Analyzing Chinese Nationalism
through the Protect Diaoyutai Movement

Mirana M. Szeto
Comparative Literature
University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Abstract
Using three psychoanalytic insights in the context of nationalism, this paper sets out to illustrate the unrecognized imaginaries in the political unconscious of contemporary Chinese nationalism by looking at a spectacular Chinese nationalist movement, the Protect Diaoyutai Movement of 1996. Firstly, the paper suggests that a certain cultural imaginary of “nationalism” (or “love of one’s nation”) is perverse. This idea has profound political implications for democracy, because in Lacanian psychoanalysis the pervert is tortured by the inability to separate his subjectivity from the perversely demanding Other. However, democracy is supposed to protect, and allow for the equal and free manifestation of, subjectivity in the human community. What, then, can this case teach us about the difficult relation between the two dominant modern political imperatives of nationalism and democracy? Secondly, the paper illustrates the traumatic and “real” implications of the jouissance of nationalism through the example of the inadvertent and traumatic death of a leader of the 1996 Protect Diaoyutai Movement in Hong Kong. Here the question will be: What is the irreducible aspect of the Lacanian real that people failed to symbolize and reckon with in dealing with Chen Yuxiang’s death? Thirdly, the paper takes the concept of disavowal as being central to the operational logic of perversion, and explores the following questions. Can the analysis of this case help us to understand how the perverse cultural imaginary of nationalism operates through denial and disavowal? How can theory articulate and make knowable the plight of nationalism’s hated and persecuted others? How can Jacques-Alain Miller’s concept of extimacy address the relation between the nationalist community and its disavowed others?

Keywords
Chinese nationalism, psychoanalysis, protect Diaoyutai Movement,
Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Chen Yuxiang
This paper illustrates the unrecognized imaginaries in the political unconscious of contemporary Chinese nationalism by looking at a spectacular Chinese nationalist movement, the Protect Diaoyutai Movement of 1996, which concerned an ongoing territorial sovereignty dispute in the East China Sea. Instead of venturing into the sophisticated landmines of competing historical, economic, legal, and political issues in the East Asian region, which remain highly contentious and unresolved, this article suggests that Lacanian psychoanalysis may provide a language for analyzing different national subjects’ intricate and impassioned relations with their cultural imaginaries, exclusivist symbolic orders and materially-organized nationalisms.

Nationalism does not operate only on the level of discourse, diplomacy, or cultural, socio-economic and military conflict—which are the usual foci of studies in history, law and the social sciences—but also on the level of desires, drives and cultural fantasies, which involve problems that do not easily go away with diplomatic or practical solutions. This is not so much the practical and conceptual aspect of nationalism as the passionate and psychological aspect. Jacques Lacan explains Sigmund Freud’s discovery, via the Irma case, that interpretation is not enough to constitute a psychological cure (Lacan, “The dream of Irma’s injection” 146-71). An analysis that can alter the course of a subject’s progress towards the traversal of cultural imaginaries and resistance to the hold of the symbolic orders, one that allows a genuine self-critical reflection upon one’s own condition, subjectivity and course of action, has to begin on the level of desire, jouissance and the Lacanian real. As a very first step, the national subject needs to at least have a way to face up to, reckon with and analyze his/her own cultural imaginaries and symbolic orders. This does not mean that psychoanalysis would be adequate on its own, yet we must be aware of the inadequacy of discursive, diplomatic and military interventions which do not also take into account desires, drives and cultural imaginaries.

When Arjun Appadurai attempts to analyze ethnic violence and nationalism in the age of globalization, he cannot but admit that sociological analysis can explain the pattern, scale and effects of ethnic violence in the present geo-historical

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1 Peter Hays Gries’ excellent book China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy succinctly shows how discourse, diplomacy and military conflict are the usual foci of political science studies on Chinese nationalism. His book contains a chapter on “three separate waves of nationalism in late-1990s China,” one being “The Diaoyu Islands protests of 1996,” which is also the subject of this paper. Gries pointed out that the “Party suppressed Diaoyu protesters” in China (Gries 121), and thus that the movement remained a particularly Hong Kong phenomenon, while present in Taiwan to a lesser extent.
situation, but cannot explain the nature of hatred, racism, sexism and violence (Appadurai, Modernity at Large 154). He then points to a possible psychoanalytic explanation by saying that such “peculiar and ghastly” forms of violence “‘carry a surplus of rage . . . or excess’ . . . that calls for an additional interpretive frame” (Appadurai, “Dead Certainty” 243). Jacques Derrida and others have also attempted to deconstruct the friend/enemy binary fundamental to the structure of national and ethnic hatred. Derrida, whose analysis also recalls Lacan’s idea of “le Père ou Pire” (the Father or Worse), says that “losing” the national “enemy would not necessarily be progress, reconciliation, or the opening of an era of peace and human fraternity. It would be worse: an unheard-of violence” (Derrida, Politics of Friendship 83).

The invention of a new enemy is an anxious attempt “to repoliticize” national politics when “the principal enemy, the ‘structuring’ enemy” that anchors national hatred and fear in the symbolic order becomes undone and is “nowhere to be found” (84), as in the collapse of Communism for capitalist America.

Slavoj Žižek thinks that repoliticization should not happen through the infinite deferral of the issue as in deconstructive analysis and the deferral of the act of naming the enemy, nor through the fantastic invention of a replacement enemy, but through becoming a political “subject” for whom the problem of nationalism becomes a Perverse Superego imperative (Tarrying with the Negative 200-237), that is, through dis-identifying with IT by traversing the national fantasy and saying “no” to IT (in Derrida’s term, barring IT). Derrida points to the first step in this process:

Were we even to trust the still so crude concepts of effect or symptom . . . we would still have to analyze and formulate . . . to determine of what these texts are the symptomatic effect . . . [of] what this supposed cause, the thing, the “real” itself, will have been capable. To account for a symptom-effect . . . one must . . . attempt to read it in the language in which it speaks. (81-2)

For all his doubts about psychoanalytic concepts (e.g. Derrida, Resistances of Psychoanalysis), Derrida nonetheless echoes Lacan’s and Žižek’s arguments for the need to “formulate” and “formalize” the symptoms of these real dislocations in the Other, “in the language in which it speaks,” so that we do not forget and can start to analyze what they are “capable” of. Like Lacan, Derrida proposes that we deal with national and ethnic hatred through constructions that symbolize the symptoms of our cultures in all their impossibilities. This is “necessary” so that we do not fall
back on imaginary fantasies that elide this confrontation with the “real.” Thus, this paper points toward a psychoanalytic reading of cultural imaginaries, symbolic orders and the potentially horrific excess of *jouissance* in the playing out of a sensitive case of Chinese nationalism. It is therefore not so much about the notions as about the passions of nationalism.²

The case under analysis is the 1996 Hong Kong Protect Diaoyutai movement. This *danse macabre* is hardly an example of ethnic violence, but demonstrates nonetheless the deadly potentials of nationalism. The worrisome implications of this Hong Kong case are compounded by the relationship between nationalism and democracy. The Chinese government tends to set the imperative of nationalism over against the struggle for democracy, and thus has consistently called most of the pro-democratic constituencies in Hong Kong and China “unpatriotic” (Loh). Ironically, the iconographic and performative nationalist Protect Diaoyutai Movement was instigated by some pan-democratic Hong Kong constituencies. Here I will follow out three psychoanalytic insights into nationalism, insights which might not be specific to Chinese nationalism.

Firstly, I will argue that a certain cultural imaginary of nationalism and the love of one’s nation are perverse. This idea has profound political implications especially for democracy, because in Lacanian psychoanalysis the pervert is, ontologically speaking, constantly in danger of being incorporated into the Other and failing to achieve a minimal degree of separate subjectivity. In clinical terms, the pervert’s reality is a state of constant anxiety about the incessant and uncontrollable demands of the perverse Other. The pervert is tortured by the inability to separate his own subjectivity from the demanding Voice and overseeing Eyes of the Other. The pervert cannot be a subject with a relatively secure sense of his own subjectivity, but has the constant compulsion to be the object and tool of the Other’s *jouissance*. The pervert feels compelled to be an object of the Other’s fulfillment, because there is no alternative symbolic authority to intervene and stop the perversely desirous demands of the Other. What is most torturous for the pervert is therefore the difficulty of achieving subjectivity (Fink, *A Clinical Introduction* 167-202; “Perversion” 38-69; Lacan, “Kant with Sade” 645-68). However, “democracy” is commonly taken to allow for the free and equal manifestation of

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² A fuller analysis of the complex concept of nationalism is beyond the scope of this paper. For studies on the notions of nationalism in different contexts, readers can refer to seminal works by Benedict Anderson, Partha Chatterjee, Ernest Gellner, Liah Greenfeld, E. J. Hobsbawm and Anthony Smith, as well as volumes edited by Dahbour and Ishay, and Sukumar Periwal. (See works cited.)
subjectivity in the human community. Thus if nationalism is pictured in the form of a perverse cultural imaginary, it will stand in opposition to democracy, as may indeed be seen in its most mundane, everyday cultural manifestations.

The second issue I want to explore is that of the traumatic implications of the *jouissance* of nationalism, here illustrated through the inadvertent death of Chen Yuxiang, one of the leaders of the 1996 nationalist Protect Diaoyutai Movement. This can warn us of the potential dangers for the national subject when the enjoyment of nationalism becomes too real. Whose *jouissance* was being enjoyed, after all, when Chen posthumously became the *corpselle corps* of the nation? What were the implications of the irreducible aspect of the *real* which people failed to symbolize and reckon with when confronted with his death?

The third issue is that of “disavowal” as the key operational logic of perversion. Can the analysis of this 1996 case help us to recognize the operation of nationalism as a perverse cultural imaginary, and to understand how it operates through denial and disavowal? What can psychoanalytic theory say to such a passionate nationalist community about its own denial of unconscious issues fundamental to its problematic emergence? How can psychoanalytic theory articulate, symbolize and make knowable the plight of nationalism’s hated and persecuted others? How can Jacques-Alain Miller’s concept of *extimacy* address the relations between the nationalist community and its disavowed cultural, social and political others? Can this illuminate a theoretical point of departure worthy of constructive regional attention?

**The 1971 Diaoyutai movement—**
**A Small Leftover Piece of the Traumatic Real**

The Diaoyutai qundao\(^3\) (Senkaku Retto in Japanese) is an “allergic” spot in the East China Sea (Deans). It is an oil-rich “second Middle East” (Ji 48) that China,\(^4\) Japan, Taiwan and the US have all scrambled to lay claim to. The Diaoyutai movement erupted in 1971 when the US “returned” the “administrative rights” of Okinawa to Japan (Schaller; Purves).\(^5\) What the Chinese people in the

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\(^3\) The term Diaoyutai, meaning “fishing platform,” is the Romanization form of China’s putonghua pinyin; Tiao-yu-t’ai is the form based on the Wade-Giles system in Taiwan.

\(^4\) Those people in Hong Kong who felt they had the most at stake were those who identified with a certain idea of Chinese sovereignty, for Hong Kong was and is not a sovereign state itself.

\(^5\) The US played an active role in manipulating these territorial disputes between China, Taiwan and Japan as a way of maintaining its leverage in the area. US military document no. 667 of 29 January 1946 (sent to the United Nations) did not include the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.
US, Hong Kong and Taiwan found unacceptable was the inclusion of the Diaoyutai islet in the US’s definition of the Okinawa territories. In the eyes of the Chinese, this was in effect a US gift of Chinese territory to the Japanese. The Chinese still remember the colonial brutalities of the Japanese between 1895 and 1945. According to the Chinese side, Japan is supposed to have “restored” to China “all the territories Japan has ‘stolen’ from China” after its defeat in WWII. At that time in 1971, both the Republic of China (ROC) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) claimed rightful sovereignty over all of China. Thus while both considered the Diaoyutai islets as a part of Taiwan, and “Taiwan” had different meanings for the ROC and PRC, the Japan-US alliance, in keeping these islets under Japanese control, was considered a case of renewed imperialism in the eyes of both the PRC and the ROC.

For the Chinese people, the little pieces of rock known as the Diaoyutai islets are small leftovers, fragments of the traumatic and real experience of Japan’s invasion and colonial control. “Diaoyutai” is a reminder of a century of imperialism, and the resulting painful birth of the modern nation and of nationalism. The national subject’s form of attachment to this partial object, Diaoyutai, and the petit objet a that remains unspoken, define and organize the subject’s relation to its (his, her) nation. Thus, to do anything to this little partial object that embodies the national passions is bound to unsettle the national subject and provoke strong reactions. No wonder the Chinese people in the US initiated one of the biggest trans-local Chinese nationalist movements against Japanese and US imperialism. The historical, geographical and sovereign specificities of “Diaoyutai” are still being disputed today, though the most heated debates were in 1971 and 1996. Any provocation today can still ignite the heated reactions of people whose national imagination takes the signifier “China” as the point de capiton.

After the Chinese Protect Diaoyutai movement broke out in 1971, students...
and scholars in Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and even Korea did extensive research, looking at the widespread Diaoyutai materials, trying to find theories and arguments in support of their own positions on the resource-rich continental shelf (Dzurek). PRC researchers tended to argue for China’s “primitive discovery” and the geological “natural prolongation of land territory principle.” This principle is often challenged by smaller, newer nations like Japan, as it privileges larger and older nations (Ji 22-8). Japan argued that the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands were incorporated into it before the Treaty of Shimonoseki with China, and therefore that they should not be included among the colonized territories restored to China under the provisions of the Cairo and Potsdam Declarations. Japanese researchers claimed that Japan had landed on this “terra nullius” first. However, these disputed territories were also seen as the home of aboriginal peoples, denied by both Japanese and Chinese claims of “original” discovery and ownership.

Among the many issues tied to the 1971 Protect Diaoyutai movement, two series of events that best illustrate aspects of the Chinese nationalist cultural imaginary at that time are also relevant to the contextualization of the 1996 Diaoyutai movement in Hong Kong. Firstly there was the incorporation of the anti-British element into an originally anti-Japanese and anti-US movement in Hong Kong. After the British colonial police cracked down on the 1,000 Protect

8 Since this paper is not a historical study, the focus is placed on the implications of the various desires, stakes and positions in the debate rather than on the details and accuracy of each argument. For historical analysis see Urano et al; Murata; Li; Ju; Inoue, Diaoyudao; Inoue, “Japanese Militarism & Diaoyutai”; Inoue, “Senkaku retto”; Okuhara. This is a highly contested issue and any timeline is liable to the charge of bias, but a timeline of the events referred to in this paper is nonetheless included in the appendix. A timeline in Chinese is also available from a Hong Kong Protect Diaoyutai organization, 20 Mar. 2009, <http://www.diaoyuislands.org/fwl/1.html>.

9 Other forms of territorial division have been introduced since 1982 to deal with the issue of equity.

10 According to Inoue, after its successful Meiji modernization (1872-9), Japan “[forcibly . . . conquered the . . . Ryukyu Kingdom” and colonized it under the Okinawa Prefecture (Inoue Diaoyudao). Since 1879, Japan made attempts to incorporate the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands into the territory of Okinawa. In view of their victory in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5, the Japanese incorporated them into its territory before the treaty (Inoue “Japanese Militarism”).

11 Inoue disagreed, claiming that the islets were first named the Senkaku in 1900 (“Japanese Militarism”). In 1971, Taiwan students found documents indicating that fishermen from Taiwan had built a temple for the Chinese Tianhou goddess and a temple for forlorn ghosts on Diaoyutai before the Japanese came. These were removed by the Japanese based on the “terra nullius” claim (Huang Yang-chih, Mingpao yuekan 144-97; Dan and Wang, The Diaoyutai Special Issue 51-75).
Diaoyutai protestors who rallied at the Japanese Cultural Center on May 4, 1971, the protesters marched instead to the Queen’s Statue Square, the symbolic center of British colonial power and the cenotaph for WWII martyrs who fought the Japanese. Thus, the symbolism of anti-Japanese imperialism merged with that of British colonialism. The visual iconography and discursive tactics of the Diaoyutai movement invoked the revolutionary, anti-imperialist spirit of the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the figure of Sun Yat-sen, the Father of the Chinese Revolution.\footnote{See Qishi niandai (Apr. 1971): 4; (June 1971): 16; (Dec. 1971): 4-6; (Jan. 1972): 46-50, and Undergrad, April to September 1971.} Again, the British colonial police cracked down in the name of the Public Safety Ordinance that in effect outlawed people’s right to organize and demonstrate.\footnote{This notorious ordinance is still in effect today, willingly adopted by the Hong Kong SAR government.} The colonial police further executed one of the most brutal crackdowns in the history of the colony during the 10,000 strong Protect Diaoyutai rally at Victoria Park on July 7, 1971, the day commemorating Japan’s 1937 declaration of total war on China.\footnote{Chinese students and scholars embarked on historical, geographical, and legal research on Diaoyutai. Students from Taiwan at Columbia University studied over 7,000 documents to produce the most influential research on Diaoyutai at the time. Due to this movement, new newspaper columns and political magazines in Hong Kong like Qishi niandai enlarged their influence in public discourse (Dan and Wang, “Premier Zhou Enlai”).} Thus, the discourse of protestation against Japanese and American imperialism merged with that of protestation against British colonial oppression against democracy and national rights in Hong Kong. This link between nationalism and democracy would resurface in mutated form in 1996.

The second series of events in 1971 in Taiwan illustrated why the Chinese nationalism of the Protect Diaoyutai movement became increasingly dis-identified with the respective Chinese states. The dis-identification happened in Taiwan in a protest movement against the ROC in 1971 and in Hong Kong in a protest movement against the PRC in 1996. The 1971 movement in Taiwan was limited to university campuses by the ROC police state. Meanwhile, the ROC in Taiwan would lose its membership in the United Nations on October 25, 1971, replaced by the PRC in China. Thus the ROC, now cut off from the international community, had very little bargaining power against Japan and the US on the Diaoyutai issue. Taiwan students became increasingly disappointed with their government’s unassertive stance.\footnote{Thus, not surprisingly, scholars from Taiwan tend to look into international maritime and sovereignty laws for terms that prefer co-development with Japan. The present President of Taiwan, Ma Ying-jeou, who was a student during the 1971 Protect Diaoyutai movement, wrote} Officials toured campuses to persuade students to preserve a
“pure nationalism” not tainted by the “anti-government,” “communist fervor of leftists agents from Hong Kong.” This was a sinister threat. Since the age of White Terror in Taiwan, association with the left had treasonous implications, making one liable to varying degrees of political surveillance and incrimination. The state-controlled media also encouraged “patriotism” through “studying hard” and “supporting the government.” This “paternalistic” tactic of “benevolent threats” to “suppress political participation” was badly received (Dan and Wang, The Diaoyutai Special Issue 90-3).

Since Communist China would soon replace Taiwan in the United Nations, this became a real national crisis for the people in Taiwan. The anxiety of impending international isolation and the anger against Japan and the US needed an outlet. To make things worse, the traditionally easiest target of attack, Communist China, who had “stolen” the attention of the international community, ironically seemed more likeable to the Taiwanese at that point because it stood firm against Japanese and American “aggression.” The Taiwan government, however, did nothing. This was the last straw for Taiwan students; there had to be an outlet for their anger and frustration. If one could not save Taiwan, one could at least save Diaoyutai. If one could not love the government, one could at least love the islets. If one could not join the international community of the United Nations, one could at least join the international Chinese nationalist movement and express one’s outrage.

In Lacanian terms, the slogan “Protect Diaoyutai” became the new point de capiton, the new signifier that these Chinese and Taiwanese national subjects used to inaugurate their reorganized relationship to the symbolic order of Chinese nationalism. For Taiwan students, the movement’s ideal of nationalism gradually split off from a matter-of-fact relation to the state in Taiwan to become a less firmly embodied utopianism. This disembodied nationalism was increasingly attached to the partial object Diaoyutai and the organizations/organs of the Protect Diaoyutai movement. For the national subjects disillusioned with their nation, all that was left of the national body was the partial object, the tiny little Diaoyutai which remained just such a Ph.D. dissertation on international law and the Taiwan-Japan co-development policy at the Harvard Law School (Legal Problems; Cong xin haiyangfa lun diaoyutai).

16 The Hong Kong students were smeared as affiliates of Communist China. The 1971 movement in Taiwan was initiated by students from Hong Kong. It was soon supported by the Hong Kong-Macao Student Association and the Overseas Chinese Students Association. Local students and scholars then took over the lead.

17 Communist China criticized the Japanese government and made the Japanese trade delegation admit the rebirth of Japanese militarism. It forced Japan to admit that it planned to develop along with Korea the continental shelf without China, and succeeded in pressuring Japan to shelf its co-development plan (Qishi niandai 1971: 6).
the object of Chinese nationalist desire. After the Taiwanese national body lost its functional usefulness for the national subject, the Diaoyutai movement became the replacement organ for this nationalism that lacked a national body. 18 It allowed Chinese nationalism to continue to produce discourses and actions and to convert subjects. The name of the islet became the signifier of the petit objet a for the national subject, which shockingly reminded them of the lack, the contradictions and incompleteness in/of their national symbolic Other. The material piece of rock was thus imagined as the fetish, the possession and enjoyment of which is thought to be capable of fulfilling the Other. The lack of this little thing, therefore, tortured these Chinese national subjects for it meant the incompleteness of their previous national unity.

The national symbolic Other/order of the Taiwanese state was now exposed as not-whole. The Taiwan government could neither unify China and keep its territorial integrity nor protect its national stature internationally. Thus, state patriotism was a broken fantasy. However, the passionate national subjects were not quite ready to live without a nationalist fantasy—not ready to “traverse the fantasy” in Lacanian terms. Rather than remaining critical after the fantasy of state patriotism collapsed and dealing with the painful destitution of national subjecthood, they would rather invent a replacement fantasy. It was around this little thing Diaoyutai that a new fantasy of national unity was built. Thus, on the symbolic level, the national subject constructed a new identity within the new idealized symbolic order of Chinese nationalism. Moreover, to rebuild the cultural imaginary of Chinese nationalism, the national subject needed to identify with a new idealized national figure. Some therefore began to dis-identify with the father figures of Taiwan, preferring the father figure from Communist China, Zhou Enlai.

On the international stage, Zhou Enlai, the second in command in Communist China, endorsed the 1971 Protect Diaoyutai movement as the “overseas May Fourth Movement.” The word “overseas” implied that Communist China was the only legitimate national “homeland.” He staged this pronouncement in a diplomatically salient scene. Taiwanese students who were disappointed with the weak stance of their government made a visit to China. Zhou gave them a highly publicized audience which continued into an all-night tête-à-tête, during which he praised the students’ nationalist sentiments. He told them that he might not see the day when Taiwan was reunited with China. He wished that the international Chinese students

18 This is a reversal of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of “the body without organs” (A Thousand Plateaus). Rather, it looks like a case of “organs without a body,” a phrase Žižek also uses.
in the Protect Diaoyutai movement would carry on the mission of China’s unification. To show off the integrity of the communist regime, he shared with the hungry students a warm supper of frugal rice porridge, direct from his own kitchen. This was designed to contrast sharply with the extravagance of officials in Taiwan. The students from Taiwan were charmed, awed and interpellated by Zhou’s nationalist vision of a unified China. Some of these students have actually become pro-unification politicians in Taiwan today (Dan and Wang, The Diaoyutai Special Issue 44-7; Qishi niandai Dec. 1971: 4-6; Jan. 1972: 46-50). Many ethnic Chinese students in Hong Kong also answered the seemingly benevolent paternalistic call of the newly idealized national figure Zhou Enlai. The young people became hailed as the national subjects of a unified China, as the tools for the completion of the Other’s desire for unity. The nationalist subject’s desire is therefore the Other’s desire, the desire of the Chinese state for a complete national totality. The movement gradually promoted the ideal of nationalism to the abstract level of unification. It was a transnational, trans-political and cosmopolitan alliance of contradictory elements under a totalizing and abstract nationalism.

These trans-local Chinese nationalist movements became important landmarks in the history of the participating communities, because the students’ purity of purpose shone brighter than the compromising hypocrisy of the politicians. The protesters in Taiwan exposed the oppressive and paternalistic nature of their state. This contributed to an important turning point in the re-imagination of cultural identity and alternative radicalism in Taiwan, especially for those who fell victim to the exclusions of the ROC’s Chinese national imaginary and were more concerned about the democratic equity and local inequalities ignored by this ethnic Chinese concept of national unity. The anti-imperial and anti-colonial resistance of the Hong Kong movement also became an important resource for the development of the local civil society and cultural identity over against the British establishment. It tore apart the hypocrisy of British colonialism as a benevolent civilizing mission. Thus, the populist Chinese nationalism of the students emerged victorious on the moral front and legitimized nationalism as the people’s organizing principle of democratic radicalism. This has profound implication for the 1996 Protect Diaoyutai movement in Hong Kong.
The 1996 Protect Diaoyutai Movement in Hong Kong—War Games

The Protect Diaoyutai movement in Hong Kong started under political conditions that were very different from those of 1971. There were no high-level international maneuvers. It started because the right-wing Japan Youth Federation (Nihon Seinen sha) decided to build a solar-powered lighthouse on Diaoyutai and applied to have it “recognized as an official beacon . . . marked on Japanese maritime charts” (Hong Kong Standard Sept. 26 1996). Members of the group hoisted a Japanese flag on the islet and then built their lighthouse, a pathetic little structure now slanting and damaged by a typhoon. It was their way of enjoying their little national “thing.” This was as serious as the issue was ever meant to be.

Yet the Hong Kong Protect Diaoyutai movement flared up in no time, becoming the most spectacular local political and media event of the year. Interestingly, Hong Kong, in 1996 a British colony preparing to return to Chinese sovereignty in the following year, became more passionately nationalistic than the governments and people in China and Taiwan. In fact the movement did not attract much local attention in Taiwan and China, and the Chinese and Japanese governments merely responded rhetorically. The PRC’s official newspaper Renmin ribao said that the Japanese youths might have the unspoken consent of the Japanese government, because their Foreign Minister had reiterated the
internationally debated issue of a 200 nautical mile economic zone which included the Senkaku/Diaoyu islets (Huang, Wei-ming 45). However, this had been Japan’s rhetoric since 1972 and Deng Xiaoping and Japan had both decided to shelf the sovereignty issue indefinitely since 1978. Moreover, by the 1990s China was a power to contend with. This political side issue could not do it any harm. There was no national crisis to speak of.\footnote{In contrast, in 1971 China was undergoing its Cultural Revolution, Taiwan was getting kicked out of the United Nations, and the US and Japan actually signed treaties to act on the territorial issue. The national crises were real.} To a lot of people, it was just a few Japanese youths having some fun with their slanted little (phallic) lighthouse on a neglected islet in the middle of the ocean. Why then were the Hong Kong nationalists so worked up? There were two reasons.

Jacques-Alain Miller has a theory that can clearly explain the first reason why the Hong Kong Protect Diaoyutai people found the lighthouse incident so intolerable. What happened was an exasperation at the incomprehensible jouissance of the other. “\textit{Jouissance} is precisely . . . what makes the Other other, that is, what makes it particular, different” (“\textit{Extimité}” 79). Like racism or sexism, nationalism implies the “hatred of the particular way” others experience their own (national) jouissance (76). People are seldom against nationalism \textit{per se} and tend to affirm others’ right to be nationalistic. It is when different ways of enjoying this right come into contact that hatred arises. The other’s proximity exacerbates this hate, requiring “a confrontation of incompatible modes of \textit{jouissance}.” This hate imagines the other as having a “\textit{plus-de-jouir},” a surplus jouissance (80). “What are fantasies about the Other’s special, excessive enjoyment about—the Jew’s or the Japanese’s special relationship towards money and work—if not precisely \textit{so many ways, for us, to organize our own enjoyment}?” (Žižek, \textit{Tarrying with the Negative} 206).

Thus, in the case of the Japanese lighthouse on the tiny islet, the racist’s unconscious screams: the other stole the use of our national thing, which we externalize, deny ourselves and do not even dare to touch! The other is not forgiven for displaying the excess enjoyment that even we do not dare to admit and exercise ourselves. This was why the Japanese other’s enjoyment of their nationalist thing seemed like a “theft of enjoyment” (203) to the Hong Kong Chinese nationalists. What is being denied is that their \textit{jouissance} is in fact exactly like that of the Japanese youths. Ironically, it is rather hard to tell who was stealing whose enjoyment. The 1996 Protect Diaoyutai movement in fact unknowingly “stole” from the Japanese youths their body politics. The Hong Kong nationalists were “inspired” by these Japanese youths inasmuch as they were shown how one could
appropriate the state’s nationalistic discourse for their own enjoyment in an embodied manner. They “stole” the Japanese trick—to embody the nation more fully than did the national government itself—as a way to formulate their own populist nationalist movement vis-à-vis the Chinese state.

The cultural fantasy of national unity in the Protect Diaoyutai movement was held together by an uncomfortable and perverse denial and disavowal of one’s jouissance and the jouissance of the national others. The Hong Kong nationalists’ logic was like this: if not for the invasive other, we should have been living in “a perfect community . . . founded on an idea of sameness, of a shared spirit, history, aspirations, and values.” The problem is, “not even in some golden past did such communities exist, and the totalitarian implication of such imaginings should make everyone leery of seeking them” (Rothenberg and Foster 7). The strategy of the pervert is that of denial and disavowal. On the individual level, it might be an ontological survival tactic. Once taken to the political level however, this logic may lead to an exclusivist and potentially violent idea of community. This perverse cultural imaginary says: although I knew there were other perspectives, I am going to go on as if there never were any. The other cannot be right. The danger is, if this denial “functions in politics,” it “becomes the ground for racism, homophobia, and other expressions of disgust at others’ enjoyment” (4). The following illustration will show how the Chinese nationalism behind this movement, which claims to be democratic and inclusive, actually denies the rights of the others. Its logic of idealized sameness inherently excludes those who cannot identify with an essentialist fantasy of Chineseness. Thus, by their very success in legitimizing Chinese nationalism, the Protect Diaoyutai community has at the same time imploded the possible space for an inclusive and democratic sense of community. They left behind a very problematic legacy.

The second reason why the Hong Kong Protect Diaoyutai nationalists were the most agitated in 1996 was that Hong Kong was going through its own real crisis with nationalism at the time. In less than a year, Hong Kong would no longer be a British colony as it would return to Chinese sovereignty. It was a time when Hong Kong’s people were striving for more democracy and the Chinese government, soon to regain sovereignty over Hong Kong, was adamantly trying to suppress it. The locally elected democrats would soon have to leave office when the British colonial legislature was dissolved in preparation for the transitional government of

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20 I use the word in lower case to mean a very broad alliance of democrats from various political parties.
Since this transitional government was mainly hand-picked by Beijing and not elected by popular vote, it would be 1998 before the democrats could be elected to office again. They were also facing the prospect of further marginalization by the Chinese government as “unpatriotic” elements. Deng Xiaoping stated that “people who manage the affairs of Hong Kong should be those Hong Kong people who love their country, who love Hong Kong.” At stake was the issue of who Beijing considered “patriotic” enough to run Hong Kong. Those whose ideas of governance Beijing considered too radical and different for its taste were subsequently classified as “unpatriotic” and unfit to participate in the civil and constitutional development of Hong Kong. The Beijing government used its typical tongzhan (統戰) policy of “divide and rule” to marginalize the democratic opposition and rally the support of the rest. Thus, for some Hong Kongese, especially the democrats, there was no sweeter revenge against the Chinese state than to outdo it at its own patriotic game. The point was to challenge this government to a patriotism competition. For most people within the broader democratic alliance, patriotism meant the mission to advance democracy in China and Hong Kong rather than a duel of populist nationalist exhibitionism. However, some impatient members of the broader democratic alliance jumped at the more graphic and literal tactic they “learned” from the Japanese youths. They imagined that they were going to “enjoy” themselves at Diaoyutai.

Their leader was Zeng Jiancheng (nicknamed “the Bull”). They inaugurated the Action Alliance in Defense of the Diaoyu Islands to raise money for the naval expedition to Diaoyutai to “demonstrate Chinese sovereignty” (Mingpao Sept. 5 1996). The countering pro-Beijing constituencies and some other political opportunists also wanted to compete for media attention and to impress the Beijing government. To the opportunists, competing with the democrats was a way to show their allegiance to Beijing and get the attention of the high officials. It was their best chance to get into the transitional government through appointments, when Beijing was preventing the democrats from joining and trying to plant their own people. An old Protect Diaoyutai veteran from the 1971 movement, Chen Yuxiang, soon set up his own competing group on 6 September 1996, called The Greater Global Chinese Alliance in Defense of Diaoyutai. The group was no bigger than the others despite

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21 Most Hong Kong people resent the assumption that they are less Chinese and less patriotic simply because China gave Hong Kong away to the British 150 years ago. The Beijing government’s marginalization of the democratic constituency in Hong Kong as “unpatriotic” was repeated in 2003, when the democratic movements in Hong Kong galvanized into the 500,000 people march on 1 July.
its pompous name. Chen was a politician wannabe who wanted to champion the “Global Chinese” group to launch his political career. In his inaugural speech, he claimed to be able to represent Hong Kong’s people more directly to the Beijing leaders than could the democrats (*Xinbao* Sept. 7 1996). Eager to compete, the democrats organized a 3,000 people Protect Diaoyutai march. The core pro-Beijing constituency was wary of being left behind. It, too, organized a 4,000 strong Protect Diaoyutai rally and then a 2,000 strong one. The democratic alliance upped the ante on September 15th by organizing a 12,000 people march that decried Japanese militarism (*South China Morning Post* Sept. 16 1996).

The Protect Diaoyutai movement soon turned into a hyperreal spectacle. The little piece of rock named Diaoyutai, an abstract cipher of Chinese territorial integrity in 1971, was almost palpable on the televisions of 1996. The Protect Diaoyutai activists got the idea from their Japanese “enemy” that their own symbolic and imaginary national space actually had a real little partial object left for their enjoyment, a palpable place where they could literally swim around and erect their national monuments. They learned from the Japanese youths a new fetishistic fantasy and they competed in order to exhibit their own new toys. Various Protect Diaoyutai brotherhoods from Hong Kong competed to see which could get there first. They hired ships, raised money, bought equipment, trained, campaigned and launched operations with much ritual and fanfare. They staged a glamorous war game with the Japanese coastguard and maritime safety agency amidst the media’s cheerleading. Everybody was having a good time embodying the nation (*Hong Kong Standard*, Sept. 7 1996). They were the nation, just like Toys-r-us. If the army was the most traditional and literal organ of the state, by playing at war were they not simulating the state’s ideological and patriotic moral high ground? They congratulated themselves on a successful appropriation of Hong Kong’s (Chinese) nationalism for their own purposes. The sanctity of state patriotism was thus simulated by a hyperreal movement and disappeared into the obscene body of the populist national subjects. The subversion was sweet.
Fig. 2 Front page of the *South China Morning Post* (Sept. 8 1996).

Fig. 3 Graphics by Martin Megino, “Gunboat turns back Hong Kong journalists,” *Hong Kong Standard*, Sept. 7 1996.
The Limitations of the Simulation Tactic

Nationalism is not a monopoly. . . . If Chinese officials can use it, Hong Kong people can use it, too. . . . It is now the Chinese officials who have to answer to the command of the nationalism banner in Hong Kong’s hands.”

—Hong Qingtian
(political commentator)

Nationalism, under party-led competitive exhibitionism and the subjective value judgments of the media, has taken on a very horrific face. . . . When irrational nationalism overflows in society, any non-mainstream critique is immediately hunted down to quiet disturbance by intolerant actions.

—Li Yi, “Baodiao fansi,” Apple Daily
11 Oct. 1996

Despite the smothering glory lavished on the Protect Diaoyutai democratic alliance, the long term effect of their subversion was rather troubling. Unlike the oppositional politics of the 1970-71 Protect Diaoyutai movement, the 1996 Hong Kong democratic brotherhood used the postmodern tactic of simulation. Rather than attacking the state from the margins, the democratic alliance “performed nationalism,” the central ideology of the state, more passionately than could the state itself. In this way, the Chinese state had to grudgingly admit that the democrats’ nationalist performance was patriotism, too. Thus, the state could no longer legitimately exclude the democrats as “unpatriotic” elements. They had to find a better excuse. It was a virtual performance of nationalism that absorbed the symbolic energy of the actual state-orchestrated nationalism. Nationalism, once the territory of the state, was now deterriorialized by the democrats to become available to the pervasive body of the masses—the populist nationalists. It seemed that the democrats had won from the state the ground, the turf of nationalism. However, this turf was dubious.

By becoming in effect the simulacra of patriotism, Hong Kong’s democrats also blurred the previously clear political and discursive space of difference between the repressive state and their own democratic movement, which they had painstakingly cultivated for decades. In return, they now acquired a local turf and
discourse of nationalism. Whether this would be useful for the development of the
democratic movement was doubtful. By undercutting the state’s monopolistic
claims on nationalism, the democrats have at the same time narrowed the political
and theoretical distance between the Chinese state and the Hong Kong democratic
alliance. They have now become the paradigm of nationalism. What has that got to
do with pressing for democracy and developing the civil society of Hong Kong and
China? What harm has it done to the state, after all? Would the state stop
suppressing democratic movements just because of that?

This Hong Kong Protect Diaoyutai nationalist brotherhood won only a
short-term psychological victory. However, on screen, the difference between the
Japanese youths with their little phallic lighthouse and the Hong Kong nationalists
with their spectacular war toys and fierce nationalist fervor was only a matter of
scale. Moreover, the Protect Diaoyutai democratic brotherhood did not seem to see
its similarity to the Chinese regime it was fighting. If nationalism can be a perverse
cultural imaginary that has the potential to be both prejudiced against the excluded
and devouringly demanding towards those within, how open could a nationalist be
in the promotion of a tolerant and inclusive democracy? As Li Yi lamented, the
local media discourse no longer allowed any space for skepticism and criticism that
was not in agreement with the intolerant hegemony of the Protect Diaoyutai
nationalists. Cautious analysts were brutalized and hunted down to keep things
under control. What was this if not political oppression driven by populist
nationalism? Although state patriotism was de-legitimized, the Hong Kong media
and civil society failed to reinvent forms of community not congealed by pre-given
ideologies. This possibility was drowned out by a hegemonic populist nationalism.
Thus, the brotherhood’s postmodern tactic of simulation appropriated the state’s
nationalist logic but did not radicalize it. Their simulation simply obeyed the
nationalist symbolic order by taking it to an extreme, to the point of absurdity. Yet
this movement remained potentially as sexist, racist and exclusionary as the
“enemies” it purported to fight. It changed basically nothing for those who have
always been victimized, misrecognized and outcast by Chinese nationalism. The
oppositional regime of the Diaoyutai brotherhood only appropriated the nationalist
trump card of the Chinese state for the sake of its (their) own political fantasy. Zeng
the Bull did not gain much political currency from this either. Zeng’s nationalist
passions did not go down well with the Hong Kong voters, and he did not get
elected to the legislature when the democrats returned in 1998. The Hong Kong
mainstream was, after all, made up of refugees who had fled the political passions of China.

If we risk reading the democratic brotherhood’s enjoyment of nationalism as
an unconscious enjoyment of the Other (of nationalism), and assume that nationalism enjoys a boost whether the Hong Kong democratic groups, the Japanese youths or the respective governments win, then the Lacanian psychoanalytic insight that we may misrecognize perverse transgression as radicalism becomes illuminating. Our commonsense assumption about power is still simply the repression of subjectivity in/under the symbolic order. What remains unrecognized is the way postmodern control operates. The transgression of the Protect Diaoyutai democratic alliance into the state’s turf looks like a resistance against the symbolic order of the Chinese state, but on the unconscious level, they are simply obeying and enjoying the imperatives of nationalism as the Other. Today, both theoretical hindsight and commonsense tell us that governments can be exposed as exploitative and overpowering, but they still have to be resisted and not internalized (Rothenberg and Foster 2). However, alongside the repressive law of the state there is also the perverse demand of capitalism and/or nationalism. To be polymorphously perverse, embodied, enjoying subjects is now the mainstream cultural imperative. However, in the commonsense imaginary, people still tend to misrecognize perverse transgressions as the guarantee of resistance against the repressive symbolic order. In fact, the Hong Kong democrats have only obeyed the superegoic imperative to enjoy nationalism, to fulfill and complete the nation without limit, transgressively.

What are the political implications of transgression in the face of a perverse nationalist cultural imaginary? This theoretical question, pertaining to this Hong Kong case and beyond, will be illustrated through the Chen Yuxiang case below. Upon further analysis, the perverse national subject’s jouissance turns out to be the nation’s jouissance. The nation demands that we love it enough to sacrifice ourselves for it. The nation’s demand perversely lacks boundaries. There is no limit as to how far the nation’s demands can transgress into our subjectivities and our material existence. If the subject answers the call of nationalism as a pervert, it means that the national subject is willing to give up even his subjectivity and life for the completion of the nation’s will. This existence as the loyal object of one’s nation unto death is an anxious and precarious existence. But inasmuch as the pervert’s transgression is a desperate attempt to limit this demand of the nation on him, he is not being totally used as an object. In other words, the pervert’s transgression is an ontological strategy to achieve a certain degree of subjectivity and thus not be totally claimed by the national Other. That is to say, the pervert transgresses a law in the hope that the law will intervene, arrest him and take him out of the hands of the perverse national demand for a compulsive total sacrifice. In this way, the pervert can at least temporarily achieve an imaginary space of/for subjectivity separate
from the demanding enjoyment of the perverse national imaginary of “sacrificial love of the nation.” This transgression allows the pervert temporary imaginary relief from the pressure to serve the perverse demands of the national Other. Thus, the pervert’s transgression is not for transgression’s sake, but for the suspension of the national Other’s perverse demands in favor of the realm of symbolic law and order. As Bruce Fink would remind us, in pop psychology, *jouissance* understood as enjoyment “is simply overrated. It is not so wonderful that everyone really wants it” (“Perversion” 48). In the clinical context:

[O]ne of the paradoxical claims Lacan makes about perversion is that while it may sometimes present itself as a no-holds-barred, *jouissance*-seeking activity, its less apparent aim is to bring the law into being. . . . The pervert . . . does not desire what is prohibited. Instead, the pervert commits transgressions in order to invite the law to intervene. (54-5)

It is a way to make another Other (the symbolic order) exist as a defense against the perverse (national) Other. Thus, for the pervert, perversion is the ultimate conservatism, the condition of being the slavish object of the Other’s demands. The radical politics of the national pervert would, therefore, aim at achieving however fictitious a separation from the national Other, a separation from the perverse and incessant demands and *jouissance* of the national Other. This is not to say that a separate subjectivity will have nothing to do with the nation. It simply means that it is no longer “all” about the nation. That is, the national pervert who struggles to achieve a sense of separate subjectivity not overridden by the national demand is in fact exercising a real desire for liberation. For the pervert, the effort to achieve subjectivity is a radical liberation from his slavery to the Other. This is why perversion in the political realm is not radical at all. This also implies that a nationalism imagined as a sacrificial love of the nation is a perverse and devouring cultural imaginary. To achieve subjectivity, to achieve a critical distance from such a perverse cultural imaginary is thus the political subject’s best chance to radicalize his political subjectivity. Thus what is disturbing about the 1996 Protect Diaoyutai movement in Hong Kong is that the anti-establishment brotherhood still rallied for support within a perverse discourse of national sacrifice, martyrdom, and heroism.
The Inadvertent and Traumatic Corpse of the Nation:
Chen Yuxiang

In the perverse nationalist imaginary, to be a true national subject is to be willing to give up one’s subjectivity and desires, to be willing to die to complete the demands of the national Other/order. In other words, the true selfless national martyr, who lives totally for the welfare, demands and love of the nation, who goes to any length to fulfill the demands of the nation, is perverse. The sinister implication is that nationalism, if taken as an imaginary love of the nation, is in fact a deadly and boundlessly perverse imaginary. However, many national subjects are more “selfish” than the pervert, or have alternative value systems underlying their behavior. The national subject can have intervening systems of desires that would compete with the demand to love the nation, like one’s family and personal career. Therefore, in most cases, the more assertive desires of the subject would not be given up and the national subject does not become a clinical pervert. Like most people, he only maintains a fantasy of becoming a proud or dignified national subject (perhaps a hero or martyr). This, however, can already put him in a dangerous condition in which he could end up acting out the perverse nationalist fantasy, so that the *perverse* Other comes too close and the order of symbolization (substitution and displacement) is at risk of disappearing. This is perhaps the case with Chen Yuxiang.

Chen had always wanted fame as a leader. He became a respected newspaper editor and political commentator. He campaigned to become a legislator but failed. As a veteran of the 1971 Protect Diaoyutai movement, he welcomed the revival of the movement in 1996 as a way to re-launch his political career. However, the democrats were now in the spotlight. When they decided to set foot on Diaoyutai, Chen quickly pulled together another team to compete with them. He would go there first. His group set sail on 22 September 1996. However, the planning was too rushed; the team members were passionate but ill-prepared and inadequately equipped. Overwhelmed by rough winds and roaring waves, the captain aborted their plan to land on Diaoyutai. Chen could not bear the disappointment. The sea was overrun with journalists and cameras and the global public was watching via satellite broadcasts from outer space. The imaginary eyes of the Other were too close and the anxiety was unbearable. While some other team members opted for alternative symbolic actions on board, Chen wanted to claim Chinese sovereignty over the islet in a more bodily manner. He suggested swimming in the sea to demonstrate Chinese ownership. However, if going to the islet on a speedboat...
launched from an anchored vessel was unthinkably dangerous, one wonders why Chen thought he could jump into the rough sea while the vessel was sailing. He and two others, without notifying the captain, jumped into the ocean in the midst of high waves. Unaware of this sudden drastic act, the captain continued sailing, and the suction effect of the moving boat made swimming in the sea even more precarious. The other two swimmers survived but Chen was drowned. He passed away on 26 September (Huang 1-33).
What drove Chen to this “suicidal” act? He had not done anything beforehand to prepare others for a staged, ritualistic sacrifice. The act was unnecessary, unscripted, unexpected, and awkward. No cultural imaginary was invoked, no symbolic speeches were made to provide the community with a context for processing this tragic incident. Moreover, Chen had been at the height of his career and at the center of the media’s attention. Did he really intend to be a martyr and leave behind his wife, children and re-ignited career? Was this an inadvertent tragedy, or was Chen driven by the perverse fantasy of being a good national subject to the extent of following its perverse logic to its obvious conclusion, his own death? Was this a wish, a desire Chen consciously contemplated, or was he driven by some unconscious forces to become the uncanny object that fulfilled the national Other’s jouissance? The only thing that derived enjoyment from this traumatic incident was Chinese nationalism, which was perpetuated by the death of its subject. If Chen really asked for it on an unconscious level, then it was not his own jouissance but the jouissance of the national Other that asked for it. If it was the perverse fantasy of being the object that fulfills nationalism that drove Chen to his death, then his corpse was the traumatic and real reminder of the devouringly perverse demand of the national Other’s jouissance, the real enjoyment of nationalism.
What for Freud was trauma was for Lacan the first approach to the real (Verhaeghe 116). This corpse was real, but its production could not be satisfactorily explained. For all the platitudes of the state and the media, no one succeeded in covering up the absurd and accidental nature of Chen’s death. The rhetoric of martyrdom sounded embarrassing and unconvincing to most people, although most dared not utter their suspicions out of respect for death itself. The inexplicability of the corpse remained throughout all the facile and inarticulate explanations. Paul Verhaeghe explains this “loss for words” eloquently: the “consequence of the impossibility to signify this traumatic jouissance . . . entails an endless attempt to signify it . . . but the impossibility to interpret it (for lack of a signifier)” causes analysis to become “interminable” and to circle “around the not-whole . . . without signifying it” (115-6). This corpse was haunting through its very corporeality, its tangible presence that the symbolic order of the living failed to signify. The unease was unbearable to the community and even more so to Chen’s family.

To end their gnawing sense of discomfort, the community quickly incorporated Chen’s corpse into some redeeming nationalist discourse of martyrdom. Discourses and rituals combined to cover up the body with the national flag, and to give it a national funeral and burial. The China News Agency, the representative of the PRC government in Hong Kong at that time, conveniently provided the national flag. The actuality of the corpse was soon safely tucked away. Chen’s name, however, became le corps of the nation. Paradoxically, by giving up his bodily existence he ended up embodying the nation posthumously through his name. To swim in the deadly waters of the nation now bespoke the wish to physically be one with the oceanic womb of the nation. His body was literally swallowed up by the devouring Other, the perverse demand of the nation. He was dead but his name eerily lived and lives on as the body of the nation, which is always propped up by names and corpses.

During the aftermath of the event, there was an indescribable but pervasive sense of absurdity and unease surrounding Chen’s accidental death and the arbitrariness of naming it an act of martyrdom. His death somehow failed to live up to that name. To call Chen a martyr was widely felt to be a kind of impropriety. But there was no other proper name. At that time in political and media circles in Hong Kong, it was treasonous to point out the absurdity of nationalism in its strained production of this martyr. Anybody who dared point to the emperor’s new clothes was punished for another impropriety, disrespect for nationalism and for death itself. The anxious nationalist community somehow intuited the precariousness of nationalism in this incident. As a precaution, anyone who dared to point out the
ridiculousness of this death was immediately silenced and condemned as a traitor to China. Either one had to accept Chen as a martyr, or one risked symbolic discrimination and banishment into the realm of the outcast, the realm of “symbolic death” (Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* 262). The place of symbolic death was a place disavowed by the perverse nationalist community, as if such a place could not really exist. It was the place of the outcast, which the symbolic order of nationalism (a hegemonic discourse in the mass media at that time) refused to understand and to accept into the realm of sharable meaning. Thus, one had to accept the incorporation of the corpse through the reductive discourse of nationalism and martyrdom. If one were to insist on being true to the corpse’s inexplicability at that moment, one had to go into the place of (a) symbolic, living death.

**The *extimate* of the Other**

For Miller, the symbol of the living dead is the haunting figure of the *extimate*, both excluded by and intimate to the hegemonic symbolic community of the Protect Diaoyutai nationalists. Extimacy, in Lacanian terms, is a subject position both external and intimate. This is not a facile imaginary fantasy of the in-between invented out of solipsism to dodge and evade the difficulty, but rather a hard-to-live-with real paradox. It is paradoxical that “the most intimate is at the same time the most hidden” (“*Extimité*” 76) within us, the most hidden from ourselves, the most unacknowledged in us. “Extimacy is not the contrary of intimacy. Extimacy says that the intimate is Other—like a foreign body, a parasite” in us (76). It is the place of the excluded but intimate victims of the imagined Protect Diaoyutai nationalist community, the real testimony to its exclusion and its discursive violence.

For example, the Japanese ally in this anti-Japanese nationalist movement would be both an intimate member of the movement but also a disturbing reminder of the lack of totality of their racist nationalist imaginary. The imagined national Other, the Japanese, is not One. The cultural imaginary of the “Japanese” as national and racial enemy is an arbitrary construction, one that is impossible without the violence of categorical exclusion. The Japanese woman, imagined as the sexualized racial other, the target of imaginary hatred and abuse in the language of the Protect Diaoyutai nationalist movement, can in fact also be one of their most intimate allies. The effort of the Japanese woman demonstrating with them against Japanese militarism and ultra-nationalism in Hong Kong, Ōdate Kamina (probably a pseudonym), for instance, was imagined as a “willing servant” or a beautiful
ally” deflected from the “enemy” camp (Huang, Wei-ming 117-21; Chengbao Sept. 6 1996). This logic is the same as that of Japanese men who imagined the Asian Comfort Women were willing sex slaves.

This paper, however, speaks from the place of the victim of this nationalist imaginary, the place disavowed by this hegemonic fantasy, and looks back at its tattered, anxious clumsiness. It is an attempt to see the nationalism of the Protect Diaoyutai community in its clumsily bandaged distress, to see it in its irritable agony, to see it for the first time from its extimate place, excluded but intimate—because this essay is also speaking from the position of a Hong-Konger fighting for the right to democracy, a position intimate to this democratic nationalist brotherhood. The extimate is the place of symbolic death. The extimate is experienced by the hegemonic community as ghostly and non-existent. However, it is also a place of insistent critique outside-in the symbolic hegemony. To be in the unprotected and exposed wilderness of the extimate is a precarious and strenuous task. As Li Yi lamented, reflective and critical voices were “hunted down to quiet disturbance by intolerant actions” (“Baodiao fansi”). But there are always those who are ethically driven to risk symbolic death and sometimes even actual persecution in order to bear witness to the possible significance of this movement and its aftermath. They insist on keeping open the wounds of the body politic and examining them in all earnestness. They persist in unearthing issues that are hastily buried. They recall the ghosts cast away by the hegemonic symbolic order. They continue to question the implications of the nationalist community. Moreover, the Protect Diaoyutai movement has continued into the time of this paper, and will most probably extend into the future, overlapping more and more often with other populist Chinese nationalist movements erupting across China. In the face of the growing dominance of China and the increasing cockiness of Chinese nationalism, and in view of the increasing ethnic tensions within China and Hong Kong, one has reason to be worried now more than ever.

Thus, this paper itself is a small thing, a small attempt to speak to the Hong Kong Protect Diaoyutai community about the haunting logic and implications of their cultural fantasy, about the precarious relationship of their cultural imaginary to the perverse jouissance of the Other, about the distance between their nationalism and the democracy they claim to be fighting for. This voice of the denied and disavowed others is also insisted upon by Mok Chiu-yu, himself a Hong Kong activist, who protested in the 1970-71 Protect Diaoyutai movement against the US-Japan deal and the British colonial police crackdown on local civil society. He, however, reflected critically in 1996 that “Hong Kong’s return to China” should be
about “the people becoming the masters of their own place” and not about “a transfer of sovereignty (from Britain to China) . . . just as the Diaoyu Island is not simply about sovereignty” but about “the birds and fish” that actually live there. Although there is “oil underneath” Diaoyutai and thus the fuss about it in “Japan and China,” one should ask whether it “should then be drilled and exploited. Would this be environmentally damaging? . . . Moreover, the democracy people have been fighting for since the 1970s is still nowhere to be seen.” And that, rather than competitive populist nationalism, is the issue the democratic community should be worrying about (Recorded interview, September 1996). For Mok, this was a matter of the right to self determination of the birds and the fish and of the well-being of the environment. After all, the Diaoyutai islet has not been occupied by human beings for more than eight decades. Yet Mok also compared the birds and the fish to Hong Kong people, who were also denied their self-determination in the matters most crucial to their livelihood. Hong Kong was handed over by dynastic China as a colony to Britain in 1842, and then given by Britain as a colony to a very different People’s Republic of China in 1997. In 1996, right before Hong Kong changed hands between two colonizing states, Mok reflected on the Protect Diaoyutai movement of the 1970s, indirectly referring also to the 1996 movement. He therefore spoke from the position of the excluded others (e.g. animals) of anthropocentric discourse as well as the excluded others of the Protect Diaoyutai nationalist discourse (e.g. Hong Kongers who care more about democracy and self-determination). Mok is thus an extimate medium, expressing positions unheard of in the symbolic order of competing nationalist human communities.

The anti-Japanese Japanese are perhaps the most intriguing participants in this picture. The leftist historian Kiyoshi Inoue, a Professor of History at Kyoto University during the 1971 Protect Diaoyutai movement, risked being ridiculed and marginalized by and within Japanese academia to produce one of the most influential research studies on the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands sovereignty issue (Zhongguo yanjiu yuebao; “Japanese Militarism”; Kasei wago 110:28 Oct 1996). Surprisingly, he produced ample evidence in support of the Chinese claim. He continued to debate with Japanese scholars like Toshio Okuhara of Kokushikan University (Okinawa Quarterly 58: 79-93), whom he thought were engaging in biased readings of the evidence in order to produce research favorable to the Japanese claim. Since then, a lot of research, both Chinese and Japanese, has relied on Inoue’s work as a point of departure. Other Japanese scholars like Murata Tadayoshi of Yokohama National University (“Senkaku retto/Diaoyudao”) and Urano Tatseo of Nihon University (Urano et al Diaoyutai qundao) went out of their
way to see things from the other side and to cooperate with Chinese and Taiwanese scholars in opening a research platform beyond the straight-jacket of competing nationalist concerns. These scholars saw the importance of maintaining a critical distance from the competing nationalisms. They came up with ways to channel the aggressive drives of nationalism, enabling them to circulate around the analysis of the petit objet a, trying to signify the petit objet a in the Diaoyutai research discourse itself instead of allowing these nationalist drives to get hold of the national subject directly, as in the case of Chen Yuxiang.

In order to traverse our own cultural fantasies, then, we must choose to be in the place of our culture’s others, whose modes of being are foreign to the hegemonic community. This position risks symbolic death—the condition of being totally unrecognized by the resident community. The difficulty is to persist in testimony, to find a way to make the resident community cognize and face those others whose exclusion forms the very foundation of the community. This space of intervention is the space of the extimate. This is the position in which critical subjectivity can emerge from within the dominant symbolic orders and cultural imaginaries, a position diametrically opposed to the perverse object that fulfills the imaginary totality of the Other, the object of the Other’s jouissance. To insist on the condition of extimacy is an act each subject has to face from his or her own singular position. No other can stand in for the subject in this process of traversal of one’s own cultural fantasies. This is the act that could irreversibly transform one’s relation to the symbolic and imaginary orders of one’s culture.

Conclusion

This much-reported trans-local nationalist movement is a complex, continuing encounter with nationalism that the Chinese and other implicated regional communities can share. Hopefully, more extimate—that is, in critical proximity—interventions in the region can help us to construct a shared theoretical platform in order to formulate the symptoms of our cultures in all their complexities, and to learn what to do with our cultural symptoms other than giving in to the (their)

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22 Similarly, Ikeda Daisaku, the president of the Soka Gakkai International, spoke on behalf of the Chinese victims of Japanese militarism and questioned Japan’s claim in the issue of Diaoyu/Senkaku Island. Marginalized Japanese communist organizations like Nihon Shinjidai sha in Tokyo also spoke on behalf of the historically disavowed victims of Japanese nationalism and militarism. They wrote a letter to the “Hong Kong citizens, comrades and friends” on 18 Sept. 1996 to offer “the support of quotidian Japanese organizations” for the “Protect Diaoyutai” movement. A photocopy was given to the author by a fellow student on 19 Sept. 1996.
same old jouissance. This would allow the respective national subjects to cautiously analyze their intricate relations to their own cultural imaginaries, symbolic orders and (potentially horrifically excessive) jouissance in the playing out of nationalism. This is “necessary” in order that we do not fall back on imaginary fantasies that elide our confrontation with the traumatic and real implications of nationalism. How can theory articulate, symbolize and make knowable to the impassioned national subject the plight of nationalism’s disavowed and persecuted others? Together, we need to find a way to speak to the perverse cultural imaginary of nationalism about its denied unconscious issues, and make it listen.

Appendix: Protect Diaoyutai Movement Timeline (until 1996)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1402</td>
<td>The Chinese text <em>Shunfen xiangsong</em> recorded the names &amp; positions of the Diaoyu islets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1524</td>
<td>The Chinese text <em>Envoy to the Liuqiu</em> (Ryukyu in Japanese) recorded passing the Diaoyutai, the very end of Chinese territory, before reaching the Ryukyu territories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>Lin Ziping, a Chinese scholar, classified the Diaoyu islets as part of Chinese territory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>Japan annexed the Ryukyu islands and attempted later to incorporate the Senkaku islands (Diaoyutai in Chinese) into the Ryukyu and justify taking the Ryukyu as part of the territory of Okinawa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>The Japanese Cabinet ordered the Okinawa Prefecture to suspend national inscription plans for the Senkaku islands to avoid getting China's attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>The Qing Empress Dowager wrote an imperial edict giving three Diaoyu islets to an official, Sheng Xuanhuai, who found arthritis herbal medicine on the islets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>In view of its victory over China in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895, the Japanese government incorporated the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands into its territory before the <em>Treaty of Shimonoseki</em> of 1895. (Later, after WWII, Japan claimed that the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands were incorporated into Japan before the <em>Treaty of Shimonoseki</em> and therefore should not be included among the colonized territories restored to China under the provisions of the Cairo and Potsdam Declarations, which were based on the Shimonoseki treaty.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 April 1895</td>
<td>China, defeated in the Sino-Japanese War, signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki and ceded Taiwan to Japan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Dec. 1943</td>
<td>Cairo Communiqué</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Court in Tokyo designated Senkaku Retto as being under Taipei’s jurisdiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>The US took over the Ryukyu islands and included the Diaoyu islets under its jurisdiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>In the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the US included the Diaoyutai islets within the scope of its mandatory rule over the Ryukyu Islands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>China started exploring for oil reserves in the South China Sea.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Japan started exploring for oil reserves in the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1968</td>
<td>The United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) reported vast hydrocarbon deposits in the South China Sea. US technology made it possible to downgrade its military bases in Okinawa and return that island’s administration to Japan. However, with the oil reserves in mind, the US and Japan strategically included as much as possible in their territorial claims on the continental shelf in the reversion of Okinawa’s administration to Japan. The date of reversion was set in 1972. Japan then worked to justify taking the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands as part of the territory of Okinawa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 May 1969</td>
<td>Japan’s Ryukyu Prefecture erected a signpost on Diaoyu islet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1969</td>
<td>Hundreds of Chinese students attended a University of Chicago seminar on Diaoyutai.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Sept. 1970</td>
<td>A China Times reporter erected a Republic of China flag on Diaoyutai.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Sept. 1970</td>
<td>Chinese University of Hong Kong’s Chung Chi College student newspaper argued for the protection of Chinese sovereignty over Diaoyutai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Sept. 1970</td>
<td>The US officially announced the reversion to Japan of the Okinawa administration, which included the Diaoyutai islets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Nov. 1970</td>
<td>Taiwan students at Princeton University set up an Action Committee to Protect the Diaoyu Islands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 Jan. 1971</td>
<td>2500 demonstrated outside the United Nations Headquarters, starting the wave of global Protect Diaoyutai movements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 Feb. 1971</td>
<td>More than 40 people marched to the Japanese Consulate in Hong Kong. Beginning of the Protect Diaoyutai movement in Hong Kong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 May 1971</td>
<td>1,000 Protect Diaoyutai protestors in Hong Kong rallied at the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 July 1971</td>
<td>Thousands strong Protect Diaoyutai rally at Victoria Park on the day commemorating Japan’s 1937 declaration of total war on China.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 1971</td>
<td>Zhou Enlai endorsed the Protect Diaoyutai movement as the “overseas May Fourth Movement” and gave a highly publicized audience to students from Taiwan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 May 1972</td>
<td>The US announces reversion of Diaoyutai and Ryukyu administration to Japan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 1972</td>
<td>Zhou Enlai told visiting Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka that the sovereignty dispute over the Diaoyutai would be shelved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Oct. 1978</td>
<td>Deng Xiaoping announced that the Diaoyutai sovereignty issue would be shelved indefinitely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 July 1996</td>
<td>Right-wing Japan Youth Federation (Nihon Seinen sha) built a solar powered lighthouse on Senkaku Island/Diaoyutai.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 July 1996</td>
<td>The Chinese Foreign Minister got a guarantee from the Japanese Foreign Minister that the lighthouse would be dismantled.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 July 1996</td>
<td>The Japan Youth Federation applied to have the lighthouse recognized as an official beacon marked on Japanese maritime charts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Aug. 1996</td>
<td>The lighthouse was damaged by a typhoon and remained slanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sept. 1996</td>
<td>A Hong Kong Mingpao reporter tried to reach Diaoyutai but was blocked by the Japan Coast Guard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Sept. 1996</td>
<td>Zeng Jiancheng (nicknamed the Bull) and comrades inaugurated the <em>Action Alliance in Defense of the Diaoyu Islands</em> to raise money for the naval expedition to Diaoyutai to “demonstrate Chinese sovereignty.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Sept. 1996</td>
<td>Hong Kong’s democrats organized a 3,000 strong Protect Diaoyutai march. (The core pro-Beijing constituency, wary of being left behind, organized two Protect Diaoyutai rallies soon after.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Sept. 1996</td>
<td>Protect Diaoyutai movement leader in Beijing was forced by the government to leave the city. Ex-prisoners in Taiwan planned to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
blow up the Japanese lighthouse on Diaoyutai. Taiwan's *China Times Weekly* landed on Diaoyutai and discovered a Taiwanese stone tablet on the islet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 Sept. 1996</td>
<td>The Hong Kong democratic alliance organized the largest Protect Diaoyutai march of 1996.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 Sept. 1996</td>
<td>Chen Yuxiang’s team set sail to Diaoyutai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Sept. 1996</td>
<td>Chen Yuxiang drowned off the coast of Diaoyutai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Oct. 1996</td>
<td>The <em>Action Alliance in Defense of the Diaoyu Islands</em> successfully landed on Diaoyutai and planted a PRC and an ROC flag on it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Works Cited


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“Gunboat turns back Hong Kong journalists.” Hong Kong Standard 7 Sept. 1996.


“12,000 march as anger over Diaoyutai grows.” South China Morning Post Sept. 16, 1996.


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**About the Author**

Mirana May Szeto is Assistant Professor in Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong. She is working on a book entitled *The Radical Itch: Cultural Politics and Its Discontents* and a monograph entitled *Decolonizing Neoliberalism: Urban Cultural Politics in Post 1997 Hong Kong*. Her articles also appear in *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* and forthcoming collected volumes on Hong Kong film and Chinese literature and culture.

Email: mmszeto@hku.hk

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