

Preface to the Japanese Translation of *Advanced Introduction to Nationalism*, 2020

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It is a great honor for me to have one of my books at last translated into Japanese. From the moment I started studying Japan in the late 1990's, I have been an admirer of the Japanese people and its remarkable spirit – indomitable, dignified, confident without presumption, active but not agitated. I have long wanted to communicate my admiration to the Japanese people directly; this translation makes this possible.

Japan opened my eyes to the possibility of an existential experience, a way of thinking and feeling completely different from the one with which I was familiar after living in three different societies and studying many others, and made me realize that for the first 45 years of my life I have been enclosed within one of the several coexisting civilizations. It was because of Japan that I became interested in Sinic civilization and China, in particular; began developing a general, scientifically useful, concept of civilization; and, as a result of my new, cross-civilizational perspective, discovered the clue to the understanding of my own (referred to as “Western”) civilization, which was never adequately characterized and objectively understood before.

I began studying Japan in the framework of a comparison among the leading world economies for my book *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth*. Japan was then the second largest economy and its inclusion in the book was essential. By that time, I have already studied the emergence of nationalism in the major European cases and the United States and developed a conceptual model of the development of nationalism, allowing for three types of nationalism – individualistic/civic, collectivistic/civic, and collectivistic/ethnic – each with its characteristic political, social, and cultural implications. This conceptual model had already proved applicable to all the European, American, Middle Eastern, and African cases studied.

I traced the definition of nationalism from its understanding by the participants in the formation of the five original nationalisms: the English, French, Russian, German, and American, and to its historical origin in the aftermath of the English Wars of the Roses in the second half of the 15th century. Emerging from the breakdown of the feudal system of stratification as a result of the virtual destruction of the Plantagenet aristocracy on the battlefield and entering consciousness in the equation of people and nation (meaning at the time, respectively, the lower classes and the highest elite), nationalism, that is, perception of reality in national terms, national consciousness, implied a radical, revolutionary change in the social structure. Since the early 16th century, the word “nation” was reserved for this changed, new, structure. It was a sovereign community of fundamentally equal members and inclusive identity, which replaced the rigidly stratified feudal society, governed by forces outside and above it and divided into essentially unequal and unmixable social orders, each with its own exclusive identity. Especially striking against the background of the feudal society which it replaced, the principles of popular sovereignty and fundamental equality of membership were the central principles of the new society, the nation. Today we identify these principles with democracy. Indeed, democracy was introduced into the modern history as nationalism and only much later (in the 19th century), abstracted from its conceptualization in particular, specifically English/British, American, and French, forms of national consciousness,

formulated as a universal political theory. This political theory, however, is none other than a reflection of the vision of society implied in nationalism.

The other core features of nationalism logically derived from the principles of popular sovereignty and fundamental equality of membership. These were, above all, dignity and competitiveness implicit in national identity. Both popular sovereignty (the participation of members of the community in its self-government) and fundamental equality of membership made personal identities of members of nations dignified, endowing them with respectability and value, previously associated only with the identities of members of narrow upper strata. This dignity, in turn, connected as it was to membership in the nation, encouraged a constant emotional investment in the dignity of the nation as a whole – its prestige or standing among other nations – and therefore spurred incessant international competition for prestige, making the world of nations inherently competitive.

All the conflicts between nations, that is, all the international conflicts since the rise of nationalism in the 16th century, resulted essentially from competition for dignity. This competition has been at the root of international relations, in general. The appeal of nationalism was directly related to its dignity-conferring quality. Originally motivated by specific interests of various elite groups, the spread of nationalism was a function of this appeal, which induced these groups to actively import the new, national, vision of society in each particular case from where it was already established (first, from England, then from England and France, etc.). This active importation installed the societies from which nationalism was imported as, by definition, models for the importing societies, as exemplars of cultural superiority and advanced development to be looked up to, learned from, and imitated. Mimicking – being like -- culturally superior societies, however, was not easy and, proving impossible within a short period of time, generated among the importers a sense of cultural inferiority, the more profound the longer it took to achieve equality with the chosen models. A profound, long-lasting sense of inferiority resulted in *ressentiment* – a constantly reinforced feeling of humiliation by comparison and existential envy of the superior other -- which became the central psychological mechanism of the formation of nationalism in less culturally developed societies. The only way to assuage *ressentiment* was by humiliating the superior other, in turn. In most cases this was done symbolically, by *transvaluating* the values (principles of nationalism) borrowed from the model societies, representing them as false or altogether evil, and redefining the models as the anti-models. This resentful transvaluation led to the creation of most modern political ideologies, both emphasizing class (achieved) inequalities, such as socialism, communism, and fascism, and inequalities of ascribed (physical and cultural) identities, such as feminism and other identity politics platforms. In particularly egregious cases, however, specifically in the case of existential envy against the Jews (the Holocaust), the humiliation of the culturally superior envied other took the form of physical torture and mass murder.

Ressentiment has been the core factor in the formation of the great majority of nationalisms in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East. As a rule, *ressentiment* – based nationalisms belong to the collectivistic/ethnic type, which, while necessarily democratic, like every nationalism is, produce an authoritarian type of democracy, as opposed to liberal democracy. Indeed, the main ideological opposition in the 20th century was the opposition between two types of democratic regimes, authoritarian and liberal, although in the West (the US and Western Europe) the term “democracy” was reserved only for the one – Western – party to the conflict. *Ressentiment*-based, collectivistic/ethnic nationalisms are commonly xenophobic, aggressive, lacking in respect for the individual, and,

vociferously championing “human” rights, define the latter exclusively in collective terms, usually as rights of biologically constituted groups (such as race, sex, etc.).

The most surprising for me feature of Japan, when I began studying its nationalism, was that there was no *ressentiment* in it. Nationalism was introduced to Japan in 1853 at the point of a gun, or rather of the cannons on Commodore Mathew Perry’s “black ships,” which would soon be followed by other warships of nations to the West of the country. Japan, at that time armed only with swords – for the use of firearms had been outlawed there since the late 16th century – was not in a position to refuse the offering, though, unlike the threats that accompanied it, made unconsciously. In distinction to every single society nationalism spread before it, in other words, where it was imported 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 added to different psychological dynamics that necessarily affected the character of the nationalism that developed in Japan. The country was unceremoniously bullied, forcibly dragged out of its self-imposed isolation and obliged to submit to the humiliation of subscribing to intolerable “unequal treaties.” Its collective dignity was severely wounded. Feeling resentful vis-à-vis the models of its nationalism, which it did not elect but was compelled to accept, in Japan, therefore, was fully justified. And, yet, there was no *ressentiment*. Instead, the Japanese reaction was to regard the outrage as a lesson and to profit from it. In comparison to all the previous cases of the spread of nationalism and to numerous later cases, it was an astonishingly rational reaction.

Under the circumstances, it was impossible to defend the dignity of Japan and its way of life unless Japan 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 pre-national indigenous culture. But the pre-national culture in Japan was far more different from the cultures where nationalism originated than anywhere that nationalism had traveled before. 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, 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 national 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. 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.

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 it. 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 – by 1941 they have 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 88 years to respond to a provocation? Yet, throughout this period, Japan did nothing that it had not learned from the West.

The psychological dynamics behind the formation and expression of Japanese nationalism have been strikingly different from those of all the other cases of nationalism before Japan and after Japan and before China. This made me realize that the nature and implications of nationalism depended not only on the interrelationship between its constitutive elements (popular sovereignty, fundamental equality of membership, inclusive identity, dignity, and competitiveness) and the process of its formation, as I thought before, but on the existential characteristics – fundamental modes of thinking and feeling, the modes of experiencing life – of the pre-existing culture in which nationalism was formed. My studies made me familiar with two such cultures, differing in the experience of life itself: the culture of Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, and Africa – to which I myself belonged, and the East-Asian, Sinic culture, to which I was introduced by Japan. These two cultural frameworks, both colossal in population and each, despite their existential unity, comprising numerous autonomous cultures within, deserved a name that would acknowledge this combination of features; they were separate *civilizations*. Civilizations have been talked about before, but were never adequately defined and logically distinguished from cultural frameworks of other nature. The comparison between two civilizations, made possible by the juxtaposition of Japanese nationalism and other nationalisms around it, allows for such definition and distinction. Moreover, this comparison finally makes possible the understanding of the so-called “Western” civilization, which turns out to be the cultural community of Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, and Africa, based on monotheism and specifically uniting in one cultural family Christian and Muslim societies, so often regarded as representing separate – and clashing -- civilizations.

The absence in Japan of *ressentiment* focuses attention on the core difference between the Sinic and monotheistic civilizations: the essential – though not complete -- self-sufficiency of every autonomous identity (i.e., Chinese, Japanese, Hong Kong, Korean) within the former and the essential insufficiency, dependence, of all but one such autonomous identities (Jewish) on comparison with and recognition by others within the framework of the latter. 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 autonomous units, such as nations, through stratification-defined subcultures and institutions, to the individualized cultural process within the innermost cultural layer – the mind. Civilizations are thus the most durable continuous cultural processes. 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 (as frameworks) completely independent from others, as well as irrelevant and indifferent to each other. Unlike autonomous cultures within a civilization, civilizations do not clash. 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 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. Adopting the Jewish belief made Christians – and later Muslims – fixated on Jews being first in God's favor. This resulted in establishing existential envy as the core psychological dynamic within the monotheistic civilization and antisemitism as its most deeply institutionalized attitude. As the logic based on the principle of no contradiction, implied in the monotheistic idea of one world consistently organized under One God, encouraged quantitative rather than qualitative comparisons, shared standards made some societies within the monotheistic civilization necessarily appear (to themselves and to others) superior and some inferior, better and worse than others, inevitably leading some to wish *to be like* those whose superiority could not be denied, and those that were near equals with claims to superiority to incessantly challenge each other. The unceasing conflict between Christianity and Islam, and between falling and rising powers within Christianity and Islam, as much as the tendency towards *ressentiment* on the part of cultures importing nationalism while perceiving themselves as inferior, have stemmed from these built-in characteristics.

Nationalism vastly increased the numbers of those who cared about the relative status of their geopolitical units by dignifying the personal identities of millions and by making this personal dignity dependent on the dignity of these units. It made millions of people, 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.

I learned so much from the experience of Japan – from its reserve, patience, and self-confidence without the need to impress others. It not only opened to me a completely different world, it helped me understand, and evaluate objectively, my own. Although I have never visited it, this noble country came to occupy a very important place in my life. I hope my admiration for it comes through in these lines.