

Remember Diaoyutai Islands: Territorial Dispute, Nationalism, and Generational Memory of Nostalgic Intellectuals in Taiwan

A-chin Hsiau

ABSTRACT

Territorial dispute between countries often has significant and lasting impact on civil society and different civil society actors usually have different relationship with territorial dispute. This article first gives a brief overview of the “Defending the Diaoyutai Islands Movement” (*Baodiao*) in Taiwan and America. The territorial dispute over the Diaoyutai Islands (Senkakus Islands) in the East China Sea between Taiwan, Japan, and China emerged in the late 1960s. Over the last four decades, non-state actors devoting themselves to *Baodiao* included intellectuals, local politicians, fishermen, and so on, whose ideologies, interests, and practical approaches to defending the Diaoyutais are not necessarily the same. Among them, the intellectual-activists who pioneered *Baodiao* either in America or Taiwan during 1971, especially the “leftist-unificationist” members (*Zuotong*) who have strongly advocated Taiwan’s unification with China, have been most vocal in calling for the defense of the “Chinese” territory of the Diaoyutais since the turn of the new millennium in the context of Taiwan’s democratization and “Taiwanization” in politics and culture.

This article then explains why there has been an unexpected *Baodiao* memory boom created mainly by the leftist-unificationists in the recent two decades, highlighting their high cultural capital compared with that of local politicians and fishermen, nostalgic tendency typical of their late adult stage of life, the significant development of Taiwanese nationalism, and the rising of China as a global power. The article further points out that many highly antagonistic leftist and rightist members of *Baodiao* intellectual-activists have since the mid-1990s reached rapprochement because of their shared Chinese identity, opposition against Taiwanese nationalism, and support for the rising China, thus echoing China’s rising popular nationalism. The article concludes that the high capability

of these intellectual-activists in constructing collective memory, as demonstrated in their nostalgia for the *Baodiao* past, shows that they have been one of most unyielding civil society actors demanding to defend the Diaoyutais, and one of the most important agents of territorial nationalism, which arguably must be overcome in order to solve the territorial dispute over the Diaoyutais, maintain stability in the East China Sea, and achieve peaceful coexistence among Taiwan, China, and Japan.

Keywords: Diaoyutai, Defending the Diaoyutai Islands Movement, Territorial Dispute, Nationalism, Intellectuals, Nostalgia, Generational Memory