic” (疫情), and “the United States” (美国) that were published in 2022 to search for relevant questions on Zhihu. I specifically chose two controversial questions that evoked discussions on comparing China’s COVID policy with Western policies. I also took quality (views, follows and likes of a question) and quantity (numbers of comments/answers to a question) into account. Thus, receiving two questions:

1. What do you think about the February 2022 announcement made by the United States and Europe that “the pandemic is basically over”? (如何看待2022年2月起美国和欧洲 “基本宣布疫情结束”?) Follows: 1,374. Views: 2,511,376. Comments: 409. Likes: 140
2. The pandemic in the United States is still serious, but why are some of the people still so happy? (美国疫情那么严重, 有的老百姓为啥还那么开心呢?) Follows: 446. Views: 1,036,762. Comments: 241. Likes: 20.

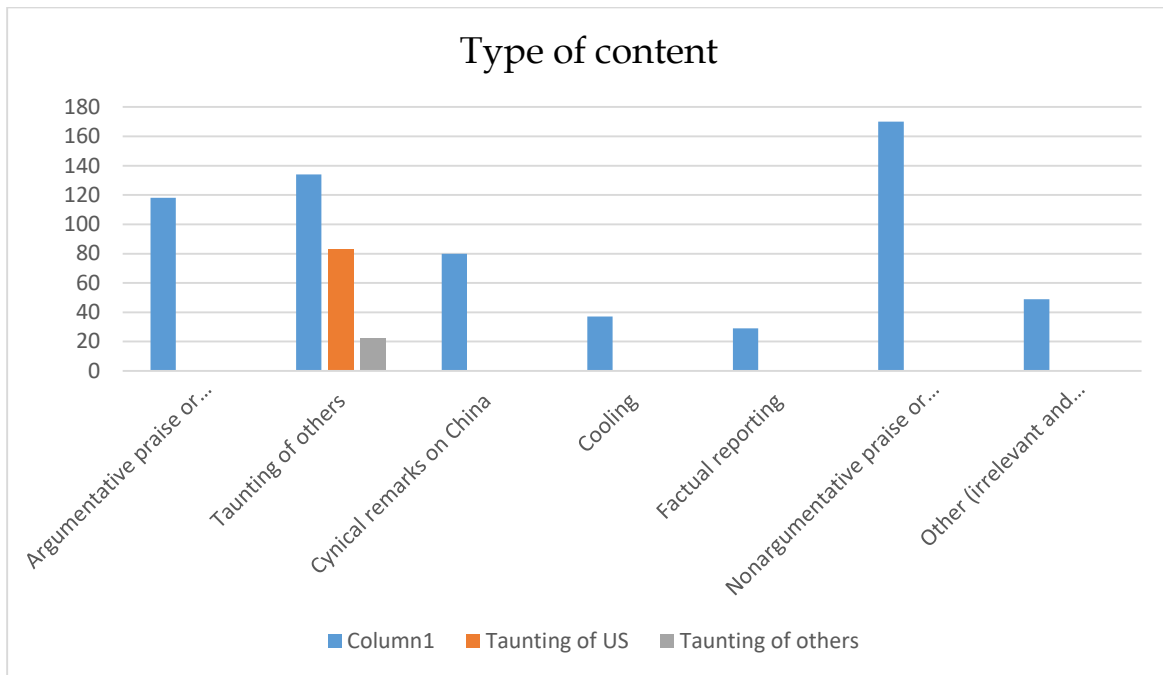
From the two questions, I obtained 606 answers in total (44 answers “covered”<sup>39</sup>). For comparison purposes, this paper uses the same discourse analysis tool NVivo, and the same coding scheme with a bit of a revision as in Zhao’s study. After coding all valid posts by using NVivo, I obtained 1,569 references under 90 nodes. The nodes are categorized into six groups: “Aspirations of Chinese nationalism” (13 nodes and 52 references), “Roots of Chinese nationalism” (6 nodes and 51 references), “Perception of China” (20 nodes and 113 references), “Perceptions of policies” (5 nodes and 100 references), “Significant others” (14 nodes and 379 references), and “Type of content” (9 nodes and 617 references).

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<sup>38</sup> Zhang, Yinxian, Jiajun Liu, and Ji-Rong Wen. “Nationalism on Weibo: Towards a Multifaceted Understanding of Chinese Nationalism.” *The China quarterly* (London) 235 (2018): 758–783.

<sup>39</sup> Zhihu censors answers for 6 reasons, more information of the censorship system can be found here: <https://www.zhihu.com/question/20120168>

**Figure 1: Type of content**



As Figure 1 may suggest, responses can be categorized into seven types of content. (1) Argumentative praise or criticism are comments that take a particular position and elaborates an argument with examples and details. Posts that fall into this category are prone to be explanatory and unemotional. (2) Taunting of others include taunting the United States and taunting other nations. Sarcastic responses toward the United States during the pandemic appeared considerably more than others. (3) Cynical remarks on China refer to posts that directly or indirectly deride or criticize the Chinese government and Chinese people for being too patriotic. (4) Cooling refers to responses that take a neutral stance which emphasize the importance of keeping the discussion rational and less political. This type of content also stresses the importance of respect for other nations. (5) Factual reporting implies no personal emotion toward the topic and describes reports and news of events, policies and government programs as such. (6) Non-argumentative praise or suggestions involves praising or criticizing certain issues without giving evidence or reasons, and are often emotional. (7) Other refers to irrelevant posts that either involves posting pictures with no description, personal posts, commercial posts, or jokes that fail to demonstrate a viewpoint on a topic.



## Aspirations of nationalism and perceptions of China

*Table 1: a cross-tabulation in cyber discourse*

	External provocation	Glorious history	Leadership of CCP or government	Painful history	Significant achievement	Comparing to others
Follow existing approaches	—	—	2	—	2	3
Improve international status	—	—	—	—	—	—
Interdependent	—	—	—	—	—	—
Maintain the development	—	—	1	—	1	—
Make China’s voice heard	—	—	—	—	—	—
Make friends	—	—	—	—	—	—
National rejuvenation	—	2	—	—	—	—
Political stability and unity	—	—	—	—	—	—
Realist gain	—	—	—	—	2	3
Remain modest	—	—	—	—	1	8
Self-determination and national unity	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stand firm	—	—	—	—	3	13
World leadership	—	1	1	—	1	1

Among the two questions, the most salient aspirations of Chinese nationalism on Zhihu include stand firm (19 references, 36.54%), remain modest (8 references, 15.39%), realist gain (7 references, 13.46%), Following existing approaches (7 references, 13.46%), and World leadership (5 references, 9.62%). National rejuvenation (2 references, 3.85%), make friends (1 reference, 1.92%), make China’s voice heard (0 references, 0%), maintain the development (1 reference, 1.92%), interdependent (1 reference, 1.92%) and improvement of international status (1 reference, 1.92%) are least expressed in the discourse. Contrary to Zhao’s study, Zhihu users called for China to stand firm and remain modest stems from comparing COVID-19 fatality rates and policies around the world. As Table 1 shows, China’s “century of humiliation,” glorious history of the past and external provocations were not mentioned, or were mentioned less, in the discourse. This does not mean these roots of aspirations are currently not important, but it signals Chinese netizen’s satisfaction of the government’s zero-COVID policy and a sense of superiority and confidence when compared to other nations. In this light, Western policies on COVID are often expressed on Zhihu as “lying flat” (躺平), which indicates doing the bare minimum to get by, and striving for nothing more than is essential for one’s survival. A typical expression goes as follows:

Lying flat is easy, but reaching zero-COVID is hard, China can lay flat whenever we want, but Western countries can ONLY lay flat. Knowledge comes from practice, we should first observe the consequence of lying flat,

it wouldn't be late to join them if the results are positive. I wouldn't believe a word you say when there's no proof of lying flat is better than our zero-COVID strategy. (Mo Fei, 2022-02-07).<sup>40</sup>

Remain modest holds a less patriotic and a more neutral stance and hopes for coexistence with COVID. However, especially with news on the pandemic in the United States, netizens expressed the view that they would rather stick with the "authoritarian" zero-COVID policy but nonetheless were willing to learn from others. Expressions of realist gain were not significant during the start of the pandemic.<sup>41</sup> However, similar to other expressions, this has also changed through the two years of observation of the pandemic outside of China. The majority points to fatality rates and the US government's ineffectual approaches to contain the virus as a sense of realist gain. Several answers also argue that even with the help of the US government endlessly printing dollars in an attempt to boost the economy, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is still under tremendous pressure and continues to decrease. By contrast, China's GDP in the face of COVID pressures has been relatively steady. As more academic reports on the long-term effects of COVID-19 are published, a number of answers also expressed that with China's zero-COVID policy, long-term effects of COVID will not be an issue with the Chinese population. Thus, China, with its healthy people and economic might, will be leading the world in every aspect in the foreseeable future:

...So, if the pandemic continues, it will bring a huge hit to global productivity. But in China with its policies on COVID-19, productivity will accelerate the growth. With one increasing and the other falling off, it would probably only take 5-6 years for China to become the global economic center! At that time, an immense amount of capital and those with talent will come to China due to low risks. That's when China's technology sector can flourish. At that time, probably 330 million people will have had COVID in the United States. According to The Lancet, 180 million, which is 55% of the people who have been infected by COVID will have long-term effects. Thus, the proportion of people who have heart complications, breathing problems, chronic kidney impairments and such will greatly increase, and will affect the United States' military power. (On the other hand,) With its modern

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<sup>40</sup> Translated by author. Retrieved from:

<https://www.zhihu.com/question/514429734/answer/2339362899> Accessed 19 April 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Zhao, Xiaoyu. A Discourse Analysis of Quotidian Expressions of Nationalism during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Chinese Cyberspace. *J OF CHIN POLIT SCI* 26, 277–293 (2021).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09692-6>

military equipment and healthy soldiers, China's military strength will be phenomenal!

China will help to rebuild the world! China will become the center of the globe! Of course, we won't seek hegemony! (Wei Yan Fan Yu, 2022-02-02)<sup>42</sup>

In this light, China's significant achievements in combating COVID-19, the successful leadership of the CCP, and the comparison primarily with the United States, Zhihu netizens feel confident (17 references, 15.04%), unique and superior (6 references, 5.31%), and civilized (5 references, 4.42%) about their country. The netizens also view the CCP as people-oriented (7 references, 6.19%), long-sighted (5 references, 4.42%) and fair-minded (2 references, 1.77%). Most answers refer to Chinese culture and the Chinese mindset as crucial in containing the virus, and that capitalism, freedom and democracy were obstacles preventing the implementation of effective policies in Western societies. These positive traits are accompanied with a strong sense of "us" against "them" (26 references, 23.01%), with a majority feeling little or no sympathy for Western countries. The decisions of the West to reduce COVID restrictions were seen as a "massive voluntary human experiment" in the netizen discourse, and users were sarcastically expressing their gratitude towards these policies. The quote below received 1,645 likes and greatly captures the sentiment:

...To speak bluntly, I don't care what kind of people die outside of China for me personally, 900,000 or 1 million deaths are just numbers, it's information I use to gain people's interest online or with friends, but it would be a huge problem for me if the village next door has one death of COVID... As for now, I prefer observing the physical effects of COVID in Western countries, the people of the west show the spirit of communism by voluntarily willing to become an experiment, and I would like to express my worthless appreciation by saying "thank you". (Bu Liao Liao, 2022-02-11)<sup>43</sup>

Despite the domestic support of China's policies for combating COVID-19, derogatory perceptions of China consisted of 33.63% of all perceptions. Among negative sentiments, doormat (14 references, 12.39%), speech controlling (8 references, 7.08%), muffed (4 references, 3.54%), and over-optimistic (4 references, 3.54%) were expressed the most in the two questions. Doormat refers to China acting as a yes man when faced with demands from other countries, as well as the image of Chinese people being submissive to the government with little or no

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<sup>42</sup> Translated by author. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.zhihu.com/question/514429734/answer/2333391459>. Accessed 19 April 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Translated by author. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.zhihu.com/question/514429734/answer/2344157704>. Accessed 19 April 2022.

critical thinking which appeared to be a majority view in this case. Netizens criticized over-patriotic/nationalistic comments and blamed the government for driving nationalistic narratives. Thus, doormat is often associated with speech controlling. These posts often emphasized the importance of not only listening to what the media says, but also maintaining a habit of critical thinking. A minority of posts criticized the traditional Chinese mindset that “to live a terrible life is better than to die with honor” (好死不如赖活着), echoing the famous writer Lu Xun who viewed such a mindset as the “illness of the Chinese people.”

Perceptions of policies differed greatly among Zhihu netizens, with 25% support coexistence (25 references), 22% support China’s zero-COVID policy (22 references), 18% disapprove of coexistence (18 references), 9% disapprove of China’s zero-COVID policy (nine references), and 26% remain neutral (26 references). Voices of support for China’s zero-COVID policy resonated with stand firm, unique and superior and follow existing approaches. They criticized Western countries as the main spreaders of the virus thus making it harder for China to contain. Since the CCP is spending a tremendous amount of effort propagating and justifying their policies in every aspect, from big character posters to songs to fight against COVID-19, it should be expected that the Chinese public have been conditioned to believe zero-COVID is the correct and the only way to defeat the virus. However, contrary to this expectation, there were more references of support of coexistence and neutral among Zhihu users. This particular group acknowledged that as other countries have decided to reopen borders, eliminating the virus is almost scientifically impossible. These netizens have called for the government to encourage vaccination rates in order to coexist with COVID. Among this group, there are also those who experienced living in Western countries during the pandemic, or are currently living in Western countries that feel their daily lives were not affected by COVID and it is “nothing but a stronger flu.” Expressions of neutral are similar to those who support coexistence, and aligns with remain modest. However, this group understands the underlying threats to China if the government chooses to reopen. A typical answer is expressed as follows:

Coexistence is inevitable, but we can’t immediately reopen when Western countries do so. We need to overcome some issues, one is lack of medical resources, I remember during the worst days of the Wuhan pandemic, there were shortages for ventilators or even nasal cannulas, patients who aren’t able to have it had no choice but to wait for death at home; the second problem to consider is the density of populated big cities, there may be dozens of carriers behind a positive patient. If these problems are not solved,

the Xi'an situation may occur in any city in China. (Zhihu anonymous user, 2022-02-12)<sup>44</sup>

Only a few users expressed discontent with China's zero-COVID policy; some argued that maintaining the zero-COVID policy was harming the economy, causing unemployment and pressuring small and medium size companies to respond to the policy. Netizens also expressed grievances with the government for only caring about strictly executing its policies with no exceptions allowed. Multiple comments referred to incidents such as the pregnant woman who lost her baby after being turned away from a hospital due to COVID lockdown restrictions during the outbreak in the city of Xi'an. Such harsh policies are being questioned as incidents of individuals losing their lives not to COVID but to lockdown restrictions are increasing.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Chinese cyber nationalism mostly stemmed from external provocations, China's painful history and China's achievements.<sup>45</sup> However, this has changed greatly in 2022. As Chinese netizens were exposed to more information on how other countries are dealing with the pandemic, nationalism today is greatly expressed through comparison to Western countries. Facts of rising COVID cases and death tolls further fueled the notion of "we are better than them." Chinese netizens today are more confident about the regime and more antagonistic toward Western nations. At the same time, voices of discontent with the Chinese people being ignorant and over submissive to power still exist in the discourse, and the government being muffed and over-optimistic. Comparing the results to Zhao's paper, it is likely that the performance of Western countries during COVID have greatly bolstered China's image domestically, with China's positive image rising from 53.2% to 66.37%. However, netizens are divided over the zero-COVID policy, with 26% remaining neutral, and 25% calling for the end to ridiculous lockdown restrictions. In other words, public opinion on policies is fluid as most remain neutral. Whether China should maintain its zero-COVID policy or learn from Western countries to reopen its doors for economic purposes has been a heated debate among Zhihu posts. China's success in recent years when compared with other countries have manifested a strong sense of nationalism, but this has not been translated into support for the government's policies on COVID.

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<sup>44</sup> Translated by author. Retrieved from:

<https://www.zhihu.com/question/514429734/answer/2346166661>. Accessed 18 April 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Zhao, Xiaoyu. A Discourse Analysis of Quotidian Expressions of Nationalism during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Chinese Cyberspace. *J OF CHIN POLIT SCI* 26, 277-293 (2021).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09692-6>

## Perceptions of significant others

To no surprise, the United States remained the most significant other, with 280 mentions out of a total of 412 references to other countries. European countries are seen as the same entity as United States, as the word “欧美” (Europe and US, or Western countries) may suggest, thus the second most mentioned is Western countries or Europe (81 references). Other countries documented include: Japan (nine references), Canada (eight references), France (seven references), Australia (seven references), Germany (five references), Taiwan (three references), Italy (three references), India (three references), the United Kingdom (two references), Sweden (two references), Korea (one reference), and Brazil (one reference).

In total, I obtained 263 references out of 606 posts. Main perceptions of others in general include, deplorable (40 references, 15.21%), respectful (35 references, 13.31%), ineffectual (32 references, 12.17%), interest-oriented (28 references, 10.65%), sharing a common destiny (19 references, 7.23%), praiseworthy (16 references, 6.09%), targeting China (16 references, 6.09%), self-serving (14 references, 5.32%), and publicity stunt (12 references, 4.56%).

Chinese netizens are well aware of domestic issues in the United States. These include the Black Lives Matter Movement, the 2021 United States Capitol riot, rising COVID cases and deaths, rising US deficit and increase in thefts and shoplifting in recent years. Zhihu netizens used these incidents as evidence that the US is no longer suitable to guide the global order, and view the US government as deplorable and ineffectual. Netizens cited Western countries relaxing COVID restrictions as vicious and inhumane, as it exposed vulnerable groups such as the elderly and the poor populations to danger. In addition, economic pressure, ineffectual COVID policies and Western culture were also raised as reasons why Western countries cannot contain the virus from spreading. Thus, the notion of “they have no choice but to give up, even if they were to fight back, Western countries will not succeed. (西方不得不放弃了, 再坚持下去防疫也不会成功)<sup>46</sup>” was commonly expressed in the discourse.

Posts that showed respect and praised others echoed those who supported coexistence. Those who had closer connections with and personal experiences in Western countries displayed more positive attitudes toward Western countries. They often shared personal experience and emphasized that their daily lives were not interrupted by the pandemic. They also stressed that the pandemic should not be viewed politically, and called on Chinese netizens to respect the choices of other countries. Although not in the majority, this type of response held a fair number of

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<sup>46</sup> Translated by author. Retrieved from: <https://www.zhihu.com/question/514429734/answer/2332724786>. Accessed 19 April 2022.

posts on Zhihu. In particular, the post below received 2,011 likes and 328 comments on May 10, 2022:

As the East and the West do not share a common political culture, the public on both sides cannot understand the other's behavior. People with a sweet tooth will never understand others who love spices... If you want to know why Western countries chose to coexist with the virus, why the people support their governments on this decision, and why this doesn't affect their current administrations, you'll need to understand it from a historical, political and philosophical perspective...(Yu Zhou Qu Zhang Sun Lian Cheng, 2022-02-05)<sup>47</sup>

Opinions on Western countries, especially the United States, has plummeted greatly. The Western capitalist interest-oriented mindset was increasingly criticized as the COVID cases and death rates rose. This trend was also demonstrated in Zhang *et al's* findings, where some Chinese claimed to be "forced to become patriotic" when they were exposed to more negative information of Western countries.<sup>48</sup> Overall, negative perceptions of others (72.23%) far outstripped positive perceptions. However, it is worthy to mention that the poor performance by the West during the pandemic was not the sole driver of plummeting US perception in China, as the intensification of US-China competition and propaganda on both sides also played an important role. This includes other hot button issues such as the trade war with the US instituted by former US President Donald Trump, as well as the CCP's view that the expansion of the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) provoked Russia into invading of Ukraine.

### **A single enforced narrative destroyed?**

As lockdown restrictions became more frequent in cities and the government stepped up its harsh policies as COVID spread among Chinese cities in March and April 2022, China's leadership and its strategy were further tested in China's most populous and wealthiest cities. As government officials noticed a surge in infections, they first announced a phased lockdown, first in a few districts, then other districts just a few days later, in hopes of blocking the spread without harming the economy.<sup>49</sup> However, it failed to stop the spread of infection. As of April 3, the city of Shanghai announced a city-wide lockdown. Up until early May,

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<sup>47</sup> Translated by author. This post has received 2011 likes on May 10, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.zhihu.com/question/514429734/answer/2336668563> Accessed May 10, 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Zhang, Yinxian, Jiajun Liu, and Ji-Rong Wen. "Nationalism on Weibo: Towards a Multifaceted Understanding of Chinese Nationalism." *The China quarterly* (London) 235 (2018): 758–783.

<sup>49</sup> Song, Wanyuan. "Why Shanghai Has Abandoned Its 'Relaxed' Approach to Covid." *BBC*. April 20, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-61023811>.

Shanghai had experienced more than a month of strict lockdown and the situation seemed grim.

For the first time, Chinese opinions on social media platforms resonated with mainstream Western news in condemning Chinese policymakers. Online discussions on Zhihu criticized the lockdown policy harshly, especially as news that many people were cut off from fresh food and medical care, and in extreme cases children taken away from their parents or their pets killed in the name of preventing the spread of infection angered people. On 18 April, the city of 25 million people reported up to 285 COVID-related fatalities since 17 April from around 500,000 cases.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, reports of hospitals denying treatment to patients due to the zero-COVID restrictions surged on Chinese social media platforms. On one hand, hospitals in Shanghai were denying patients that tested positive, on the other, even with a negative test, most hospitals were closed, with their staff in compulsory isolation centers.<sup>51</sup> This dire situation left people with no recourse.

Complaints and criticism began to circulate on Chinese social media. A five-minute audio recording on WeChat went viral in May 2022 (excerpts below). It was retweeted on Weibo, TikTok, and Zhihu. For a short period, the government tried to censor this news on WeChat by blocking the original recording from being forwarded; nonetheless, the clip went viral, forcing the government to respond. The recording was of an elderly Shanghai resident named Yu who called a neighborhood committee to report that he had no food and medicine for days, and was not feeling well. He begged an official for help seeking a doctor. The official responded by saying he could only provide traditional Chinese medicine and any other requests were beyond his power.

“It’s not that I don’t want to do anything, I’ve been filing so many other reports. You are not the only one. Today I tried sending a pregnant woman to the hospital. Today I’m dealing with an old man that just died. Mr. Yu, it’s not that we don’t do anything, we have done a lot. Some things are just beyond my power. I have done what the neighborhood committee can do, and I have also done what the neighborhood committee should not.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Stanway, David. “Explainer: Shanghai Death Numbers Raise Questions over Its Covid Accounting.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, April 28, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/shanghai-death-numbers-raise-questions-over-its-covid-accounting-2022-04-28/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ao, Jia and Tang Jane. “Seriously Ill Patients Die after Being Denied Hospital Care in Shanghai Lockdown.” Radio Free Asia, April 11, 2022. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/treatment-04112022151748.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Shang Hai Lao Ren Qiu Zhu Ju Wei Hui Gan Bu: “Jiu Bu Neng Jiu Jiu Wo Men De Lao Bai Xing Ma?” (Shanghai elderly calls neighboring committee for help: “Can’t you save us ordinary people?”). *Chinadigitaltimes*. April 30, 2022. <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/679489.html>.



This is only one example of the situation in Shanghai. As the official states, Yu's case was not the only one that day; the official had other issues to resolve, and most of which were beyond his power to address. The strict zero-COVID policy was indirectly causing presumably more deaths among vulnerable groups than COVID was as city officials failed to address these issues. Within a month, the lockdown had fueled a great amount of public anger and protest, as well as slowed China's economy.

The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) also expressed concerns over China's zero-COVID policy, as countries around the globe were observing the situation in Shanghai. On May 10, *The Guardian* reported that the WHO's director general Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus claimed that "his organization does not think China's Covid policy is sustainable considering the behavior of the virus" thus a shift on policy would be crucial. The WHO further stated that the impact of the zero-COVID policy "on human rights needed to be taken into consideration alongside its economic effect."<sup>53</sup>

However, Xi Jinping announced in a major speech to China's senior officials in May before receiving criticism from the WHO, that China will nonetheless continue its zero-COVID commitment, and warned against any criticism of the policy.<sup>54</sup> The announcements of the WHO were censored shortly after. Many observers view this commitment as a sign of China challenging the Western order, and to demonstrate superiority of its governance. "National leaders in big countries like China (and the United States) use foreign policy to show domestic audiences what strong, capable leaders they are. They sometimes also use assertive foreign policy to divert attention from domestic problems, a tactic that has become known in the West as wag the dog. Chinese leaders are prone to public muscle flexing because they feel the need to stay out in front of a growing tide of popular nationalism."<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

The most salient aspiration of Chinese cyber nationalism on Zhihu today stems from comparisons of China to advanced Western nations, thus, facilitating a strong

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<sup>53</sup> Ni, Vincent. "China's Zero-Covid Policy Is Not Sustainable, Who Director General Says." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, May 10, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/10/china-zero-covid-policy-world-health-organization>.

<sup>54</sup> Davidson, Helen. "Xi Jinping attacks 'doubters' as he doubles down on China's zero-Covid policy" *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, May 6, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/06/xi-jinping-attacks-doubters-as-he-doubles-down-on-chinas-zero-covid-policy>

<sup>55</sup> Shirk, Susan L. *China Fragile Superpower*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2007.

emotion of “China against the West.” However, this strong surging emotion does not accurately translate into support of Xi’s zero-COVID-19 policy.

The pandemic has become a battleground for countries seeking to drive the global narrative. Comparing to the deficiencies of Western nations, China has outperformed what once were the most scientifically advanced and “civilized” countries. The results of this discourse analysis suggest that there are differing opinions on China’s COVID policy. Chinese netizens on Zhihu cite upsurging cases of COVID-19 and death tolls in Western countries as evidence of success of China’s zero-COVID strategy, and have generated a new trend of Chinese cyber nationalism. Within this new trend, positive perceptions of Western countries and its ideologies declined greatly. As previous studies have predicted, Chinese netizens are becoming more and more disappointed with Western countries and “have no choice but to side with China”. This has also prompted China to be more confident in challenging the global narrative and seeking to guide the international order on COVID-related issues amid the China-US rivalry. However, this nationalism trend does not resonate clearly with supporting Xi’s zero-COVID strategy. A majority of Zhihu netizens remained neutral and preferred to live with the virus as many Western nations have chosen to do. Although Chinese public opinion matters, it has its limits. With more negative stories of the lockdown situation in Shanghai and Beijing coming forward, China’s zero-Covid policy is facing tremendous pressure domestically and internationally. All eyes are on Xi Jinping and what he plans to do next.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Overview of nodes

<b>Perceptions of China</b>	<b>Perceptions of others</b>	<b>Aspirations of Chinese nationalism</b>
1.Big-hearted	1.Adversarial	1. Follow existing approaches
2.Civilized	2.Arrogant	2. Improvement of international status
3.Confident	3.Bandwagoning	3. Interdependent
4.Dauntless	4.Benchmark and competitor	4. Maintain the development
5.Doormat	5.Biased	5. Make China’s voice heard
6.Fair-minded	6.Brainwashed	6. Make friends
7.Grateful	7.Deplorable	7. National rejuvenation
8.Long-sighted	8.Friends	8. Political stability and unity
9.Muffled	9.Hegemonic	9. Realist gain
10.No voice	10.Ineffectual	10. Remain modest
11.Over-optimistic	11.Interest-oriented	11. Self-determination and national unity
12.Patriotic	12.Little brother or student	12. Stand firm
13.People-oriented	13.Paper tiger	13.World leadership
14.Peaceful	14.Praiseworthy	
15.Pragmatic	15.Publicity stunt	
16.Resilient	16.Respectful	
17.Speech controlling	17.Self-serving	
18.Unique and superior	18.Sharing a common destiny	
19.Us against them	19. Strategic partner	
20. Victim	20.Targeting China	
	21. Tarring	
	22.Uncivilized	
	23.Untrustworthy	
	24.Unworthy of attention	
<b>Perceptions of policies</b>	<b>Significant others</b>	<b>Roots of Chinese nationalism</b>
1. Support China’s zero-COVID policy	1. The United States	1.External provocation
2. Support coexistence	2. Brazil	2. Glorious history
3. Disapprove China’s zero-COVID policy	3. Korea	3. Leadership of the CCP or government
4. Disapprove coexistence	4. Sweden	4. Painful history
5. Neutral	5. The United Kingdom	5. Significant Achievements
	6. Italy	6. Comparing to others
	7. India	
	8. Taiwan	
	9. Germany	
	10. Australia	
	11. France	
	12. Canada	
	13. Japan	
	14. European Union	
		<b>Type of content</b>
		1. Argumentative praise or criticism
		2. Nonargumentative praise or suggestion
		3. Cynical remarks on China
		4. Taunting of others
		5. Taunting of the United States
		6. Cooling
		7. Factual reporting
		8. Other

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