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GLOBALIZATION OF NATIONALISM AND THE RISE OF ASIA

*Civilization—crossing civilizational
boundaries—Japan, China, and India*

The spread of nationalism—that is, of the secular national consciousness focused on this world and the distribution of dignity within it—under the name of Islam unquestionably has been an important aspect of the history of nationalism in the past half-century. But it has not been its most important aspect. This pride of place is reserved for the final break of this mode of thinking, previously contained within the limits of our—that is, monotheistic—civilization through these limits: its *globalization*. The monotheistic civilization, usually inappropriately called “Western” in the West, and elsewhere within its confines (Russia, eastern and southern Europe, South America) seen as the world civilization, is in fact one of three civilizations that today provide the frameworks for the existing cultures. Although the monotheistic civilization is undoubtedly the largest of these frameworks, about half of humanity lives within the other two, the Chinese and Indian civilizations.

Characterizing a civilization as the framework within which individual cultures exist—as, for instance, both of the larger Christian and Muslim cultures exist within the framework of monotheistic civilization—implies that these individual cultures share the same characteristic first principles. In some fundamental sense, people within them think alike about life and have mutually understandable existential experiences. Cultures that belong to different civilizations, by contrast, have fundamentally different existential attitudes. In fact, civilizations are the fundamental divisions within humanity. Contrary to the still persisting view (which originated, as mentioned earlier, in Germany), these divisions are cultural, not racial, and cultural phenomena in no way reflect biological or genetic characteristics of human populations. As cultural effects ultimately are exercised on the level of individuals (compared with biological heredity, which can be examined only on the population level), physical group characteristics such as skin color or sex have no logical connection to culture and thus are totally irrelevant to the discussion of the aspects or forms of culture, including issues of identity—national identity among others.

Civilization is the highest level on which the cultural process happens. As the outer layer of culture, it affects all layers and levels beneath and inside it. These inner layers span all the cultural processes, from cultures that unite groups of societies of the same historical origin, religious tradition, and language, through the characteristic cultures of individual, lower-level autonomous units (such as principalities and nations), down through stratification-defined subcultures and institutions (which, remember, are merely patterned ways of thinking and acting in particular spheres), and finally to the individualized cultural process within the innermost cultural layer—the mind.¹ Civilizations are thus the most durable continuous cultural processes. Indeed, each of the three civilizations existing today has lasted between five and six millennia, and none of the ones that had existed before lasted less than seven hun-

dred years. This continuity is the product of the codification of the civilizational (first) principles in the written language, which lets them be transmitted consistently over many generations and extensive areas. These codified first principles distinguish between civilizations and make them self-sufficient; as a result, they also make civilizations irrelevant and indifferent to each other. A civilization's first principles help it resist cross-civilizational influences and obstruct regular processes of cultural diffusion from outside a civilization into it. At the same time, for cultures that do not have a civilizational framework (that is, cultures without indigenous or adopted codified first principles), civilizations exercise an almost magnetic attraction. Codified civilizational principles easily diffuse within populations that have none of their own, so that even militarily superior and conquering "uncivilized" cultures are absorbed within the conquered "civilized" culture. This is what happened several times in China, for instance, where successive "barbarian" conquerors were absorbed into the Chinese culture. Much more spectacularly, because of the reversed relative size of the conquering power and the conquered carriers of the civilizational principles, this is what also happened in the case of the Roman destruction of the small and already conquered (though never subdued) province of Judea. The ultimate result of the dispersion of the surviving remnant of the Jewish population was the spread of the peculiar Jewish religion of One God—monotheism—and the appropriation of its first principles as codified in the sixth century BCE redaction of the Hebrew Bible in the form of Christianity throughout the Greco-Roman world. In the fourth century CE, Christianity was adopted by Rome as its imperial creed, and within a few centuries, the expansion of monotheistic civilization made it territorially and demographically at least the equal of its Chinese and Indian contemporaries. As monotheism continued to spread also in the form of Islam, it would equal both the Chinese and Indian civilizations taken together.

Throughout the last two millennia of its existence, monotheistic civilization has been far more aggressive as a whole than either the Chinese or the Indian civilization. This drive may have stemmed from the original cultures that the monotheistic civilization attracted (Greek, Roman, Arabian), in which war had become the privileged way of life rather than the last resort for protecting the ways of life. Moreover, the monotheistic beliefs that these cultures adopted and which became fundamental for them and shaped their identities were not indigenous to them; thus they were not self-sufficient and needed repeated confirmation. The Chinese and Indian civilizations, by contrast, spread primarily through language and cultural precept, and remained mostly contained within the limits they had reached by the time that monotheistic civilization began to expand. In the first 1,500 years, this expansion was driven by religious (Christian and Muslim) proselytism. Though supported by the force of arms, it succeeded for cultural reasons (that is, the magnetism of codified first principles) because arms alone were powerless to promote monotheism in populations that already had codified first principles. It is astonishing how few inroads monotheistic civilization made into India, even though Islam has repeatedly invaded the space of the Indian civilization and parts of it were for centuries under Muslim rule. But in the past five hundred years, as monotheistic civilization expanded to the Western Hemisphere and most of Africa (and it is the addition of South American and African populations that made it the most populous of the three), much of this civilizational expansion was motivated by, and at the same time spread, national consciousness. It is also significant that as a major factor in shaping individual and group identities in India, dividing Indians' political commitments, and pitting Muslim Indians against the huge majority of others, Islam emerged only when absorbed into national consciousness.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, nationalism developed almost exclusively within the monotheistic civilization. The

only nation outside it was Japan. While everywhere within the monotheistic civilization and the cultures it absorbed, nationalism, once it was created in England, was imported into one society after another by indigenous agents (the first nationalists) in willing imitation of Western nations chosen as models, in Japan it was a clearly unwanted export. This circumstance resulted in different psychological dynamics that necessarily affected the character of the nationalism that developed in Japan.

Societies within the monotheistic civilization (like those within the Chinese civilization, of which Japan is a part, or the ones within the Indian civilization), however different in specifics, were and are fundamentally similar and mutually understandable thanks to their shared first principles. Like siblings or close cousins in a family, they have been relevant to each other, constantly within each other's sphere of observation, constantly compared with and evaluated against each other. As the logic based on the principle of no contradiction, implied by monotheism and privileged in the monotheistic civilization, encourages quantitative rather than qualitative comparisons, shared standards made some societies within it necessarily appear (to themselves and to others) superior and some inferior, better and worse than others, necessarily leading (1) some to wish *to be like* those whose superiority could not be denied, and (2) those that were near equals with claims to superiority to incessantly challenge each other. The unceasing conflict between Christianity and Islam, and between rising and falling powers within Christianity and Islam, stems from this psychological dynamic. The constant hostility toward the Jews has already been mentioned. This dynamic does not exist in the Chinese and Indian civilizational spheres. Neither sphere privileges the logic of no contradiction in the way that it is privileged in the monotheistic civilization. As a result, these spheres encourage *qualitative* comparisons—with an added difference that, in the case of the Chinese civilization, the early dominance of the Chinese Empire made challenges to its

evident superiority rare, if not altogether impossible. For more than two thousand years, the Middle Kingdom was an accepted hegemon within its “world”; no societies in the monotheistic civilization had anything comparable to such hegemony. Nationalism vastly increased the numbers of those who cared about the relative status of their geopolitical units by transforming these units from the patrimony of a few (or few thousand) individuals to inclusive communities of identity, by dignifying the personal identities of millions, and by making this personal dignity dependent on the dignity of such communities. It suddenly made millions of people now personally invested in the prestige of their communities’ desire to *be like* the recognizably superior communities to which they did not belong, and frustrated by their inability to become like them—all of which set in motion the dynamics of *ressentiment*.

But Japan never wanted to be like the West. Its elite never wanted Japan to be anything but itself. Though it was not entirely self-sufficient in its identity—having never denied its cultural participation in the Chinese civilizational sphere—it was entirely free of existential envy. Although it recognized China’s priority, it was certain of its own excellence and, if anything, looked down on the rest of humanity. The West was essentially irrelevant to it, held no significance for it, and was not a part of its world. Whatever Japan knew of Western societies was enough to convince it to regard them as barbarians, with utter contempt. As late as 1825, when Western powers (Russia, Britain, the United States) were eyeing Japan as a possible addition to their overseas dominions, an influential Japanese historian stated:

The earth in the firmament appears to be perfectly round, without edges or corners. However, everything exists in its natural bodily form, and our Divine Land is situated at the top of the earth. Thus, although it is not an extensive country spatially, it reigns over all quarters of the world, for it has never once changed its dynasty or its form of sovereignty. The various countries of the

West correspond to the feet and legs of the body. That is why their ships come from afar to visit Japan. As for the land amidst the seas which the Western barbarians call America, it occupies the hindmost region of the earth; thus, its people are stupid and simple, and are incapable of doing things.²

This analogical argument, stressing continuity and integrity of identity, may seem preposterous in comparison with the monotheistic civilization's logical ones, which tend to stress material power. Yet to call it "primitive" would be to disregard the millennia of cultural sophistication behind it and repeat the terrible mistakes that the West made in the nineteenth century, which culminated in the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Against the background of several millennia of culture, the recent entries into the continuous cultural process in Europe and America (the United States, remember, at that time was not yet fifty years old) could not but appear entirely uncivilized.

Japan did not reject outright everything that the monotheistic civilization exported. Common people, for instance, proved receptive to the message of sixteenth-century Jesuit missionaries. But because the logic of no contradiction was just one of the possible systems of consistency in terms of which (unlike us) they could think, they received Christianity without necessarily converting to it. Christianity simply became an option among many other beliefs that one could turn to on appropriate occasions and, when inappropriate, abandon altogether without much psychological distress. Something of this nature happened with nationalism as well. Nationalism was introduced to Japan in 1853 at the point of a gun, or rather of the cannons on Commodore Matthew Perry's "black ships," which soon would be followed by other Western nations' warships. Japan, at that time armed only with swords (for the use of firearms had been forbidden there since the late sixteenth century), was not in a position to refuse the offering, though, unlike the threats that accompanied it, made unconsciously.

Members of the second tier of its upper class, the samurai, understood they were being taught a valuable lesson. However offended by or unhappy they were with their unwitting teachers, they decided to learn it. Under the circumstances, it was impossible to defend the dignity of Japan and its way of life (in which the samurai were major stakeholders) unless they adopted the Western invaders' aggressive political attitude and developed their technology. The attitude was competitive nationalism. To adopt it in regard to the outside world necessitated a thorough reorganization of social relations inside Japan, above all by introducing the governing democratic principles of nationalism: the fundamental equality of membership and popular sovereignty. Obviously, as elsewhere, these principles were reinterpreted and implemented in accordance with the prenational indigenous culture. But the prenational culture in Japan was far more different from the cultures where nationalism originated than anywhere that nationalism had traveled before. As with Christianity earlier, Japan did not *convert* to nationalism—did not replace its earlier vision of reality with national consciousness and earlier identities within it with one inclusive national identity—but *added* these new consciousness and identity to the previously existing ones. This was reflected in the motto of early Japanese nationalism, “Western knowledge, Eastern values.” As a result, specifically, though the shogunate and the *daimyo* upper class were abolished, Japanese nationalism did not set great store on internal equality. What mattered was the equality of standards in relations among nations, and the fundamental equality of membership was interpreted as the participation of all the members of the nation equally in the national project of ensuring the dignity of Japan. The paramount dedication to this collective dignity explained Japan's intense competitiveness in the international arena.

The Japanese proved excellent and fast learners. Within fifteen years of its introduction, they had a clear understanding of na-

tional consciousness and created an extensive vocabulary for its expression. The new concepts captured the essence of Western ideas, which in the regions of their birth were often obscured by the etymologies of the words chosen to denote them for historical reasons. The nation, for example, was rendered as *kokumin*—"the people of the country." Likewise, *kyōsō*—"running and fighting"—openly conveyed the aggressive meaning of international *competition*, the primary goal of which was to undermine the opponent rather than demonstrate the excellence of the home team (as suggested by the sportive Western terms derived from Latin with their emphasis on togetherness and agreement). Another twenty years later, within barely one generation, Japan was a nation and had emerged as a major contender in the race for economic and military supremacy in which great Western nations were engaged. Notably, despite its size and severe lack of natural resources, it did so before the United States too entered these competitions in earnest.

In 1894, the Japanese "dwarf" (*wa*) challenged the Qing Empire for influence in the Korean Peninsula, and forced the giant China to sue for peace. The full impact of that astounding victory wouldn't be realized until the end of the twentieth century. Ten years later, Japan went a major step further: it attacked and defeated the Western military colossus—Russia. A genie was out of the bottle. The Americans, too impatient to think before acting, appeared to have released—in fact, created—a force that would prove impossible to control. Characteristically naïve, they would remain oblivious to their responsibility for this. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in late 1941, the American leadership seemed to sincerely believe that the attack was unprovoked, to be blamed entirely on Japanese nationalism. But who was responsible for Japanese nationalism? If any in the United States had been aware of the humiliation their nation had inflicted on Japan in 1853—barging in on a country that wished nothing from the world but to be left alone, then forcing on it the intolerable "unequal treaties," to drag it out

of its self-imposed isolation—by 1941 they had completely forgotten their own complicity. With the American historical memory still so short, how could Americans empathize with a people who regarded the relevant past in terms of millennia, and believe that it would patiently wait for eighty-eight years to respond to a provocation? Yet, throughout this period, Japan did nothing that it had not learned from the West.

At the turn of the twentieth century, when 1941 was far ahead, the spectacular self-assertion of the newly minted nation of Japan, however, had opened a new page in the history of nationalism. It triggered the process of *nationalism's globalization*, its break into China and India. Chinese national consciousness dates back to the defeat of China at the hands of Japan in 1895. It was reinforced by the subsequent victory of the small Asian nation over “the great White Power” (as the people of Southeast Asia called Russia), celebrated throughout the region, which also catalyzed nationalism in India. China’s much advertised these days “century of humiliation” was the century of humiliation by Japan. Unlike the Western powers—which spent the nineteenth century nibbling at the sides of what Napoleon called “the sleeping giant, waiting to be awakened,” which disregarded them as a giant animal might disregard annoying mosquitoes—Japan was always a significant other for China. As the site of the Eastern Capital of the World, it owed the Middle Kingdom filial respect and obedience. Yet Japan not only disobeyed but was blatant in its disrespect—and when the heavens did not fall, this undermined China’s self-respect, and woke up the proverbial giant. Much as in Japan itself forty years earlier, the members of Chinese elites who took this affront personally were not prone to resentment. Instead of nursing their envy (which, under the circumstances, would have been preposterous), they immediately took action, and decided to investigate the sources of the great empire’s weakness and learn what had made their former subordinate so mighty. Many of the brightest Chinese intellectu-

als chose Japan as a model, went there to study, and actively began to import into China the new consciousness that had actuated its rise—nationalism. They adopted the new Japanese vocabulary (developed for nationalist discourse) wholesale, and with it the Japanese insight into and interpretation of nationalism. This interpretation fit China well and was adopted with little modification. As in Japan, the cognitively tolerant nature of Chinese civilization, not limited by logic, allowed national consciousness to be incorporated among other forms of consciousness that had been added to the Chinese culture over its long history. They coexisted, like segments of a whole, alongside and without replacing each other. The psychological dynamics of Japanese nationalism (which, as mentioned, significantly differed from the psychological dynamics of the monotheistic civilization's nationalism) was inherited by Chinese nationalism as well: collective dignity was paramount, equality meant above all international equality and equal duty of all members to contribute to the dignity of the nation, while equality among the members mattered relatively little.³

Within hardly more than a decade from the beginning of these Chinese educational journeys to Japan, China had developed a Nationalist Movement (Guomindang).⁴ All its leaders had spent time in Japan to learn the new ways of nationalism. Within about two decades, the Guomindang had a rival—the communist movement, led by Mao Zedong, a young intellectual from a peasant background (not a rarity in China). This competing movement was modeled on the Bolsheviks in Russia (the RKPb, the Russian Communist/Bolshevik Party), which by that time were installed as the government within the one-party system, different from autocracy only in name. Like this Russian model, the Chinese communist movement was essentially nationalist. In the Russian case, the communist movement could not explicitly self-identify as national because it was in the Russian national interest to preserve its empire, at least half of which consisted of non-Russians and which

could not be “Russified” because of the ethnic character of Russian nationalism. The Chinese communists, for their part, did not self-identify as national because they needed to differentiate themselves from the Guomindang. The two movements fought to preside over the Chinese nationalist project, but the project was the same for both: a sovereign and dignified China. Given Japan’s agenda regarding China’s sovereignty at the time, they united in fighting it at least as often as they sought to undermine each other. Eventually, though, Mao got the upper hand, and the national project proceeded under the communist banner.

Both movements, however, represented only an elite sector, a tiny percentage of the Chinese population. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the Chinese people were not engaged. No community can be transformed into a nation by decree: nationalisms imposed by the state, as the examples of Italy and Spain demonstrate, are likely to be failed nationalisms even where abstract national consciousness is widespread, and even abstract national consciousness spreads only where an interest in it exists. In Europe, nationalism added dignity to the identity of every human being by making this world the sphere of the sacred, demoting God and elevating humanity. But in China, where this world always has been the sphere of the sacred and individual dignity reflected one’s educational achievement, it could not have such an effect. The conditions in Japan also differed greatly from those in China. In Japan, the nationalist elite were the samurai, a clearly defined class that had cultivated a unique ethic of service, maintained military discipline, and had a strong sense of authority. The samurai class also was unusually large in proportion to the population, around 7 percent (perhaps one samurai for every fourteen or fifteen Japanese). There was no such class in China. Although Chinese early nationalists were members of the elite by right of their education, they were a minority in the elite as a whole—a minority within its middling ranks, to be precise, belonging neither to the top of-

ficialdom nor to the vastly larger lower officialdom that mixed with the people and was an extension of it. The ruling class was essentially a bureaucracy; like all bureaucracies, it was internally stratified, had no unifying ethos or lifestyle, and was made even more amorphous by the sprawl of the empire and the gigantic size of the population it regulated. Its relationship with and influence over the people could not be compared to that between the samurai and the people of Japan, from whom the former could claim uniform obedience. In China, even after the nationalists gained influence, rose to positions of top leadership (as happened when the communists assumed power in 1949), and had all the means of official propaganda in their hands, they did not have the power to impose their consciousness on the vast masses physically under their control.

The ideals of the Chinese leadership remained irrelevant for the masses because the masses had nothing to do with the dignity or international prestige of China, and vice versa. In China, the government was responsible for those under it, while private individuals were responsible for their families. Moreover, social status, and thus dignity, depended entirely on education. Scholars enjoyed high status, while peasants and those engaged in business were looked down upon. The masses, by their very nature, could not contribute to the dignity of the nation; they were, in effect, culturally prevented from doing so. After Mao Zedong's death, his successor Deng Xiaoping's turn toward capitalism changed this. The change of economic policy implied a revolution in the communist leadership's attitude toward economic activity. It made the economic classes, previously denied dignity by Chinese traditions disparaging money-making, main shareholders in the collective dignity of the nation, and finally welcomed them into the dignified circle of contributors to the nation's glory. The speed and enthusiasm with which hundreds of millions of Chinese responded to the call of their rulers—which this time was an invitation rather

than an order—to join in the common national project took the world by surprise. Nobody expected China to go nationalistic all of a sudden. Its immediate economic competitiveness, if at all noticed as something new, was interpreted as a part of global secular trends. But the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the carefully rehearsed symbolism of which could not be mistaken, announced clearly what China was competing for.

This most recent significant change in the history of nationalism has opened a new page in human history. The Chinese colossus (with India, traditionally passive, close on its heels) has announced its candidacy for global hegemony. The rule of the West is at an end. It is not simply that the political map of the world must be redrawn: the world will radically change because the hegemonic values will be different. Within a generation, the destinies of humanity will be decided by the relations between China and India. It is an open question whether either superpower will try to impose its values on the rest of mankind, as the West has consistently attempted to do. Perhaps they will be more permissive in their government. The fact remains that the world's value hierarchy is changing. As the case of Japan demonstrated, the importation of nationalism from one civilization into another will likely significantly affect the nature of nationalism. It is already clear, for instance, that even though the original civilizational framework (of Christianity or Islam) dictated that individual dignity, which is paramount for the sense of life satisfaction in a nation, depends not only on a nation's international prestige but also on the implementation of the egalitarian principle within it, in both Japan and China only international prestige matters. As long as the collective dignity is preserved, Japan and China apparently consent to live with higher degrees of inequality inside their societies. Inequality, in their framework, is not identified with injustice. This, among other things, makes for far less division in these nations than in the West: while they

are intensely competitive in the international arena, they are not competitive inside. Egalitarianism, essential for the sense of inclusive identity in the West, is not a cardinal principle of Japanese or Chinese nationalisms. It would be hard to underestimate the effects of this difference in the very nature of nationalism on international politics—or the destiny of the world.

