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Everyday Nationalism in Global-Historical Contexts

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**Below is the preliminary result of my critical literature review of the everyday nationalism studies, and my theoretical intervention to incorporate global-historical perspectives. Along the line, I will complement the existing theoretical discussion with demonstrating the case of Taiwan. Specifically, I will illustrate why is imperative to think global-historically to account for the nationalistic phenomena in Taiwan, or in East Asia in general.*

I. Introduction

There has been a renewed interest in nationalism in recent years. On the one hand, the term “new nationalism” was coined to refer to the emerging nationalistic phenomena, mainly in the Global North, that have caught scholarly attention. Best exemplified by the far-right movements, populist parties, and the nationalistic rhetoric of authoritarian governments, these “new nationalisms” stress the protection of borders, national interests, and populist appeals (Bonikowski et al. 2019; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas 2019). On the other hand, recent years have witnessed the continuation of territorial and sovereign disputes across national boundaries. Challenging regional orders, these conflicts take the forms of territorial disputes, independence movements, and even hot wars (Werron 2021). It seems that the salience of

nationalism is by no means over but exhibits a strong persistence.

These phenomena point to a paradox of our time: In an age of globalization, in which we expected to see less nationalistic struggles because the nation-states had become not only a settled reality but also something to transcend, why do we continue to witness nationalistic moments across the world? The resurgence of nationalism in our time has challenged our assumptions about nationalism. For instance, the populist movements put the ideal of a globalized world in doubt; the nationalistic rhetoric of politicians implies the persistence of nationalistic appeals; and the territorial disputes shake our understanding that the process of nation-state formation has been settled. In order to account for the persistence of nationalism in our time, a new theoretical perspective has to be explored.

At the turn of the century, nationalism studies have turned the focus from the origins and diffusion of nationalism to the reproduction of nations in everyday life in established nation-states (Bonikowski 2016). This analytical shift tends to study nationalism as practiced in its present within the container of a nation-state. However, as Siniša Malešević correctly notes, this new line of literature tends to overlook “the long-term historical trends that have shaped the dynamics of nationalist ideologies” in its analytical framework. Incorporating historical factors reveals that the nationalistic moments in our time are not so much something “new” but as the “particular variation” of long-term social processes. More importantly, it helps to understand why nationalism has been, and continues to be, the dominant source of legitimacy

in the modern age (Malešević 2019: 6-8).

Building on Malešević's insights, I would argue that, to understand the persistence of nationalism of our time, it will be fruitful to incorporate a global-historical perspective. From this perspective, to the nationalistic moments of our time, it warrants attention to the long-term influence of the global processes such as globalization and geopolitics. I utilize the term "global historical sociology" heuristically to refer to the investigations on the dynamics between global processes and the transformations of social orders (Go & Lawson 2016). As I will further argue, the global system governed by the principles of nationalism is not a given entity, but an ongoing process that continues to influence the way we organize our collective lives today. It should be noted, still, that the purpose of this essay is not to provide an all-encompassing theory of nationalism, as the phenomenon of nationalism is too complex to achieve such an endeavor (Calhoun 1997). Rather, it sets out to see how a global-historical perspective can shed light on nationalistic moments of our time.

In this literature review essay, I will first identify two waves of nationalism studies to situate my problematics. I will then discuss what a global-historical perspective might be able to offer to advance the state of the field. I will then sketch three research directions that align with the perspectives from a global-historical approach.

II. Two Waves of Nationalism Studies

In this essay, I divide the existing work on nationalism into two waves. I made this distinction because, as I will show, the transition from the first to the second wave represented a paradigm shift in nationalism studies, ontologically and analytically. It therefore raises a few problems for the second wave when dealing with the resurgence of nationalism today.

The First Wave: Origins and Diffusion of Nationalism

The first wave of nationalism studies shared the central concerns of explaining the origins and diffusion of nationalism (Anderson 2006[1983]; Gellner 1983; Greenfeld 2001[1992]; Hobsbawm 2012[1990]; Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012[1983]). To be sure, the studies of nationalism have a long history. It can be traced to as far as, for instance, Earnest Renan's (2018[1882]) famous speech of "What is a Nation?" or Hans Kohn's (2005[1944]) study of European Nationalism that proposed the "civic vs. ethnic" distinction. However, it is in the 1980s and 1990s, when a number of authors engaged in the debate about the origins of nationalism, that the field of nationalism studies that we know today took its form.

The debate about the origins of nationalism revolved around the "primordialists vs. modernists/constructivists" dichotomy. The former located the roots of nationalism in ancestry, shared history, and culture, while the latter saw nationalism as the byproduct of the modernization process. Anthony Smith (1991), representing the primordialist perspective, maintains that modern nations have their roots in their pre-modern cultures, particularly the

ethnic features stemming from distant eras. It is through the common values, cultures, and historical memories of ethnies that nationalism gains its cultural continuity. Ernest Gellner, on the other hand, argues that nationalism arose during modern society's transition to an advanced industrial form. Industrialization and economic growth provided modern states with the incentives to homogenize the culture of their populations, which later resulted in nationalism. Besides the debate between Smith and Gellner, Benedict Anderson (2006[1983]) was also grouped into the modernist camp as he proposed that print-capitalism was the key to spreading the national imagination across a wide range of territory.

It should be noted that most authors in the first wave of nationalism studies incorporated comparative-historical – and in many cases, global-historical – perspectives to unpack the origins and diffusion of nationalism. Given the widespread prevalence of nationalism across the world, a sufficient explanation usually requires a global perspective. For instance, Anderson's (2006[1983]) theory was profoundly global-historical. Regarding the diffusion of nationalism, he stressed the “modular” character of nationalism, meaning that the latecomer nationalistic movements tend to draw inspiration from past models of nationalism. Moreover, in Smith's (1996) account for the persistence of ethnonational conflicts, he looks toward the discrepancy between the states' and ethnies' concepts of national boundaries across the world.

Although divided along the “primordialists vs. modernists/constructivists” debate, the authors of the first wave were almost unanimous in their preference toward historical

approaches. Nations and nation-states were treated as historical contingencies that warrant explanation. In addition, global contexts were deemed significant to account for the diffusion of nationalism across the world. As we will see below, these theses are undermined, although not without reason, in the subsequent wave of nationalism studies.

The Second Wave: Reproduction of Nations in Everyday Life

The second wave of nationalism studies shifted the attention from macro-historical formation of nations to the reproduction of nations in everyday life in established nations (Billig 1995; Bonikowski & DiMaggio 2016; Skey 2011; Skey & Antonsich 2017; Surak 2013). Michael Billig's (1995) *Banal Nationalism* represents the watershed of this wave. According to Billig, nationalism studies before mostly focused on the nationalistic movements in the peripheral societies. The term "nationalism" therefore had gained an "exotic" undertone. Billig argued that nationalism is not only a political project for the independence movements but also an ideology reproduced in everyday life in established nations of the West (Billig 1995).

This signals a paradigm shift in nationalism studies, wherein the nation as a reproduced ideology in daily life has become the new focal point of inquiry. As Billig indicates, the central idea of such reproduction is that "in the established nations, there is a continual 'flagging', or reminding, of nationhood." Nationalism is not absent in established nation-states. Instead, it provides a continual background for the political discourses and cultural

productions (Billig 1995: 8). Subsequently, multiple related works explore the everyday reproduction through various cases in established nation-states, such as the “pledge of allegiance” in the US (Billig 1995), everyday conversation over news stories and weather in the UK (Skey 2011), and the tea ceremony in Japan (Surak 2013).

This research agenda has developed prosperously in recent years, usually under the banner of “everyday nationalism.” In an annual review article named “Nationalism in Settled Times,” Bart Bonikowski sums up this line of literature as the studies of nationalism “not only as a political project but also as a cognitive, affective, and discursive category deployed in daily practice.” He further suggests that these works proliferate in a wide range of topics, including routine interaction, public rituals, representations of national identity, commemoration, and popular understandings of the nation (Bonikowski 2016).

To be sure, scholarly definitions of the term “everyday nationalism” are not consensual. Some distinguish it from “banal nationalism” to refer to “bottom-up, agency-centered engagement with nation” (Skey & Antonsich 2017), while others coin the term to suggest the research agenda for studying the “practices through which ordinary people engage and enact (and ignore and deflect) nationhood and nationalism in the varied contexts of their everyday lives” (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 537). In this essay, I utilize the term “everyday nationalism” as an umbrella term to incorporate the works that explore the daily reproduction of nations in times when overt nationalistic conflicts are absent.

The Second Wave under Challenges

The second wave has advanced nationalism studies in numerous ways. In terms of research focus, it has expanded the lens of nationalism studies to early comers of nation-states such as Western democracies; analytically speaking, it has explored the “cognitive, affective, and discursive” aspects of nations; most importantly, it has filled the analytical vacancy regarding the reproduction of the nation after the establishment of the nation-state. These are all important contributions that this wave has brought to the studies of nationalism.

Nevertheless, the second wave is not without pitfalls. The main problem, as I assume, is that this line of research tends to reify the nation-state as a given entity that requires no further scrutiny. This is reflected in the frequently employed languages of the second wave, such as “established nations” (Billig 1995) and “settled time” (Bonikowski 2016). The underlying assumptions of these terms are that we are now living in a world of nation-states where nationalistic conflicts have already been settled, and that the global system of nation-states is self-evident. Such assumptions might derive from the historical contexts of the second wave, when the surges for nation-state formation had waned (Wimmer & Feinstein 2010), and when globalization was on the rise. However, as I will discuss, they are especially prone to challenges in light of the recent nationalistic moments.

Considering the underlying assumptions of the second wave, we can identify that this

line of literature tends to fall into the pitfall of methodological nationalism, where the nation-state is treated as a given form of a political community. As Daniel Chernilo rightly suggests, seeing nation-states through the lens of methodological nationalism yields a few biased postulates. First, nation-states are seen to develop endogenously. That is, they have presumed to have evolved independently into their current forms of “independent” states. Second, nation-states are deemed to be self-sufficient. Third, the long-term historical development of the nation-state is taken for granted (Chernilo 2020). As a result, the analytical focus of the second wave turns inward, fixating exclusively on the endogenous development of a given nation-state. Moreover, external and historical factors are left out of the analytical lens (see discussions in Antonsich 2020 and Malešević 2019: 6-8).

These tradeoffs seem to be especially vulnerable when encountering the resurgence of nationalism in recent years. For instance, according to the second wave, nation-states are treated as self-sufficient, but the anti-immigrant appeals of populist discourses suggest the importance of factors above national containers (see, e.g., Brubaker 2020). Consider also that the “settled time” discourse implies settled national boundaries, yet we continue to see territorial disputes and independence/separatist movements across the world. Moreover, in recent years, the rise of geopolitical turmoil suggests that historical trajectories of the formation of nations and nation-states matter. How can we better account for the continual relevance of nationalistic sentiments in a supposedly “settled time”?

III. Incorporating a Global-Historical Perspective

In order to understand the persistent appeals of nationalism, I argue that it is imperative to incorporate a global-historical perspective. Although the age of global proliferations of nations and nation-states has ended, global-historical factors continue to shape the nationalistic moments that we witness today. It is widely known that we are still living in a world structured by nationalistic principles. Yet, the world of nation-states is not a given entity, but an ongoing social process. Immigrant crises, territorial disputes, and geopolitical conflicts all pose challenges to this global reality.

One of the major pitfalls of the second wave is overlooking these very dynamics between global and local processes. Many times, nationalist practices in any country are not contained within the national border. Instead, they are made in an ongoing interaction with the global system of nation-states. As much as the nation is a relational construct, such a global system is also not a substantial entity, but an ongoing social process that requires further scrutiny. Therefore, in order to make sense of how contemporary nationalism is interwoven within this process, global-historical factors should not be omitted.

In this essay, I utilize the term “global historical sociology” as a heuristic device to characterize the research that deals with “the transnational and global dynamics that enable the emergence, reproduction, and breakdown of social orders whether these orders are situated at the subnational, national, or global scales” (Go & Lawson 2016: 2). Most of the

publications that I will present in the following don't describe their endeavors under this label. Still, it is clear to see their shared concerns about the dynamics between nationalism and the global-historical processes, such as globalization and geopolitics.

On the theoretical level, what I identify with global-historical sociology, and what most of these publications share, is the effort to transcend the pitfalls of methodological nationalism.

What replaces the ontological presupposition, rather, is the methodological rationalism.

Seeing nationalism as “dynamic, unfolding relations” means avoiding substantializing categories like nations, nation-states, borders, national boundaries, etc. (for more elaborated theoretical stances, see Emirbayer 1997 and Go & Lawson 2016). This approach requires seeing nationalistic practices not as self-sufficient, but as interactions between the global system of nation-states and national or subnational orders. By not treating the nation-state as self-evident, this approach also takes the macro-historical processes that gave rise to nationalistic phenomena in the present seriously, addressing some critiques about the ahistorical tendency of the second wave (Antonsich 2020; Malešević 2019).

IV. Three Global-Historical Mechanisms Shaping Everyday Nationalism

While acknowledging the contributions of everyday nationalism literature, I propose that incorporating a global-historical perspective can help to shed new light on the nationalism of our time. In what follows, I will lay out three research directions that fit the above framework. They all show that nationalistic moments are not merely contained within

national boundaries, but are interwoven with global-historical processes.

Nationalism as a Global Norm

We could say that we are still living in a national reality, where principles of nationalism pervasively structure our everyday life. Although the rise of globalization once predicted the demise of nationalism, it has been acknowledged that nationalism has become integral to our contemporary life (Calhoun 1997). The ideas of nationalism have occupied our languages and practices. For example, the existence of the United Nations suggests that the nation-state is the basic unit of political community in world society. Another instance is that the world maps that we see are delineated by the general principle of nation-states.

The global system of nation-states, it follows that, is itself a global structure that influences the expressions and practices of nationalism. It can be said that nationalistic principles have become global norms and sources of legitimacy, or, in Foucauldian language, a regime of truth on the international stage. The questions that are worth following up on are: How did this reality come about? Why have nationalistic principles become ubiquitous alongside the development of globalization? What are the relationships between the global system of nation-states and the nationalisms at home? Below, I will delineate a few publications that deal with the global-historical mechanisms of nationalism as a global norm.

Against the common perception that nationalism and globalization are separate ideas, Werron (2021) argues that the two are mutually constitutive in our contemporary age. For

him, nationalism is not only a political ideology but a global institution: “[nationalism is] a largely taken-for-granted feature of the modern world that is woven into the very fabric of global modernity” (Werron 2021: 159). Werron maintains that nationalism not only legitimizes nation-states but also the world order governed by the relationships between nation-states, that is, the global system of nation-states (Werron 2021).

In addition to the pronounced expression of nationalism during nation-building processes or political conflicts, two other types of nationalism serve the implicit functions of maintaining the national reality. First, institutionalized nationalism underpins the everyday usage of national identity markers. Consider the global media system that categorizes news reports into national and international levels. Other instances include the banal expression of national difference in the global field of science, arts, and sport. Second, scarcity nationalism considers the world as an arena with scarce resources where nations can only acquire them at the expense of other nations. The most evident example is the protectionist economic policies introduced by politicians using nationalistic discourses (Werron 2021).

It should also be noted that the system of the nation-state is a historical process. Drawing on the Bourdieusian field theory, Go (2021) conceptualizes the global political field of our time as an interstate field. It is populated by the dominant actors of nation-states. Within the interstate field, these actors, along with other actors like international organizations, compete for various forms of capital, such as economic (wealth), political (international allies),

cultural (recognition of popular sovereignty), and security (geopolitical protection) ones (Go 2021: 83-87). Go emphasizes that this interstate field emerged out of the inter-imperial field, where the dominant actors were empire states. This transition took place during the mid-twentieth century, and the major change of the “rules of struggle” within the global political field is that colonization was deemed illegitimate (Go 2021).

If Werron (2021) and Go (2021) delineate the configuration of the global system of nation-states, then Getachew (2019) offers an empirical lens into how such a global norm interacts with the nationalistic struggles of actors on the regional and national levels. In her analysis of post-war decolonization movements propelled by black Anglo-phone anticolonial critics and nationalists, Getachew characterizes anticolonial nationalism as a conscious act of worldmaking. Challenging the world order imposed by imperial powers, anticolonial nationalism proposes an alternative global order that is domination-free and egalitarian. The ideals of this anticolonial movement were achieved through some global institutions, such as the incorporation of the right to self-determination into the UN charters, regional federations, and the demand for a New International Economic Order (Getachew 2019).

Geopolitics and Nationalism

The second global-historical mechanism considers the impacts of geopolitics on the expressions of nationalism of our time. Although we are living in a “settled time” wherein national boundaries are seemingly designated, we should not ignore that these very

boundaries are formed through historical processes (Wimmer, Lee & LaViolette 2025).

Nations and national boundaries are created out of geopolitical contexts, such as wars, dissolutions of empires, and regional power struggles. This fact is evident in the first wave of nationalism studies focusing on the origins of nationalism. However, as the publications of this cluster show, the residuals of these geopolitical conflicts, too, continue to shape the popular expressions of nationalism that we see today.

Hiers, Soehl & Wimmers' (2017) analysis on the relationship between geopolitical trauma and anti-immigrant attitude provides valuable discussion about this matter. To conduct a quantitative analysis, the authors created a measure for geopolitical threat through two dimensions: (1) losses of territory and/or sovereignty; (2) threats of such losses by virtue of ongoing or recurring conflict. Drawing on the data of 33 European countries, the statistical result shows that countries that experienced more geopolitical turbulence in the past tend to develop the ethnic form of nationalism and higher levels of anti-immigrant sentiments. The authors conclude that: "Geopolitical competition and war, and the losses of territory and sovereignty... shape the nature and salience of national boundaries," and these factors in turn influence the public attitude toward immigrants as potential newcomers of the nation (Hiers, Soehl & Wimmers 2017).

Soehla and Karim (2021) further explore the dynamics between geopolitical past and popular nationalism. Although they utilize the same geopolitical threat scale, they make a

methodological contribution by introducing a more nuanced measurement of different forms of popular nationalism. Drawing on 43 countries around the world, their regression model reveals that countries that have turbulent geopolitical pasts present less prevalence of liberal nationalism, as shown in the pride in institutions and inclusive national boundaries. Instead, geopolitical trauma increases the tendency toward restrictive nationalism, as expressed in less pride in institutions and exclusive national boundaries (Soehla & Karim 2021).

The major contribution of these works is that they debunk the substantial imagination of nations and national boundaries. Under the latter understanding, nation-states are perceived as self-sufficient entities that develop endogenously. The implication of this imagination is to see every nation as commensurable. For example, many nationalism studies employ the “civic vs. ethnic nationalism” distinction to measure different types of popular understanding of nations (Larsen 2017). However, utilizing this distinction merely as a typology overlooks the socio-historical conditions that gave rise to it. In fact, the theorization of “civic vs. ethnic” distinction in the first place was rooted in the different historical experiences of Western and Eastern European societies (Kohn 2005[1944]; for a further discussion, see Mann 2005).

In this vein, what these works have achieved is to prove that different expressions of popular nationalism of our time are to some extent conditioned by the residuals of geopolitics. The point here is not to promote historical determinism. Rather, by seeing the nations and national boundaries as evolving relations, these works invite us to consider

different expressions of nationalism in light of their historical contexts, where the power relations behind the “designated” nations and national boundaries emerge. It does not undermine the general desire toward civic nationalism, but it also cautions that the social conditions to achieve this form are more complicated than is usually assumed.

Interconnectedness of Nationalisms

The discussion of geopolitics brings us to the last global-historical mechanism, which concerns the interaction between different nationalisms. Following the thesis that nations are not created endogenously but within geopolitical contexts, many contemporary nationalisms exhibit interconnected relationships. Such relationships, which derive from historical and often violent roots, have become a source of nationalistic conflicts of our time (Wang 2019).

The interconnectedness noted here takes different forms. In some cases, the surge of one nationalism threatens the ontological existence of the other. In other cases, a nation is posed as the “other” or the “enemy” in other national consciousnesses.

To think of the interconnectedness of nationalism, one has to think relationally. It challenges the substantial view of nations. The interactions between nationalisms show that nationalism is not a self-sufficient entity, but an ongoing process situated within a global realm. In many, if not most, cases, it is through the interaction with other nations that the nation gains its meaning. During contemporary nationalistic moments, we continue to witness

that nationalistic practices or discourses are not only expressed inward but also outward, resulting in regional tensions, nationalistic contentions, and in some cases, wars.

The war between Russia and Ukraine provides a window to observe the interconnectedness between nationalisms. Against the common usage of the “civic vs. ethnic” dichotomy, Knott (2022) argues that what we see in Russia and Ukraine is the conflict of neither civic nor ethnic nationalism, but what the author terms “existential nationalism.” Drawing on Russian presidential speeches, wartime rhetoric, and policy practices, the author reconceptualizes this war as a conflict in which one community (Ukraine) is fighting for the right to determine its existence, while the other (Russia) is fighting to eliminate such existence because the former is an integral part of the latter's national imagination (Knott 2022). In this case, we can see the relational and interactive dimensions of nationalisms and how they play out across national boundaries.

The interconnectedness of nationalism is especially evident in East Asia. The turbulent geopolitical pasts that involve multiple communities overshadow the contemporary order of this region. For instance, Japanese Prime Ministers' visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, a symbol of Japanese Imperialism, frequently triggered nationalist sentiments in China and Korea. As a relevant case study, Suzuki (2007) demonstrates that Japan serves as a deeply embedded role of the “other” in Chinese national identity. Drawing on the materials of Chinese academic works, Chinese textbooks, and populist works, the author shows that Chinese identity is

marked by a strong sense of victimhood deriving from its traumatic interactions with the international society in its modern history. The historical memory of Japanese aggression enhances China's self-image of the "victim" (Suzuki 2007).

Compared with the above works that examine how the interconnectedness of nationalism engenders contemporary conflicts, Wang (2019) explores the possibility of transcending such a predicament. Drawing on interviews, participant observation, and discourse analysis, the author looks into the China–Japan–Korea Tri-National Joint History Textbook Project initiated by civil society actors since the early 2000s. With the purpose of addressing the "historical perception problem" in East Asia, history scholars from China, Japan, and Korea worked together to produce a joint history textbook. The result was limited. While the project achieved partial success in transcending divergent historical perceptions, nationalistic perspectives still showed great salience during the discussion on key historical issues, such as Japanese Imperialism and the nature of the pre-modern Korean state (Wang 2019).

V. Conclusion

In this literature review essay, I critically survey the existing work of nationalism studies and point toward a potential research agenda. I categorize the trajectory of nationalism studies into two waves: the first wave that concerns the historical origins and spread of nationalism, and the second wave that focuses on the reproduction of nations in everyday life. I suggest

this paradigm shift of analytical perspectives left out the consideration of external and historical factors that have been, and continue to be, influencing contemporary nationalistic phenomena. To address this analytical blind spot, I propose to incorporate a global-historical perspective back into nationalism studies. Drawing on global historical sociology and relational sociology, this perspective affirms that the nation is not a given entity, but an unfolding process situated within the global realm through time. Supported by existing publications that reflect such a perspective, I identify three topics in which global-historical mechanisms influence nationalistic moments of our time: (1) Nationalism as a global norm; (2) Geopolitics and nationalism; and (3) Interconnectedness of nationalism. While acknowledging the contributions of existing work on nationalism studies, I demonstrate how a global-historical perspective can shed new light on the age of resurging nationalism that we live in.

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