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WESTERN NATIONALISM AND EASTERN NATIONALISM

Is there a difference that matters?

Mercifully, we no longer hear a great deal about Asian Values. These 'values' were too brazenly rhetorical, as euphemisms of certain state leaders to justify authoritarian rule, nepotism and corruption. The 1997 financial crisis, anyway, dealt a harsh blow to their claims to have found a fast-track road to permanent economic growth and prosperity. But the idea that there is a distinctively Asian form of nationalism is not only very much still with us, but has roots going back more than a century.[1] It is fairly clear that its ultimate origins lie in the notorious insistence of a racist European imperialism that 'East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.' But this insistence on an irremediable racial dichotomy began to be used, early in the twentieth century, by a number of nationalists in different parts of Asia to mobilize popular resistance against a now-utterly-alien domination. Is such a radical dichotomy really justifiable, either theoretically or empirically?

I myself do not believe that the most important distinctions among nationalisms—in the past, today, or in the near future—run along East–West lines. The oldest nationalisms in Asia—here I am thinking of India, the Philippines and Japan—are older than many of those in Europe and Europe Overseas—Corsica, Scotland, New Zealand, Estonia, Australia, Euskadi, and so forth. Philippine nationalism, in its origins, looks—for obvious reasons—very similar to those in Cuba and

continental Latin America; Meiji nationalism has obvious similarities to the late nineteenth-century official nationalisms we find in Ottoman Turkey, Tsarist Russia and Imperial Great Britain; Indian nationalism is morphologically analogous to what one finds in Ireland and in Egypt. One should also add that what people have considered to be East and West has varied substantially over time. For well over a century, Ottoman Turkey was commonly referred to in English as the Sick Man of Europe, in spite of the Islamic religious orientation of its population, and today Turkey is still trying hard to enter the European Community. In Europe, which used to regard itself as entirely Christian—forgetting about Muslim Albania—the numbers of Muslims are growing rapidly by the day. Russia was long regarded as largely an Asiatic power, and there are still plenty of people in Europe who think this way. One could add that in Japan itself, there are some people who regard themselves as a kind of White. And where does the East begin and end? Egypt is in Africa, but it used to be part of the Near East and has now, with the end of the Near East, become part of the Middle East. Papua–New Guinea is just as Far East from Europe as is Japan, but does not think of itself this way. The brave new little state of East Timor is trying to decide whether it will be part of Southeast Asia, or of an Oceania which from some standpoints—e.g., Lima and Los Angeles—could be regarded as the Far West.

These problems have been further confounded by massive migrations of populations across the supposedly fixed boundaries of Europe and Asia. From the opening of the treaty ports in China in 1842, millions of people from the Celestial Kingdom started moving overseas—to Southeast Asia, Australia, California—later, all over the world. Imperialism took Indians to Africa, Southeast Asia, Oceania and the Caribbean; Javanese to Latin America, South Africa and Oceania; Irish to Australia. Japanese went to Brazil, Filipinos to Spain, and so on. The Cold War and its aftermath accelerated the flow, now including Koreans, Vietnamese, Laotians, Thais, Malaysians, Tamils, and so forth. Thus, churches in Korea, China and Japan; mosques in Manchester, Marseilles and Washington DC; Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh temples in Los Angeles, Toronto, London and Dakar. Everything about contemporary communications suggests that these flows will continue and perhaps accelerate: even once closed Japan has more foreign residents than ever before in its history, and

[1] Text of an address delivered in Taipei, April 2000.

its demographic profile will make still more immigrants essential if its development and prosperity are to continue.

What will come out of these migrations—what identities are being and will be produced—are hugely complex, and largely still unanswerable, questions. It may amuse you if, on this subject, I insert a short personal anecdote. About four years ago I taught a graduate seminar at Yale University on nationalism, and at the outset I asked every student to state their national identity, even if only provisionally. There were three students in the class who, to my eyes, seemed to be 'Chinese' from their facial features and skin colour. Their answers surprised me and everyone else in the room. The first, speaking with an absolutely West Coast American accent, firmly said he was 'Chinese', though it turned out he was born in America and had never been to China. The second quietly said he was 'trying to be Taiwanese'. He came from a KMT family that had moved to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek in 1949, but was born in Taiwan, and identified there: so, not 'Chinese'. The third said angrily, 'I'm a Singaporean, dammit. I'm so tired of Americans thinking I'm Chinese, I'm not!' So it turned out the only Chinese was the American.

Creole nationalisms

If, as I have argued, the distinctions between East and West, Europe and Asia, are not the most realistic or interesting axes along which to think about nationalism, then what perhaps might be more fruitful alternatives? One of the central arguments of my book *Imagined Communities* is that nationalisms of all varieties cannot be understood without reflecting on the older political forms out of which they emerged: kingdoms, and especially empires of the pre-modern and early modern sorts. The earliest form of nationalism—one that I have called creole nationalism—arose out of the vast expansion of some of these empires overseas, often, but not always, very far away. It was pioneered by settler populations from the Old Country, who shared religion, language and customs with the metropole but increasingly felt oppressed by and alienated from it. The United States and the various states of Latin America which became independent between 1776 and 1830 are the famous examples of this type of nationalism. One of the justifications, sooner or later, for these creole nationalisms was also their distinctive history, and especially their demographic blending of settler and indigenous peoples, to say nothing of local traditions, geographies, climates, and so forth.

Such creole nationalisms are still very much alive, and one could say are even spreading. French-settler nationalism in Quebec has been on the rise since the late 1950s, and still teeters on the brink of separation from Canada. In my own country, Ireland, the 'settler' question in the North is still a burning one and has prevented the full integration of the country up to now. In the South, some of the earliest nationalists, the Young Irelanders of the rebellion of 1798, came from settler families or, like my own ancestors, who participated in that rebellion, from families of mixed settler and indigenous, Celtic–Catholic origins. Australians and New Zealanders are currently busy with creolized nationalisms, attempting to distinguish themselves from the United Kingdom by incorporating elements of Aborigine and Maori traditions and symbolisms. So far, so West, it might seem. At the risk, however, of giving some offence, I would like to suggest that some features of Taiwanese nationalism are also clearly creole, as, in a somewhat different vein, are those of Singaporean nationalism.

The core constituencies for these nationalisms are 'overseas' settlers from the Southeastern coastal regions of the Celestial Kingdom, some escaping from the imperial state, some sent over by that state. These settlers imposed themselves, sometimes peacefully and integratively, sometimes by violence, on the pre-existing populations, in a manner that reminds us of New Zealand and Brazil, Venezuela and Boer South Africa. Sharing, to various degrees, religion, culture and language with the metropole, these creole countries nonetheless over time developed distinct traditions, symbolisms, historical experiences, and eventually moved towards political independence when they felt the imperial centre too oppressive or too remote. One should not allow oneself to overemphasize the unique significance of Taiwan's fifty years under Japanese imperialist rule. After all, the French settlers in Quebec suffered almost 200 years under British imperial rule, and the Dutch in South Africa the same for a demi-century. Nor is it easy to argue that Japanese imperialist culture was significantly more alien from overseas 'Chinese' culture than British imperialist culture was from overseas 'French' and 'Dutch'.

Nor can one claim any easy distinction between racist European or Western creoles and the rest. The United States, South Africa and Argentina were extremely racist, but it would be hard to say that the Québecois were any more racist than the Southeast China émigrés to Taiwan or the Japanese émigrés to Brazil. If this argument is right,

then we have a creole form of nationalism that crops up in the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and, surely, also the twenty-first century, in the Americas, in Europe, in Africa, in the Antipodes, as well as in Asia. A global phenomenon. With one unexpected side-effect: there are many nations today that share (with their own variations) Spanish, French, English or Portuguese, without any one of them imagining that they 'own' this language. It is nice to think about 'Chinese' soon following in their wake.

A second form of nationalism, extensively discussed in *Imagined Communities*, and which seems relevant here, is what I have called, following Hugh Seton-Watson, official nationalism. This form of nationalism arose historically as a reactionary response to popular nationalisms from below, directed against rulers, aristocrats and imperial centres. The most famous example is provided by Imperial Russia, where the Tsars ruled over hundreds of ethnic groups and many religious communities, and in their own circles spoke French—a sign of their civilized difference from their subjects. It was as if only peasants spoke Russian. But as popular nationalisms spread through the empire in the nineteenth century (Ukrainian, Finnish, Georgian and so on), the Tsars finally decided they were national Russians after all, and in the 1880s—only 120 years ago—embarked on a fatal policy of russification of their subjects, so to speak making Tsars and their subjects the same people—which was exactly what was avoided before. In the same way, London tried to anglicize Ireland (with substantial success), Imperial Germany tried to germanify its share of Poland (with very little success), Imperial France imposed French on Italian-speaking Corsica (partial success) and the Ottoman Empire Turkish on the Arab world (with no success). In every case, to quote myself, there was a major effort to stretch the short, tight skin of the nation over the vast body of the old empire.

Can one say that this form of nationalism was uniquely Western or European? I do not think this is possible. We can, for example, consider the strange case of Japan, recently discussed in a remarkable book by Tessa Morris-Suzuki.[2] She illustrates in wonderful detail the abrupt transformation that came with the Meiji Restoration in the way that the Ainu and the Ryukyu islanders were regarded and handled. It had long been the policy of the Tokugawa shogunate to forbid the Ainu to dress

[2] *Re-Inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation*, Armonk, NY 1998.

as Tokugawa–Japanese or adopt Tokugawa–Japanese customs and traditions; similarly, envoys from the Ryukyus bringing tribute to Edo were instructed to dress as exotically Chinese as possible. In both instances, the basic idea was to separate these peripheral (barbarian) peoples as far as possible from the imperial centre. But with the rise of Meiji official nationalism, there was a complete reversal of policy: Ainu and Ryukyu were now regarded as primitive and ancient types of the same Japanese race as the Meiji oligarchs themselves. Every effort, persuasive and more often coercive, was made to japanify them (with variable success). It could be argued that later imperial policy in Korea and Taiwan followed the same logic. Koreans were to take Japanese names and speak Japanese, and Taiwanese, as younger brothers, were perhaps to follow suit. They would eventually become Japanese, it was thought, even if second-class Japanese. Just like the Irish in the United Kingdom till 1923, and the Poles in Germany till 1920.

However, by far the most spectacular and ironical case is provided by the Celestial Empire, ruled from 1644 till its collapse, less than 90 years ago, by a Manchu—and also Manchu-speaking—dynasty. (There is, of course, nothing odd about this. There has not been an English dynasty in Great Britain since the eleventh century: the first two rulers of the present royal family, the Germans George I and II, spoke almost no English, and no one cared.) It is a significant sign of the recentness of Chinese nationalism that this curious situation bothered very few people until about 110 years ago. There was no attempt to manchufy the population or even the mandarinate, because the prestige of the rulers rested, as elsewhere, on difference, not similarity. The Dowager Empress tried, at the very end, to exploit popular hostility to the Western imperialists in the name of Chinese tradition but it was too late; the dynasty vanished in 1911 and, to some extent, the Manchus as well. The most popular writer in China today, Wang Shuo, is a Manchu, but he does not advertise this fact.

When Chinese nationalism did finally arise, it was rather late in world-historical time. This was what permitted the wonderful Li Ta-chao to write a famous article about China in its springtime, something entirely young and new. But it arose in a very peculiar situation, for which there are few world comparisons. China was deeply penetrated by the various imperialisms of the age, including Japanese, but it was not actually colonized. There were too many competing imperialisms by then,

and even Great Britain, which was having trouble swallowing vast India, blanched at the thought of swallowing even vaster imperial China. (The nearest comparison is perhaps imperial Ethiopia.) Furthermore, insofar as imperial China had real borders, it shared these with a weak russifying Tsarism that was already on its last legs. The Japanese naval victory over the Tsarist fleet occurred only 6 years before the Manchu dynasty collapsed, and 12 years before Tsarism came to a bloody end. All this encouraged most first-generation nationalists in China to imagine that the Empire could, without too much trouble, be turned into a nation. This was the dream also of Enver Pasha in Istanbul in the same era, of Colonel Mengistu Mariam in Addis Ababa three generations later, and of Colonel Putin in Moscow today. They thus combined, without much thought, the popular nationalism of the worldwide anti-imperialist movement with the official nationalism of the late nineteenth century; and we know that this latter was a nationalism which emanated from the state, not the people, and thought in terms of territorial control, not popular liberation. Hence the bizarre spectacle of someone like Sun Yat-sen, a genuine popular nationalist, also making absurd claims to territories in various parts of Southeast Asia and Central Asia, based on real or fanciful territorial conquests of dynastic rulers, many of them non-Chinese, against whom his popular nationalism was supposed to fight. Both the KMT and the CCP later took over this inheritance, in various proportions at various times.

At the same time, the former Celestial Empire was not quite as unique as I have just made out. To various extents its inheritors came, at different times, to accept the kinds of boundaries and new states that imperialism and anticolonial nationalism were forging, at least at the periphery: Mongolia, Korea, Vietnam, Burma, India and Pakistan. This acceptance also came from the new idea that the Chinese were a nation, and as such, in basic respects, just like dozens of other nations represented in the United Nations and its predecessor, the League. Taiwanese historians have also shown that at various times between 1895 and 1945 the ruling groups on the mainland effectively accepted the status of Taiwan as a Japanese colony, and supported the struggle of the Taiwanese people for independence from Japan, as they sometimes did for the people of Korea. The contradictions between popular nationalism and official nationalism, which are so strikingly evident on the mainland today, are, as I have said earlier, not unique. One can find them in other parts of the world. But they are especially important today because of

China's sheer size, vast population, and a government, which, having effectively abandoned the socialism that once justified its dictatorship, shows every sign of turning to official nationalism for renewed legitimation of its rule.

Spectacles of the Past and Future

There is one more feature of official nationalism which, across the planet, tends to distinguish it from other forms of nationalism. It is probably fair to say that all organized societies in former times depended (in part) for their cohesion on visions of the past which were not too antagonistic to one another. These visions were transmitted by oral tradition, folk poetry, religious teachings, court chronicles, and so forth. What is extremely hard to find in such visions is intense concern about the Future. When nationalism entered the world late in the eighteenth century, however, all this changed fundamentally. The accelerating speed with which social, cultural, economic and political change took hold, motored by the industrial revolution and modern communications systems, made the nation the first political–moral form which based itself firmly on the idea of progress. This is also why the concept of genocide was only recently invented, though old records indicate the names of thousands of groups that have quietly disappeared over the ages with hardly anyone really noticing or being concerned. The speed of change and the power of the Future also had the effect of fundamentally altering people's ideas about the past.

In *Imagined Communities*, I tried to illuminate the nature of this change by comparing it to the difficulties we face when we are shown photographs of ourselves taken as babies. These are difficulties which only industrial memory, in the shape of photographs, produces. Our parents assure us that these babies are us, but we ourselves have no memory of being photographed, cannot imagine what it was like to be ourselves at one year old, and would not recognize ourselves without our parents' assistance. What has happened in effect is that though there are countless traces of the past around us—monuments, temples, written records, tombs, artefacts, and so on—this past is increasingly inaccessible, external to us. At the same time, for all kinds of reasons, we feel we need it, if only as some sort of anchor. But this means that our relationship to the past is today far more political, ideological, contested, fragmentary, and even opportunistic than in ages gone by.

This is a worldwide phenomenon, basic to nationalism. But mainland China again offers us most interesting examples, and will continue to do so. Once a year, the government stages a huge television spectacular, which goes on for many hours and is extremely popular, showing the various peoples that make up the population of the PRC. What is very noticeable in this long display is a sharp distinction between the Great Han people and the various minorities. The minorities are made to appear in their most colourful traditional costumes, and indeed make a splendid sight. The Han themselves, however, cannot appear in traditional clothing, even though we know from paintings and other historical records just how colourful and beautiful these actually were. So the men, for example, appear in business suits, derived from Italian and French models, about which there is nothing Han at all. The Han thus manifest themselves as the Future, and the minorities as the Past, in a tableau which is utterly political, even if not entirely consciously so. This Past, of which the minorities are the visible sign, is also part of a Big Past through which the Chinese state's territorial stretch is legitimized. It is, of course, therefore a Chinese past.

Naturally, in this line of official discourse, the older the Past the better. One can get a curious sidelong look at this phenomenon if we consider aspects of the archaeology that the state sponsors. One especially odd aspect has emerged in the reaction to the widely accepted theory that the distinctively human species emerged most likely in what is today eastern Africa. Evidently it is not a pleasant thought in official circles that the ultimate ancestors of the Great Han people, as of all other peoples, lived in Africa, not China, and can hardly be described as Chinese. So considerable funds have been made available in the search for some physical remains, within the borders of today's China, that are both older than, and entirely distinct from, anything in Africa. My intention here is not to ridicule Peking, though that is easy enough to do, but to stress its comparability. The easiest way to show this is to tell you that when I was very young, growing up in Ireland, my mother found for me, in a second-hand bookshop, a fat volume, written for children, called a *History of English Literature*. It was originally published at the end of the nineteenth century when Ireland was still a part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The long opening chapter shows London searching for a Very Ancient Past in exactly the same manner as Peking. This chapter discusses an oral epic in the Gælic language, called the Book of the Dun (or Brown) Cow, written down in the eleventh century AD, when

the English language as we know it did not yet exist. When I was grown up, I found by accident a later edition of the same book, published in the 1930s. By then most of Ireland had become independent, so you will not be surprised that the chapter on the Brown Cow had disappeared, as if it had never existed.

Battle of the tongues

Let me finally turn to another form of nationalism, which, so far as I can tell, is clearly European in origin, and ask whether it can be said still to be Western in any useful sense. This form I call linguistic nationalism; it began to appear at the start of the nineteenth century in the dynastic empires of Europe, and had its philosophical origins in the theories of Herder and Rousseau. The underlying belief was that each true nation was marked off by its own peculiar language and literary culture, which together expressed that people's historical genius. Hence enormous energy came to be devoted to the construction of dictionaries for many languages which did not have them at that point—Czech, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Serbian, Polish, Norwegian, and so on. Oral literary traditions were written down and disseminated through print as popular literacy slowly began to increase. These productions were used to fight against the domination of the big languages of the dynastic empires, such as Ottoman, High German, Parisian French, the King's English and eventually Muscovite Russian, too. Sometimes these campaigns were successful, and sometimes they were not, in each case the outcome being determined politically. The successes are very well known and need not detain us here. The failures are less well known and very interesting. In the nineteenth century, for example, Paris succeeded, through control of the school system and most publishing, in reducing the many languages actually spoken in France to the status of dialects or patois. Less successful was Madrid in turning the many languages spoken in Spain (e.g. Catalan and Galician) into mere dialects of Castilian. London came very close to completely eliminating Gælic as a living language, but today it is making a considerable comeback.

If we turn to Asia, we find an enormous variety of attempts at linguistic nationalism which are very valuable for comparative study. The variety itself underlines the difficulty of arguing for a single Asian form of nationalism. The Meiji rulers followed the example of Paris, imposing the speech of Tokyo on the rest of the country, and reducing all other

forms to the marginal status of dialects—at a time when the spoken language of Kyushu was unintelligible in Honshu, and even more so the language of the Ryukyus. We are familiar with the process whereby Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, and so on, which are clearly languages in their own right—and as loosely connected as Romanian, Italian and Spanish—were reduced to dialects under the new national language of Mandarin. In Thailand, Bangkok Thai came to dominate what it called the dialects of the North, Northeast and South of the country—which Bangkokians usually do not understand.

Two remarkable hybrid cases are offered by Vietnam and Indonesia. In the first case, the French colonialists were determined to break the mandarinate's Chinese-style culture, by forcing the romanization of Vietnamese in the schools and publishing houses that it sponsored. In the 1920s and 1930s Vietnamese nationalists increasingly accepted this revolution, and extended it further, creating the basis for mass literacy in Vietnamese, but at the same time cutting off substantive direct contact with the Sinified character-based literary tradition of previous centuries. In the Dutch East Indies, the colonial government, too uncertain of the world-value of Dutch, and too miserly to spend the money needed to spread Dutch through the huge archipelago, worked through a standardized form of the islands' old lingua franca, Malay. By the late 1920s, Indonesian nationalists had decided that this language, now to be called Indonesian, was the true national language; after that many big languages like Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese and Buginese were turned into mere regional languages, though they are mostly older than Malay, and some have literary traditions much more impressive than Malay's.

Both India and the Philippines have failed—if that is the right word—to create a generally accepted national language. The colonial language—English and American—remains the effective language of the state and of the national elite. A vigorous English-language—and nationalist—literary culture exists in both places, and has accommodated itself to no less vigorous Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Tagalog and Cebuano cultures. Old Pakistan broke into two separate nations partly because of Karachi's suppression of the Bengali language, which then became the motor for a linguistic nationalism in Bangladesh that looks very similar to earlier linguistic nationalisms in Greece, Norway and Old Czechoslovakia. The newest nation-state in Asia, East Timor, which, in spite of its small size, contains over twenty ethnolinguistic groups, has opted for Portuguese

as its language of state, and a simple lingua franca (Tetun) as the language of national unity.

It would be very difficult to say that today Indian nationalism is less serious than Chinese, East Timorese than Thai, Indonesian than Japanese, or Taiwanese than Korean. If one asks why this should be so, especially today, an explanation is impossible without thinking about the role of the electronic media, which for most people now exercise an even more powerful influence than print, the original mother of nationalism. Television makes it possible to communicate instantaneously the same images and symbols through different languages, even to the barely literate and the very young. More and more people, moreover, are becoming accustomed to using, with differing levels of skill, different languages in different contexts, without this seriously changing their national identification.

One could even argue, as I have done in another context, that electronic communications, combined with the huge migrations created by the present world-economic system, are creating a virulent new form of nationalism, which I call long-distance nationalism: a nationalism that no longer depends as it once did on territorial location in a home country. Some of the most vehement Sikh nationalists are Australians, Croatian nationalists, Canadians; Algerian nationalists, French; and Chinese, Americans. The internet, electronic banking and cheap international travel are allowing such people to have a powerful influence on the politics of their country of origin, even if they have no intention any longer of living there. This is one of the main ironic consequences of the processes popularly called globalization; it is yet another reason to believe that any sharp and unequivocal distinction between Asian and European nationalism lacks all validity.