



The Resurgence of Chinese Nationalism : Implications Toward the Regional Security of East Asia



Lai Yew Meng

Kertas Kadangkala Bil.2
Occasional Paper No.2

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11-15 SEPTEMBER 2001
KOTA KINABALU, SABAH

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**Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and
Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah**

Kota Kinabalu

2001

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First Printing / Cetakan Pertama, 2001

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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Lai Yew Meng

The resurgence of Chinese nationalism : implications toward the regional security of East Asia / Lai Yew Meng

(Occasional paper ; no. 2)

ISBN 983-2188-60-1

1. Chinese--East Asia. 2. Nationalism--East Asia. 3. East Asia--Politics and government. 4. National characteristics, Chinese. I. Title. II. Series: Kertas kadangkala ; bil 2.

320.540951

Published in Malaysia by/ Diterbitkan di Malaysia oleh
PUSAT PENATARAN ILMU DAN BAHASA
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH
Locked Bag 2073, 88999 Kota Kinabalu,
Sabah, Malaysia.

Printed in Malaysia by / Dicetak di Malaysia oleh
Percetakan CCS Sdn. Bhd. (125642-A)
No.11, Block G, Sri Kemajuan Industrial Estate,
Mile 6-1/2, Jalan Tuaran, 88450 Inanam, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
Tel : 088-437120, 426120 Fax : 088-426120

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*To Mom & Dad.
for their unconditional love & support*

Preface

This paper emphasises the potential resurgence of Chinese nationalism in Mainland China and its possible implications toward the regional security of East Asia. The fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as well as the widening embrace of the international capitalist world economy by the People's Republic of China has somewhat undermined the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. As China's market reforms and the Soviet disintegration have continued to dilute communism, Beijing has manipulated nationalism as a replacement to preserve national unity and regime legitimacy. The ascendancy of nationalism has a significant impact on the contemporary Chinese foreign policy outlook and external behaviour. Furthermore, as China becomes more powerful politically and economically, nationalism and patriotism appear to be the dominant appeal amongst the Chinese officialdom and intellectual community, not to mention the general public as a whole. Current trends have shown the manifestation of Chinese nationalism in governing Beijing's uncompromising attitude towards issues concerning territorial sovereignty as well as its increasingly assertive stance in regional and global politics. The recent public outcry in response to the American spy plane incident and the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade were excellent illustrations of how much primordial and nationalistic sentiments have influenced the Chinese people's mindset, apart from

highlighting Beijing's increasing propensity to manipulate these sentiments to realise its policy goals. Another vivid example was the mild confrontation a couple of years ago, between Chinese and Japanese activists while exerting each other's claims on the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands, which saw activists from Mainland China as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan combining forces to challenge a perceived common foe. This instance has provoked the perception of Chinese nationalism being a possible fulcrum towards realising the concept of Greater China. Therefore, this paper would try, among others, to analyse and make some assumptions on the possible implications of the emancipation of Chinese nationalism toward regional security, having in mind that China is currently involved in various conflicts concerning territorial sovereignty and integrity (i.e. Taiwan, South China Sea, Sino-Indian border, Tibet etc.), and also towards the overseas-Chinese who make up a sizeable population in both North and Southeast Asia. This paper concludes that China could become a potential destabilising force in East Asia if aggressive or chauvinistic nationalism (the rekindling of Sinocentrism) is to govern China's external behaviour in the coming decades.