

## **Reimagining *Riben Guizi*: Japanese Tactical Media Performance After the 2010 Senkaku/Diaoyu Boat Collision Incident**

YASUHITO ABE<sup>1</sup>  
Doshisha University, Japan

This article investigates a Japanese online participatory community, the Hinomoto Oniko project, that emerged after the Senkaku/Diaoyu boat collision incident of 2010 in the East China Sea. Drawing on tactical media as a conceptual framework, this study analyzes how the project challenged the prevailing meaning of a Chinese slur against the Japanese via tactical use of visual media and examines how its cultural and aesthetic performances were reproduced in the Japanese media landscape. This facilitates analysis of the implications of its cultural and aesthetic performances in a networked era.

*Keywords: tactical media, moe, history, Japan, China*

This study examines a Japanese online participatory community that emerged in Japan after the Senkaku/Diaoyu boat collision incident of 2010 in the East China Sea: the Hinomoto Oniko project. The project remade a Chinese term into various images of that term through visual media; specifically, the Hinomoto Oniko project transformed the pronunciation of the Chinese term into a Japanese reading and substituted cartoon-like characters for the term. In doing so, the project sought to create an alternative space for communication between Japanese and Chinese people, albeit briefly. The project did not necessarily succeed in making the most of an opportunity for promoting communication between Japanese and Chinese people, but the project highlights the characteristic of tactical media performance in East Asia.

The Chinese term temporarily disrupted by the Hinomoto Oniko project is 日本鬼子 (*Riben Guizi*), which originally meant “Japanese are devils” in Chinese. As Ogawa (2013) reminds us, the term is “the most derogatory term designating Japanese nationals in contemporary Chinese-speaking countries such

---

Yasuhito Abe: yasuhita@usc.edu

Date submitted: 2014-07-01

<sup>1</sup> This project was made possible with the support of my teachers and friends. I would like to thank Henry Jenkins, Nick Cull, and Randall Lake for their encouragement and valuable feedback on a version of the article. I also extend my deepest gratitude to Rhea Vichot, Eugene Sanchez, Ritesh Mehta, Dayna Chatman, Ioana Literat, L. Paul Strait, Laura Alberti, Joel Lemuel, and Evan Jones for their useful comments. Finally, I am deeply grateful to the editors and peer reviewers at the *International Journal of Communication*.

Copyright © 2017 (Yasuhito Abe). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

as China, Taiwan, and Singapore” (p. 1). Apparently, the term *Riben Guizi* seems to be just a derogatory term designating Japanese nationals as others; however, it has much broader semantic meaning. To fully understand the meaning of this term, it is necessary to consider a historical context from which the term emerged (e.g., Gries, 2005; Ogawa, 2013; Takeda, 2005; Xu & Spillman, 2010; Zhao, 2009). According to Takeda (2005), the Chinese term *Riben Guizi* was born during the First Sino-Japan War (1894–1895). The Second Sino-Japan War (1937–1945) likewise bore witness to a tide of nationwide anti-Japanese sentiment in China because of Japan’s invasion of China. Xu and Spillman (2010) further vividly describe the historical situations from which the term *Riben Guizi* became increasingly ubiquitous in China:

The sufferings and bereavement that local Chinese endured made them coin a folklore phrase, “the Japanese devils” (*riben guizi*) or simply “devils,” to name the Japanese in their private conversations. By classifying the Japanese as devils within the framework of Chinese popular religions, local Chinese villagers managed to account for the behaviour of the occupying Japanese army, which they could hardly explain in human terms. The folklore symbol, which drew on a theological repertoire of Chinese popular religions to describe human behaviour, helped local Chinese come to terms with their traumatic experiences. In this way, they recognized the dominance of the evil... Many former Japanese soldiers recollected scenes in which ordinary Chinese shouted out the phrase “Japanese devils” when they were tortured. Typically, the Chinese first begged the Japanese not to harm them or their loved ones. When they found that their pleas could not keep the Japanese soldiers from harming the people they wanted to protect, they cried “Japanese devil(s)” in a despairing curse. (pp. 105–106)

Thus, it is important to highlight that the term is, in essence, historically loaded. Similarly, Ogawa (2013) correctly points out that the term *Riben Guizi* cannot be captured as just a derogatory term dehumanizing Japanese nationals as others, noting that the term *Riben Guizi* “clearly involves not only [Chinese] derogatory feelings [toward Japanese nationals] but also [Chinese] fear and hatred [toward Japanese]” (p. 1). Accordingly, the term *Riben Guizi* should be thus understood as a term that also directly refers to Japan’s historic status as an aggressor by articulating the linkage between the past and the present.

Many studies have shown that people use language as a key component of culture and use it to shape perception of the world (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981; Carey, 2009; Castells, 2010; Duncan, 1968; Hall, 1966); language thus not merely sets limits to the way in which we discuss issues, but also provides a rich resource for collective action. In Chinese, the term *Riben Guizi* offers a cultural resource for creating, confirming, and maintaining a coherent view of Japanese by emphasizing the incommensurability of national differences between China and Japan. Nevertheless, the Hinomoto Oniko project tactically used this historically loaded term as a fundamental resource for communication between the Japanese and the Chinese. The goal was to modify the term by exploiting the fact that both the Chinese and Japanese use Chinese characters, which are pronounced “hanzi” in Chinese and “kanji” in Japanese.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps more

---

<sup>2</sup> 日本 means “Japan” in both the Japanese and Chinese languages. However, the Japanese and Chinese pronounce the term differently: 日本 is read as “Nihon,” “Nippon,” or “Hinomoto” in the Japanese

significantly, the Hinomoto Oniko project also took tactical advantage of visual media and created a new meaning of the foreign term in a transnational context. As such, the Japanese people did not merely view Chinese characters as a cultural resource shared by both the Chinese and Japanese, but also extended that cultural resource by tactically harnessing visual media.

This study thus draws on a theory of tactical media to investigate the Hinomoto Oniko project. The term *tactical media* was originally formulated by Garcia and Lovink (1997) to describe the cultural and aesthetic intervention and performance that re-engineered the prevailing semiotic structure by imposing alternative signs on the dominant structure (Raley, 2009). Importantly, one of the common elements in tactical media performances is momentary intervention or disturbance. For instance, Raley (2009) drew on De Certeau's (1984) neat distinction between tactics and strategy and argued that tactical media never indicates any systematic political transformation or absolute political victory. Rather, tactical media assume a temporary visual disruption of the dominant political discourse. Raley loosely described the characteristics of tactical media as follows:

The intervention and disruption of a dominant semiotic regime, the temporary creation of a situation in which signs, messages, and narratives are set into play and critical thinking becomes possible. Tactical media operates in the field of the symbolic, the site of power in the postindustrial society. (p. 6)

It should be noted that tactical media performances are not necessarily politically meaningless (Kluitenberg, 2011; Raley, 2009); tactical media may not be able to drastically transform the fundamental political structure, but tactical media performances can raise awareness among the public at large through cultural critique. One should also never overlook the emotional meaning of aesthetic images as a powerful tool for imagining a better world (Raley, 2009).

As will be illustrated in detail, the Hinomoto Oniko project did not transform the shape of the Japanese or Chinese political structure itself, but focused on changing the way people think through redefinition of the Chinese term *Riben Guizi*. The project tactically used the visual media to frame *Riben Guizi* such that the term would hold meaning for both the Japanese and Chinese people. An analysis of the Hinomoto Oniko project could thus provide a glimpse of what such a tactical media performance looks like in the context of contemporary Sino-Japanese relations. However, the Hinomoto Oniko project has major ethical problems, some of which might be unique to the Sino-Japan transnational context, but others could be reproduced in other contexts; despite or perhaps because of them, understanding the Hinomoto Oniko project contributes to scholarship on tactical media performance in the global era.

This study thus seeks to break new ground by considering in what ways the Hinomoto Oniko project tactically reworked the Chinese term as a cultural resource for its participatory practice. Doing so indicates a regional specificity of the contemporary networked media landscape on the grounds that

---

language, whereas the term is read as "Riben" in the Chinese language. Similarly, 鬼子 is read as "Onigo" or "Kishi" in Japanese, whereas the term is read as "Guizi" in Chinese. Importantly, the term 鬼子 is rarely used in contemporary Japanese, whereas in China, the term denotes "devil."

Chinese characters are currently used in everyday life in Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Singapore, among others. With particular attention to media texts and social contexts, this study focuses primarily on investigating the aesthetic and cultural practices of the Hinomoto Oniko project rather than the interaction between the tactical media practitioners and those who are targeted. In doing so, Hinomoto Oniko is viewed as a text in the Japanese media landscape, and the new media practices of the project are illuminated accordingly. In what follows, this article critically examines how the Hinomoto Oniko project emerged in the way it did in light of tactical media theory. The second section of this article investigates ways in which Hinomoto Oniko was reproduced in the contemporary Japanese media landscape. The third section addresses some of the project's ethical issues. In conclusion, the implications of the Hinomoto Oniko project are discussed.

### **The Hinomoto Oniko Project**

The Hinomoto Oniko project emerged after the 2010 Senkaku/Diaoyu boat collision incident. This section briefly describes the incident to provide context on the project and then critically explores why the project developed its tactical media performance the way it did.

On September 7, 2010, a Chinese fishing trawler, *Minjinyu 5179*, entered the sea surrounding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands within Japan's claimed Economic Exclusive Zone in the East China Sea and collided with Japanese Coastal Guard (JCG) patrol boats. At the time, Japan had dominated the eight uninhabited islets as its own territory since the return of the Okinawa Islands to Japan in 1972; however, both the People's Republic of China (China) and the Republic of China (Taiwan) claim that the islands are Chinese territory. Although many territorial issues are settled through diplomatic relations (Suganuma, 2000), the Senkaku/Diaoyu boat collision incident shows that territorial disputes are not always solved through communication between different countries. After the Chinese sea trawler rammed the JCG's boats in defiance of the JCG's order to stop within Japan's claimed Economic Exclusive Zone, Zhan Qixiong, the Chinese captain of the sea trawler, and other Chinese crewmembers were arrested by the JCG and detained in Japan.

The Japanese government claimed that the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are "clearly an inherent part of the territory of Japan" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016, para. 1) and sought to try the Chinese captain under Japanese domestic law. The Chinese government, however, requested the immediate release of the captain partly because such a trial would undermine China's territorial claims to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. On September 24, 2010, the Naha District court of Japan suddenly released the Chinese captain on the following grounds: (1) Japan found no substantial evidence that the captain intended to attack the Japanese ship, and (2) the Japanese government considered the current state of Japan-China relations ("Chūgoku Senchō Hoshaku E," 2010). Ultimately, the Chinese captain was sent back to China on September 25, 2010.

On October 18, 2010—more than three weeks after the Chinese captain left for his country—an anonymous user posted a thread stating, "Let's create a *moe* character called Hinomoto Oniko and turn discriminatory Chinese people into moe characters (*moe-butai*) [by making them become crazy about her]." This was posted to the breaking news board at 2-channel or 2-chan, Japan's largest anonymous bulletin board

system. Although this bulletin board system is primarily a site where a wide variety of Japanese Internet users communicate and engage each other, much research has shown that the site is notorious for various reasons including racism and nationalism (e.g., Kaigo & Watanabe, 2007; McLelland, 2008; Sakamoto, 2011). Because 2-channel allows complete anonymity, there is no way to identify who actually participated in the Hinomoto Oniko project; however, the project may not necessarily be isolated from the inherent characteristics of 2-channel. From the beginning of the project, for instance, the author of the post characterized Chinese people as those who discriminated against Japanese nationals. Without situating Sino-Japanese relations in a historical context, the author apparently cast Japanese nationals as simply one-sided victims of Chinese racists. The author of the post further described the characteristics of Hinomoto Oniko as Yamato Nadeshiko, which traditionally denotes an idealized Japanese woman:

[Chinese name]: 日本鬼子 (*Rbn guizi*)

Japanese name: Hinomoto Oniko

Yamato Nadeshiko style with long black hair is necessary. A 16-year-old-girl becoming very shy because her chest is getting bigger than her other classmates. (Hinomoto Oniko Project Matome Wiki, n.d.-b, para. 13)

This post led to the Hinomoto Oniko project, in which Japanese participants decoded the Chinese derogatory term 日本鬼子 (*Riben Guizi*) in isolation from its original meaning. The ultimate goal was to discourage Chinese people from using the term, which is often employed at Chinese demonstrations against Japan. Whereas *Riben Guizi* denotes “Japanese are devils” in Chinese, the Japanese participants tactically reread *Riben Guizi* as “Hinomoto Oniko” by using *kun’yomi* (a Japanese way of pronouncing Chinese characters). This transformed the Chinese term into a female character on the grounds that the name of Japanese females frequently ends with “ko.”

What is characteristic about the project’s anthropomorphism of *Riben Guizi* is that Hinomoto Oniko effectively became a moe anthropomorphism of *Riben Guizi*, wherein moe qualities were given to the visual image of the Chinese term. Etymologically, the Japanese term *moe* derives from *Manyōshū*—the oldest anthology of Japanese poetry in the eighth century. The literal meaning of the Japanese term *moe* is “to bud” (Galbraith, 2009b), but many scholars and cultural critics characterize the concept in diverse ways (e.g., Azuma, 2009; Galbraith, 2009a, 2009b, 2014; Hashimoto, 2007; Rivera, 2009; Sakakibara, 2004; Shingo, 2005; Yiu & Chan, 2013). For instance, Hashimoto (2007) maintained that moe is “a form of fetishism” (p. 90), just as Azuma (2009) referred to the concept as “the fictional desire for characters of comics, anime, and games, or for pop idols” (pp. 47–48). Indeed, the concept of fictional desire is not new but dates back at least to Ancient Rome. For example, in Publius Ovidius Neso’s *Metamorphoses*, the legendary sculptor Pygmalion fell in love with a female statue that he had carved (Yomota, 2006).

Whereas scholars, such as Hashimoto and Azuma, have viewed moe as a kind of desire for things, Galbraith (2014) defined *moe* as “an affectionate response to fictional characters” (p. 5) and further explained that moe is primarily a response that “is triggered by fictional characters” (p. 6). As Galbraith (2014) indicated, it is important to note that the feeling of moe emerges in the process of interaction between humans and fictional characters (nonhumans). That is, moe cannot emerge without fictional characters, and moe cannot exist without people who interpret the characters with a sense of

moe. As such, feeling a sense of moe necessarily involves a process of self-interaction (Blumer, 1969); people must cultivate feelings of moe toward fictional materials in their own ways.

When it comes to moe anthropomorphism, it is important to ensure that decoders of moe anthropomorphism have the capability to recognize and consume moe elements of fictional characters; indeed, encoders and decoders must share certain codes for tactical media performances to be recognized and interpreted. Despite or perhaps because of the constraint, the Japanese participants added moe qualities to the visual image of the term *Riben Guizi*, and they then deliberately parodied and modified the term by transforming the Chinese characters in a way that the Chinese people had not previously conceived. In so doing, Hinomoto Oniko—as a kind of cultural resistance—emerged from the project that sought to deconstruct and reimagine *Riben Guizi* as a female character, which sought to invite Chinese participation on the basis of their assumed consumption of the image. The Hinomoto Oniko project thus sought to create an alternative space for communication between Japanese and Chinese to ensure that a particular view of the Japanese—produced, shared, and sustained as *Riben Guizi*—would become disrupted in a transnational context. In other words, the project tactically attempted to lay the ground for a transnational communication space by reimagining the historically loaded term as a female character in a shared cultural context through the invention of Hinomoto Oniko.

It is important to stress that Hinomoto Oniko is not the first case of moe anthropomorphism in Japanese culture (e.g., Ideguchi, 2009; Gijinkatan hakusho seisaku iinkai, 2006). For instance, the Japanese police added moe qualities to the visual image of its police stations before the Hinomoto Oniko project emerged. Specifically, the Kanagawa Prefectural Police created cute twin mascots, Seyano Ajisai and Seyano Keyaki, for the Seya Police Department just before the Hinomoto Oniko project emerged in October 2010 (Alt, 2010; Teranishi, 2010). The Seya Police Department described the characteristic of Seyano Ajisai as “a twin big sister; slow-tempo and solid; hooked on sweets” (Kanagawa kenkei seya keisatsusho, n.d., para. 2) and referred to Seyano Keyaki as “a twin little brother; spirited and cheerful; hooked on spicy [foods]” (para. 3).

Like the Hinomoto Oniko project, the Kanagawa Prefectural Police thus gave a description of the characteristics of its mascots by incorporating moe qualities into the mascots and offered a space for a wider audience to develop their own narratives and images of the characters from the original ones. As such, it is important to note that moe anthropomorphism of *Riben Guizi* should be contextualized in contemporary Japanese culture in which various agencies including the Kanagawa Prefectural Police embedded the qualities of moe in their mascots well before the Hinomoto Oniko project.

More important, it is telling that the fundamental design of Hinomoto Oniko is essentially sexualized and erotic: The Hinomoto Oniko project started with Hinomoto Oniko as “a 16-year-old-girl becoming very shy because her chest is getting bigger than her other classmates” (Hinomoto Oniko Project Matome Wiki, n.d.-b, para. 13). The sexualized and erotic aspects of Hinomoto Oniko can be better understood in relation to the concept of moe. Shingo (2005) discussed the concept of moe in relation to images of fictional characters rather than the characters per se. One of the categories of moe images is *erokawaii-kei moe*, which is described as

images in which the moe heroine is sexualized, to an extent limited by a) her innocence and b) her consent, for the benefit of the male viewer or his narrative proxy. Found most commonly in erotic games, manga and anime, and as such is often conflated with lolicon. (Shingo, 2005, para. 4)

As the description suggests, the Hinomoto Oniko project added sexualized and erotic images to the Chinese term *Riben Guizi* with the heterosexual Chinese male as the target audience. It is thus important to note that the semipornographic design of Hinomoto Oniko apparently promotes a male heterosexual culture. From a feminist perspective, Miller (2011) examined gendered aspects of Japan's cultural diplomacy and provided a cue that demonstrates that Japanese popular culture favored by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs tends to maintain and promote "male geek culture" (p. 18). Although the Japanese government was not related to the Hinomoto Oniko project per se, the Hinomoto Oniko project likewise designed Hinomoto Oniko in a way that it embodied male heterosexual desires and fantasies.

Soon after the first thread posted to 2-channel, the Hinomoto Oniko project launched its Web page and designed the characteristics of Hinomoto Oniko in greater depth. Along with her Japanese kimono style, for example, her favorite food was defined as a local Japanese food (*wanko soba*); the nationality of Hinomoto Oniko was not explicitly shown on the site. In doing so, the Hinomoto Oniko project triggered narratives and images of Hinomoto Oniko in the public imagination by describing her characteristics to exploit her sexualized images as a tactical medium to challenge the Chinese term *Riben Guizi* in a covert way. Correspondingly, the goal of the project was gradually clarified. The Charter of the Hinomoto Oniko project stated,

Hinomoto Oniko is a non-political character by which we do not bounce back against [the Chinese] derogatory term, but look at it critically, and personify it as a *moe*-character. [Our goal is] to create a different meaning and concept of *Riben Guizi* by creating a character named Hinomoto Oniko. If [the Chinese people] learned this new concept then came upon an [Chinese] anti-Japan demonstration or riot where infuriated [Chinese] people chanted slogans with the *Riben Guizi* flags, what would they think? If [the Chinese people] wonder what *Riben Guizi* means, then Googling the word will show many *moe*-short stories (SS) and cute Onikos—what would they think? If they see an image of the anti-Japanese demonstration, then they assume that the [Chinese] *moe*-otaku are demonstrating, don't they? (Hinomoto Oniko Project Matome Wiki, n.d.-c, paras. 2–3)

Whereas the Hinomoto Oniko project clearly designated Hinomoto Oniko as "a non-political character," this provocative charter brought about the project's political tactics with which its participants were engaged in interrupting Chinese demonstrations against Japan by employing moe anthropomorphism of the Chinese term. In doing so, the charter not merely cast Japanese nationals as a one-sided victim of the Chinese term *Riben Guizi* but also reinforced a view of the Hinomoto Oniko project as more tactical or "matured" when compared with Chinese people engaging in anti-Japanese demonstrations. More clearly, the Hinomoto Oniko project Web page's frequently asked questions (FAQ) section explicitly described "the core value" of the project as follows:

[We] implicitly counterattack [against Chinese demonstrations against Japan] by offering a *moe*-character, and alleviating [their] anger against Japan. We believe [that our project] will produce political effects [on the Chinese people]. (But the Chinese people cannot argue back because we remain silent on the real purpose of our counterattack.) (Hinomoto Oniko Project Matome Wiki, n.d.-a, para. 9)

As such, the Hinomoto Oniko project was clearly aware of its political impact on Chinese people: to silence the voices of Chinese people involved in anti-Japanese demonstrations. Just as Iwabuchi (2001, 2002) showed that Japan's transnational popular culture contributes to suppressing memories of Japanese wartime aggression in other Asian nations, the Hinomoto Oniko project thus represented *Riben Guizi* as a *moe* character that is a useful political resource for rendering the legacy of Japan's wartime brutality more or less irrelevant in a contemporary society.

Given the goal and the value of the Hinomoto Oniko project, its participants portrayed more than 1,500 images of Hinomoto Oniko to minimize the Chinese people's anti-Japanese sentiment. On November 1, 2010, a single representative image of Hinomoto Oniko was chosen by election. Then, on November 6, 2010, the Hinomoto Oniko project launched another campaign to create "Koni'pon" or "Kohinomoto," which is another *moe* anthropomorphism of a Chinese term against Japan: 小日本 (*Xiao Riben*; Hinomoto Oniko Project Matome Wiki, n.d.-d, para. 3). The term *Xiao Riben* means "Small Japan" in Chinese, and the Hinomoto Oniko project decoded *Xiao Riben* as *Koni'pon* by using kun'yomi and again personified the Chinese derogative term. In comparison with the sexualized design of Hinomoto Oniko, *Koni'pon* was set up as a little and innocent girl. On November 21, 2010, a representative image of *Koni'pon* was also selected by election. Representative images of both Hinomoto Oniko and *Koni'pon* are shown in Figures 1 and 2, respectively.

There is also useful information on the Hinomoto Oniko project at its Web page's FAQ section; one FAQ highlighted the project's consideration of the Chinese people as its target audience, warning that Hinomoto Oniko cannot wear a military uniform because this might irritate the Chinese. As such, the project apparently considered the war memory of the Chinese people and imagined to what extent Chinese people would perceive Hinomoto Oniko as offensive; however, the project did not necessarily ponder why Chinese people have used the term. The FAQ section simply referred to *Riben Guizi* as "a derogatory term used by some Chinese" (Hinomoto Oniko Project Matome Wiki, n.d.-a, para. 1). By defining *Riben Guizi* as the term meant to dehumanize Japanese nationals as devils, the Hinomoto Oniko project and its participants missed opportunities to think seriously about why the term is still used in everyday life in China. As a result, the Hinomoto Oniko project apparently contributed to a narrowing communication space for serious grassroots dialogue on the legacy of Japanese wartime brutality and the term *Riben Guizi* between Japanese and Chinese people in a networked era.



Figure 1. The representative image of Hinomoto Oniko by ©No.15 BomVQKBWmRwo.



**Figure 2. The representative image of Koni'pon by ©KIIRA☆.**

At one level, the Hinomoto Oniko project is a case of tactical media in a contemporary Japanese society; the project certainly imposed Hinomoto Oniko as an alternative sign on the Chinese term *Riben Guizi* to disrupt the Chinese worldview that is maintained via the term. However, the project was more than this. The Hinomoto Oniko project took tactical advantage of the sexualized aspects of Hinomoto Oniko as a political resource for rendering the historically loaded term useless for Chinese collective action against Japan. Whereas there are no comprehensive data that demonstrate how Chinese Internet users actually perceived Hinomoto Oniko, the tactical but nonreflexive transformation of *Riben Guizi* as a moe character may have affected the Chinese view of Japanese as others, albeit temporarily (e.g., Hyakugen, 2011; Iotani, 2010; Lewis, 2010; Lin, 2010). That said, this section shows that, from the start, the Hinomoto Oniko project had some major problems about the design of Hinomoto Oniko.

### Reproducing Hinomoto Oniko

This section further investigates the tactical media performance of the Hinomoto Oniko project by examining the discourse of Hinomoto Oniko in the Japanese media landscape. The Hinomoto Oniko discourse was produced and reproduced via a wide range of media, including mainstream media, online media, Twitter, YouTube, pixiv, Nico Nico Douga, and so forth, in both Japanese and Chinese. Thus, a full investigation into the Hinomoto Oniko discourse requires an analysis of all of the media. However, the scope and delimitation of this research on the Hinomoto Oniko discourse are more modest. This section focuses on how Japanese mainstream media and major Japanese national dailies in particular represented Hinomoto Oniko and then investigates a case from one specific online medium. This sketches some of the ways in which the Internet users reproduced Hinomoto Oniko as a tactical media performance in the Japanese media landscape. An analysis of the mainstream media coverage on Hinomoto Oniko is fundamentally important because doing so illuminates key characteristics of the Japanese media environment in which the Hinomoto Oniko project further engaged with tactical media practices.

The newspaper articles used for this research were retrieved from Japan's five national major dailies: *The Asahi Shimbun*, *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Mainichi Shimbun*, *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, and *Sankei Shimbun*. Of these, *The Asahi Shimbun*, *Mainichi Shimbun*, and *Sankei Shimbun* ran articles on Hinomoto Oniko (Inotani, 2010; "Konshū No Hondana," 2011; "Moe Wa Nicchū O Sukuu," 2011; Onoda, 2011). It is important to note that an analysis of the media coverage of Hinomoto Oniko shows that the Japanese major national newspapers—including *The Asahi Shimbun* as a representative of Japan's liberal newspaper—positively acknowledged the Hinomoto Oniko project.

*Sankei Shimbun* reported on Hinomoto Oniko on November 25, 2010, for the first time in Japan. The short article, entitled "Would a Beautiful Girl 'Hinomoto Oniko' be [Japan's] Best Trump Card on Diplomacy Against China?" reported that images of Hinomoto Oniko, deployed as a sort of Japanese diplomatic counterattack, reportedly dampened China's fighting spirit. The article maintained that the project represented a style of "grassroots diplomacy" (*kusanone gaikō*) wherein Japanese participants individually composed Hinomoto Oniko songs and then translated them into Chinese. The author also asserted that "[the concept of] *moe* transcends the national border. Why doesn't the [Japanese] government adopt Hinomoto Oniko as the official character and play the best trump card on diplomacy against China?" (Inotani, 2010, p. 14).

Moreover, *The Asahi Shimbun* ("Moe Wa Nicchū O Sukuu," 2011) ran an article entitled "Moe Saves Japan and China," on June 9, 2011. Its headline was "Counterattack Against the Term of Abuse Through the Character of [Hinomoto] Oniko." *The Asahi Shimbun* thus viewed *Riben Guizi* as "the term of abuse" without considerations of a historical context from which the term emerged in China. Similarly, the *Mainichi Shimbun* ("Konshū No Hondana," 2011) noted on June 5, 2011, that "it makes me relieved [to learn] an episode that the Japanese Internet users who were abused by Chinese people as *Riben Guizi* online, designed one character named as Hinomoto Oniko after another and thus dislocated anti-Japanese sentiment in China" (p. 10). As such, mainstream Japanese newspapers more or less unanimously viewed Hinomoto Oniko as a cultural resource for Japan's counterattack against Chinese racism. In doing so, Japanese newspapers embraced the underlying assumptions that the Hinomoto Oniko project holds; that

is, the term *Riben Guizi* merely epitomizes the case of Chinese racial discrimination against Japanese, the project provided a cultural resource for fighting against Chinese racism tactically, and the Hinomoto Oniko project is tactically (and more or less morally) superior to Chinese people who use the term *Riben Guizi*. This is similar to Iwabuchi (2001, 2002), who detailed the transnationalization of Japanese popular culture that contributes to claiming Japan's cultural prominence in Asian nations. As such, Japanese mainstream newspapers did not necessarily offer opportunities for the project to consider its tactical media performance reflexively. This uncritical view of the Hinomoto Oniko project by Japanese mainstream media accordingly created a media environment in which Hinomoto Oniko was further reproduced.

Whereas Japanese mainstream newspapers almost unanimously praised the Hinomoto Oniko project and thus did not necessarily provide opportunities for the project to promote communication between Japanese and Chinese people in a reflexive way, it is important to note that online media did not necessarily celebrate the Hinomoto Oniko project in the Japanese media landscape. The case study on the discourse on Hinomoto Oniko and online media focuses on YouTube. As Jenkins (2006) noted, YouTube is a "site of civic discourse" (p. 272), which might offer an opportunity to understand how the online media platform affords expressive capabilities to engage in participatory culture. Although Hinomoto Oniko was widely reproduced on other online media platforms, YouTube is arguably the most accessible media to a wide variety of Internet users in part because its users can watch the online media platform even without membership registration (Fujitake, 2012). Unlike other online media platforms such as Nico Nico Douga whose main users exist in younger generations in particular (*Sōmushō jōhō tsūshin seisaku kenkyūjo*, 2015), an analysis of YouTube reveals how Japanese people spanning several generations generated discourse on Hinomoto Oniko in diverse ways. Because videos posted on YouTube are usually made accessible via other social networking media (Jenkins, 2007), it is not easy to demonstrate how images of Hinomoto Oniko actually gained visibility and were spread. Given space limitations, this section examines one specific YouTube video on Hinomoto Oniko in depth. This case was chosen because it illuminates how Hinomoto Oniko created a cultural resource in which different audiences participated.

On November 12, 2010, an anonymous Japanese user posted a video in which his small daughter dressed up in a costume to resemble Hinomoto Oniko. Titled "Live-Action Hinomoto Oniko," this video had both English and Chinese subtitles and showed the girl wearing Hinomoto Oniko's made-in-China horns and saying, "I am Hinomoto Oniko!" Rather than adhering to the original design features of Hinomoto Oniko, the author of the video thus developed his own narratives of Hinomoto Oniko. One critical response to the video read,

[During the Second Sino-Japan war] my [Japanese] relative was killed outside Nanyangcheng in China. My aunt was attacked by [Chinese] bandits, and trying to get out of danger, she threw herself into a well killing her and her brothers. The [Chinese] term *Riben Guizi* was invented to insult dead Japanese soldiers and families. It has been 65 years since the end of the war, and I assume that it would be difficult for a younger generation to understand [the wartime period], but the term *Riben Guizi* is unbearable to a [Japanese] bereaved family. . . . It is an unbearable sight. (Wilddog0422, 2010)

Whereas Japanese newspapers viewed the term *Riben Guizi* as a derogatory term from China, it was more than that for the author of the comment. The author brought about the Chinese wartime attack by articulating the link between the past and the present and problematized the transformation of the term *Riben Guizi* as Hinomoto Oniko. Just as did Japanese mainstream national dailies, the author of this critical comment did not fully consider a historical context from which the term *Riben Guizi* emerged in China, but contributed to generating a critical discourse on Hinomoto Oniko in the way that the Hinomoto Oniko project may not have necessarily conceived. The person who posted the video replied to this critical comment,

Thank you for your valuable comments . . . but, we should face the fact that most of the contemporary Japanese people prefer to deal with the [Chinese] derogative term with aplomb rather than to counterattack with decial, which implicitly suggests that [we, Japanese] do not seek to revive a war long past. We hope instead to achieve peace [between Japan and China]. (RioLenaMovie, 2010)

Although the Hinomoto Oniko project originally created Hinomoto Oniko as a “non-political character,” Hinomoto Oniko as a text thus spurred the dialogue on Sino-Japanese relations between different Japanese generations. Whereas Japanese mainstream national newspapers uncritically celebrated the Hinomoto Oniko project for its tactical media performance, Internet users drew the meanings of Hinomoto Oniko from the project in their own ways. This developed communication in a way the Hinomoto Oniko project did not necessarily predict. In this specific YouTube video, Hinomoto Oniko, not the Hinomoto Oniko project per se, apparently contributed to creating a space for communication among the Internet users in Japan.

This section indicates the tactical media performance of the project in the context of the Japanese media landscape. As shown, Japanese mainstream newspapers more or less unanimously celebrated the Hinomoto Oniko project for its tactical media performance. Japanese mainstream newspapers’ portrayal of Hinomoto Oniko thus did not necessarily serve as an opportunity for the project to consider its cultural intervention reflexively in the Japanese media landscape. However, an analysis of the YouTube video shows that Internet users reused Hinomoto Oniko in their own ways.

As such, they created an alternative space for communication on Sino-Japanese relations among Internet users in Japan. Although Japanese mainstream newspapers praised the tactical media performance of the project, some of the Hinomoto Oniko discourse was produced and reproduced in the Japanese media landscape, thereby creating a space for communication in a networked era.

### **Demystifying the Hinomoto Oniko Project**

Although the Hinomoto Oniko project affords capabilities to engage with tactical readings of the Chinese term *Riben Guizi*, it is not necessary to celebrate the project for at least two reasons. The first reason is the sexual and gender dimensions of Hinomoto Oniko. Indeed, Hinomoto Oniko’s sexually suggestive design is certainly readable as semipornographic images directed toward an audience of heterosexual male young adults in particular. Although the moe anthropomorphism of *Riben Guizi* could

have been one of the factors responsible for its appeal to some Chinese Internet users, it is important to note that, from the start, the project did not necessarily problematize the issue of sexism in the design of Hinomoto Oniko. The project rather highlighted the gendered aspects of Hinomoto Oniko as a useful political resource for rendering the historically loaded term *Riben Guizi* appear as nothing more than a simple reflection of moe production and consumption.

Second, the Hinomoto Oniko project was not fully cognizant of the wartime collective memories of China. From the start, the Hinomoto Oniko project failed to consider a historical context from which the term *Riben Guizi* emerged. Thus, it engaged in moe anthropomorphism of the Chinese term *Riben Guizi* accordingly. Although the project certainly considered to what extent it would be offensive for Chinese people to see a military-uniform-wearing Hinomoto Oniko, the Hinomoto Oniko project ultimately may have contributed to constraining public imaginations about the Chinese people through Hinomoto Oniko precisely because the project ended up casting the Japanese as one-sided victims of *Riben Guizi* as a racially offensive term. Racist terms of any kind should not be tolerated, but the Hinomoto Oniko project did not necessarily contribute to generating an alternative space for grassroots dialogues between people with different collective memories in a reflexive way.

### Conclusion

This article elaborates on a new form of communication in which the Internet users were engaged with the tactical use of media by examining the Hinomoto Oniko project. The project reread the Chinese term 日本鬼子 (*Riben Guizi*) by using kun'yomi and harnessed visual media in a witty way to discourage the Chinese people from using the term against them. Analyzing the project reveals a new dimension of tactical media performance in an East Asian context. A dominant view of Japanese as devils, nonhumans, and others—which was frequently produced and maintained by the Chinese term *Riben Guizi*—was disrupted by a Japanese tactical media performance. This attempted to invite Chinese participation in creating a shared meaning of Hinomoto Oniko. In doing so, this study illustrates that Chinese characters can be used as shared cultural resources in East Asia for making a transnational communication space in which Japanese Internet users created the Hinomoto Oniko project for the Chinese people as their target audience.

However, this study shows that the Hinomoto Oniko project did not necessarily generate an alternative space for grassroots dialogue between Japanese and Chinese people through the invention of Hinomoto Oniko in a reflexive way. From the start, the project defined the term *Riben Guizi* as just a derogatory term. This missed an opportunity to think critically about the term in relation to the legacy of Japanese wartime brutality. Furthermore, the sexualized design of Hinomoto Oniko supports male heterosexual culture. As Iwabuchi (2001) and Miller (2011) remind us, the transnationalization of Japanese popular culture involves major problems including nationalism and sexism in many ways. Similar to Japanese mainstream national newspapers, the Hinomoto Oniko project did not overcome the problems, as described above. Simultaneously, Hinomoto Oniko as a text provided different opportunities in a contemporary Japanese society in unexpected ways.

This study examined only a few examples of the reproduction of Hinomoto Oniko. To fully capture the reproduction of Hinomoto Oniko, it is necessary to examine the entire content of at least both the Japanese and Chinese mass media and their websites. Perhaps more crucially, this study did not fully investigate Chinese sources for a systematic analysis of the Chinese reception of Hinomoto Oniko. That said, the findings indicate opportunities and challenges that transnational tactical media practitioners faced in East Asia.

### References

- Alt, M. (2010, September 7). Yokohama police mascots more cute than cops. Retrieved from <http://travel.cnn.com/tokyo/life/yokohamas-cop-character-caper-724032/>
- Azuma, H. (2009). *Otaku: Japan's database animals*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Carey, J. W. (2009). *Communication as culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Castells, M. (2010). *The power of identity: The information age: Economy, society, and culture volume II*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Chūgoku senchō hoshaku e [Releasing the Chinese captain]. (2010, September 25). *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, p. 2.
- De Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Duncan, H. D. (1968). *Symbols in society*. London, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Fujitake, A. (2012). *Zusetsu nihon no media* [Illustrations on Japan's media]. Tokyo, Japan: NHK Shuppan.
- Galbraith, P. W. (2009a, October 31). Moe: Exploring virtual potential in post-millennial Japan. *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, 5. Retrieved from <http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2009/Bryce.html>
- Galbraith, P. W. (2009b). *The otaku encyclopedia: An insider's guide to the subculture of cool Japan*. Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha.
- Galbraith, P. W. (2014). *The moe manifesto*. Tokyo, Japan: Tuttle Publishing.

- Garcia, D., & Lovink, G. (1997, May 16). The ABC of tactical media. Retrieved from <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/78529791/The-ABC-of-Tactical-Media>
- Gijinkatan hakusho seisaku iinkai. (2006). *Gijinkatan hakusho* [White paper on anthropomorphism]. Tokyo, Japan: Aspect.
- Gries, P. H. (2005). China's "new thinking" on Japan. *The China Quarterly*, 184, 831–850.
- Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Hashimoto, M. (2007). Visual kei otaku identity: An intercultural analysis. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 16(1), 87–99.
- Hinomoto Oniko Project Matome Wiki (n.d.-a). FQA. Retrieved from <https://www16.atwiki.jp/hinomotooniko/pages/20.html>
- Hinomoto Oniko Project Matome Wiki. (n.d.-b). Gaiyō [Brief summary]. Retrieved from <http://www16.atwiki.jp/hinomotooniko/>
- Hinomoto Oniko Project Matome Wiki. (n.d.-c). Hinomoto Oniko riyō gaidorain [The guideline for using Hinomoto Oniko]. Retrieved from <https://www16.atwiki.jp/hinomotooniko/pages/38.html>
- Hinomoto Oniko Project Matome Wiki. (n.d.-d). Sabu kyara setteishū [The setting of minor characters]. Retrieved from <http://www16.atwiki.jp/hinomotooniko/pages/34.html>
- Hyakugen, K. (2011). *Ota chūgokujin no yuutsu* [The melancholy of Chinese otaku]. Tokyo, Japan: Takeda Random House Japan.
- Ideguchi, A. (2009). Moeru chihō shinkō no yukue: "Moe" okoshi no kanōsei to sono kadai ni tsuite [The future of moe-driven regional development: The possibilities and challenges of "moe"-driven regional promotion]. *Chiiki sōgō kenkyū*, 37(1), 57–69.
- Inotani, C. (2010, November 25). Bishōjo Hinomoto Oniko wa taichū gaikō no kirifuda? [Would a beautiful girl "Hinomoto Oniko" be [Japan's] best trump card on diplomacy against China?]. *Sankei Shinbun*, p. 14.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2001). *Toransunashonaru Japan* [Transnational Japan]. Tokyo, Japan: Iwanami Shoten.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2002). *Recentering globalization: Popular culture and Japanese transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.

- Jenkins, H. (2007, May 28). Nine propositions towards a cultural theory of YouTube. Retrieved from [http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/05/9\\_propositions\\_towards\\_a\\_cultu.html](http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/05/9_propositions_towards_a_cultu.html)
- Kaigo, M., & Watanabe, I. (2007). Ethos in chaos? Reaction to video files depicting socially harmful images in the Channel 2 Japanese Internet forum. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1248–1268.
- Kanagawa kenkei seya keisatsusho. (n.d.). Seya keisatsusho no masukotto kyarakutā [Mascots for Seya Police Department]. Retrieved from <https://www.police.pref.kanagawa.jp/ps/47ps/47mes/47mes401.htm>
- Kluitenberg, E. (2011). Legacies of tactical media: The tactics of occupation: From Tompkins Square to Tahrir. Retrieved from [http://networkcultures.org/\\_uploads/NN5\\_EricKluitenberg.pdf](http://networkcultures.org/_uploads/NN5_EricKluitenberg.pdf)
- Konshū no hondana: Shinkan [New books in this week]. (2011, June 5). *Mainichi Shimbun*, p. 10.
- Lewis, L. (2010, December 4). Japan blunts Chinese insults by turning them into cutesy figures. *The Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/public/sitesearch.do?querystring=oniko&p=tto&pf=all&bl=on>
- Lin, C. (2010, November 1). Meng xi riben guizi fangong Zhongguo [Moe-anthropomorphism of Riben Guizi counterattacks China]. *The Liberty Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2010/new/nov/1/today-int5.htm>
- McLelland, M. (2008). "Race" on the Japanese Internet: Discussing Korea and Koreans on "2-channeru." *New Media & Society*, 10(6), 811–829.
- Miller, L. (2011). Cute masquerade and the pimping of Japan. *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, 20, 18–29.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2016, April 13). About the Senkaku Islands. Retrieved from <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/index.html>
- Moe wa nicchū o sukuu: Hyakugen Kagohitsuji san Tomisaka Satoshi san [Moe saves Japan and China by Mr. Hyakugen Kagohitsuji and Mr. Tomisaga Satoshi]. (2011, June 9). *The Asahi Shimbun*, p. 17.
- Ogawa, M. (2013). Mezentiusu to Riben Guizi: Werugirusu no jojishi to nihonhei no rekishiteki taiken ni kansuru hikaku kōsatsu [Mezentius and the Japanese devil (Riben Guizi): A comparative study of Virgil's epic and a historical experience of Japanese soldiers]. *Nagoya Daigaku Bungakubu Kenkyū Ronshū: Bungaku*, 59, 1–33. Retrieved from [http://ir.nul.nagoya-u.ac.jp/jspui/bitstream/2237/17719/1/%E6%96%87%E5%AD%A659\\_1\\_%E5%B0%8F%E5%B7%9D.pdf](http://ir.nul.nagoya-u.ac.jp/jspui/bitstream/2237/17719/1/%E6%96%87%E5%AD%A659_1_%E5%B0%8F%E5%B7%9D.pdf)

- Onoda, Y. (2011, February 4). Otona mo gijinka moe [*Moe-anthropomorphism even for adults*]. *Sankei Shimbun*, p. 3.
- Raley, R. (2009). *Tactical media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- RioLenaMovie. (n.d.). Response to Wilddog0422 [YouTube comment]. Retrieved from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1aFT7G3U\\_8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1aFT7G3U_8)
- Rivera, R. (2009). The otaku in transition. *Journal of Kyoto Seika University*, 35, 193–205.
- Sakamoto, R. (2011). "Koreans, go home!": Internet nationalism in contemporary Japan as a digitally mediated subculture. *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 9(10/2). Retrieved from <http://apjjf.org/-Rumi-SAKAMOTO/3497/article.pdf>
- Sasakibara, G. (2004). *"Bishōjo" no gendaishi* [Contemporary history of "beautiful girls"]. Tokyo, Japan: Kodansha.
- Shingo. (2005, December 8). The moe image [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://heiseidemocracy.com/2005/12/07/the-moe-image/>
- Sōmushō jōhō tsūshin seisaku kenkyūjo. (2015). *Heisei 26 nen jōhō tsūshin media no riyōjikan to jōhō kōdō ni kansuru chōsa houkokusho* [The 2014 survey report on time spent on information-communication media and information behavior]. Retrieved from [http://www.soumu.go.jp/main\\_content/000357570.pdf](http://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000357570.pdf)
- Suganuma, U. (2000). *Sovereign rights and territorial space in Sino-Japanese relations: Irredentism and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands*. Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai'i Press.
- Takeda, M. (2005). *Guizi tachi no shōzō* [The portraits of guizi]. Tokyo, Japan: Chūō Kōron Shinsha.
- Teranishi, J. (2010, October 6). Kanagawa kenkei Seya keisatsusho no masukotto kyarakutā ga kawairashii [Mascot characters for Seya Police Department of Kanagawa Prefectural Police are adorable]. Retrieved from <http://www.excite.co.jp/News/bit/E1286174157794.html>
- Wilddog0422. (2010). Comment on *Hinomoto Oniko* [YouTube comment]. Retrieved from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1aFT7G3U\\_8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1aFT7G3U_8)
- Xu, X., & Spillman, L. (2010). Political centres, progressive narratives and cultural trauma: Coming to terms with the Nanjing Massacre in China, 1937–1979. In M. Kim & B. Schwartz (Eds.), *Northeast Asia's difficult past: Essays in collective memory* (pp. 101–128). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Yiu, W. H., & Chan, A. C. S. (2013). "Kawaii" and "Moe": Gazes, geeks (otaku), and globalization of beautiful girls (bishōjo) in Hong Kong youth culture. *Positions*, 21(4), 853–884.
- Yomota, I. (2006). *"Kawaii" ron* [On cuteness]. Tokyo, Japan: Chikuma Shinsho.
- Zhao, J. (2009). Chūgoku no rekishi shakai kyōiku ni okeru nihon imēji no keisei to hensen ni tsuite: "Kōsen eiga" nado bungaku sakuhin o chūshin to shite [A study of the transformation of Japan's image at Chinese history and social studies education with a particular focus on literature works including "resistance films"]. *Chiba Shōdai Kiyō*, 47(1), 15–36.