From cyber-nationalism to fandom nationalism:

the case of Diba expedition in China

Shiyu (Sharon) Zheng

Liu's edited collection scrutinises the influences of Diba Expedition on China's political com- munication and cyber culture. It aims to explore the individualism orientation and the style of fan movement in the media-saturated politics of today's China via the new kind of fan patri- otism in the internet era. The book makes the ground-breaking contribution to Chinese fan studies for understanding the behaviour of fan patriots.

Scholars in this collection adopt different perspectives to critically analyse Diba Expedition, an unprecedented internet phenomenon in China. Diba, short of Baidu Diba, is a Chinese discussion forum with more than 20 million registered users in China. On 20 January 2016, the moderators called for its users to collectively occupy all Facebook pages that support Taiwan Independence rather than China's national reunification. The main target of this campaign were the Facebook pages of Taiwan presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen and some Taiwan media such as Apple Daily. Diba Expedition was an instant success, trending on Chinese social media platforms such as Weibo, WeChat and QQ within hours. For instance, it reached more than 610 million views on Weibo alone. Beyond criti- quing the instances of

what they saw as 'blatant nationalism' (p. 14), scholars in this collection viewed it as a way to demonstrate netizens' power and organised political participation by Chinese fans.

The edited collection comprises 8 chapters thematically organised to discuss Diba Expedition and its influence on cyber culture, political engagement, fan patriotism in China. The first theme to be examined in the book tackles nationalism in Chapters 1–4. In the introductory Chapter 1, Guobin Yang makes the overall argument for the book that 'actors' motives, the meaning of media practices, online narratives and stylistic forms, and their cultural resources and repertories' (p. 2) play key roles in Chinese fans' political engage- ment. In Chapter 2, Hongmei Li historicises the development of China's nationalism from the First Opium War (1839–1842) to the present day, highlighting the fact that Diba users started this campaign because of the different interpretations of national identity between Mainland China and Taiwan. In the next two chapters, authors Jing Wu, Simin Li and Hongzhe Wang (Chapter 3) and Zhe Wang (Chapter 4), provide an in-depth examination of Diba Expedition from the perspectives of fan production and mobilisation to fan emotional and playful actions in the digital sphere of commercial culture. The chapters highlight how notions such as patri- otism and national consciousness motivate participants to become fan patriots and to launch the Expedition at the special time. Zhe Wang, for instance, contends that 'Cynical cyber-nationalism tends to be expressed under a unified dominant organization by hard technologi-cal means' (p. 55).

The book's second theme of nationalists' collective action is covered in Chapters 5–8. In Chapter 5, Xiaoan Guo and Shaoting Yang examine patterns of fans' participation during the Expedition as well as their collective action, focusing on characteristics such as memetic communication and consensus mobilisation. The authors employ a mix of case study, textual analysis and qualitative interviews to understand the ways fans engaged in the Expedition.

They conclude that consensus mobilisation is achieved by 'adopting memetic communications strategies, hiding expression in playful symbols, producing memes on a large scale' (p. 88). Following that, Guoqiang Liu, the author of Chapter 6, presents Diba Expedition as a collective action which highlights fans' engagement in a ritual order. In Chapter 7, Kui Zhou and Weishan Miao adopt visible symbols such as territorial maps, national totems, and leaders' images to establish the communal identity and territory boundary of an imagined community based on fans' collective practices and interaction. The vivid methods update the concept of nationalism by visualising participants' online expression as an essential part of Chinese nationalism, which becomes a significant method to motivate fan patriots. Hailong Liu concludes the book in Chapter 8 by exploring Diba Expedition as a means for netizens to express their patriotism for China.

This volume paints a picture for us to understand the cyber phenomenon of nationalism and patriotism in China. However, there is some overlap between the chapters which undermines the overall cohesion of the collection. For example, there is too much focus on the concept of (cyber) nationalism in Chapters 1–4 which could have been remedied with exploration of other underdeveloped ideas such as stakeholder influence on the campaign in the form of the different roles played by Chinese authorities. Kui Zhou and Weishan Miao in Chapter 7 fleetingly point out that during the Expedition, Chinese authorities' role evolved as they reshaped and regained 'new symbolic recourses and narrative methods in a dynamic nego- tiation process' (p. 118). However, there is no further exploration of this role nor the extent to which it impacted on fans' political participation and practices as the Expedition ensued. This is a gap that further research needs to explore.

The collection reveals a relatively new phenomenon; analysis of Chinese fandom through the notion of nationalism. In particular, it extends the academic focus of general user studies in

digital media to the construction of Chinese fans' political behaviour and status in mass audience studies, which facilitates the width and depth of future fandom research about China. To a large extent, research on fandom is heavily influenced by Anglo-American scholarship. This book brings academic attention to an underdeveloped aspect of fandom research by systematically deploying Chinese fans as important political participants while highlighting their strong influence on politics. The editor concludes the final chapter by noting that 'instead of jumping to simplistic conclusions about their [fans] contemporary attitudes, it is better to pay more attention to their memories of fandom nationalism in the future, and how they turn these memories into more positive attitudes toward reality' (p. 144). The conclusion leaves interesting questions for future fandom research which scholars and students alike are encouraged to pursue.