

The Generative (Bio-)Operation of Nationalist Discourse:  
The Anti-American and Anti-Japanese Protest Movement in Contemporary China

Guanjun Wu

(School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics, Monash University)

Abstract

April 2005 was a distinctive moment for Chinese people. Within one week, mass protests swept across mainland China. Citizens unexpectedly took to the streets, from hundreds to tens of thousands in over thirty major cities, shouting anti-Japanese slogans, calling for a radical boycott of Japanese products, burning flags and cars, smashing Japanese restaurants and shops. Owing to the strict state control, protests are very rare in mainland China, especially after the 1989 Tiananmen incident – among those rare cases of mass protest that did occur, most were actually sanctioned by the state beforehand, some were even organized by the government. So, how do we interpret these violent demonstrations? This paper employs Lacanian psychoanalysis and critical discourse analysis to examine the anti-Japan protests of 2005, with reference to the 1999 anti-NATO protest demonstrations. More broadly, it discusses the phenomenal rise of contemporary Chinese nationalism.