

The articulation of national identity in early twentieth century East Asia: Intertwining of discourses of modernity and civilisation

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Abstract:

The article examines the ways in which national identity was articulated by intellectuals of Japan, China and Taiwan in the first half of the twentieth century as a first step to review the western-centric and diffusionist account of nationalism. Conventional accounts of nationalism regard nationalism as intrinsically European rooted in development such as the Enlightenment and the Westphalian system of states and consider non-western cases as those of diffusion. While the discourse of the nation and national identity produced by East Asian intellectuals of the early twentieth century was shaped by social and political theories developed in the West, their frequent use of civilisational referent suggests that they were subjectively engaged with the project of self-definition drawing from their own sources, which undermines the diffusionist account of nationalism. The article briefly examines the discourse of national identity articulated by the Kyoto School of philosophy, Sun Yat-sen and Tsai Pei-huo as the first step in exploring the possibility of multiple origins of nationalism.

Key words:

National identity, East Asia, Japanese imperialism, Kyoto School of philosophy, Sun Yat-sen, Tsai Pei-huo, civilisational discourse

### **Introduction**

The orthodoxy in the study of nations and nationalism is that nationalism has originated in Europe. No one is more equivocal than Ellie Kedourie in this respect: "Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. [...] These ideas have become firmly naturalized in the political rhetoric of the West which has been taken over for the use of the whole world" (Kedourie 1993: 1). Other theorists may not be very concerned with determining the geographical location of the birth place of nationalism but by and large, nationalism is treated as a function of certain social change, modernisation, which took place in Europe first. Ernest Gellner's "functionalist" thesis of nationalism (Taylor 1998) presents nationalism as a form of societal response to industrialisation which occurred not in the Indian sub-continent, nor in China, but in Europe (Gellner 1983). Eric Hobsbawm (1990), John Breuilly (1982) and Anthony Giddens (1985), while there are differences in their exact approaches, consider nationalism as a function of the rise of the modern state, what is often known as the Westphalian state as described by Max Weber (2004). Even Anthony D Smith (1983), who is known for his ethno-symbolist stance, has attributed the emergence of nationalism to the rise of the "scientific state", a system of governance which tries to homogenise the population under its rule. The focus on the rise of the modern, or Westphalian, state in explaining the emergence of nationalism as an ideology and/or movement is also found in Charles Tilly's work (Tilly 1985, 1990).

While Benedict Anderson (1991) has identified Americas as the birthplace of nationalism as a political model, it is clear that nationalism is deemed to have its roots in Europe in his “imagined community” thesis. Nationalism emerged in colonial Americas because of the collapse of holy cosmology and the rise of print capitalism, which catapulted the vernacular to become a means of imagining a nation, as well as the rise of the modern, administrative state, which pushed many Creole officials to pilgrimage to far-flung corners of their land to give shape to the idea of their shared community. This all too brief review shows that in nationalism studies, nationalism is seen as intrinsically European.

If nationalism is of a European origin, it follows that nationalism in the non-western part of the world is a result of diffusion. Kedourie (1970) has suggested rejection of European dominance by colonial intellectuals as a major route of such diffusion. Although the intellectuals in European colonies or places which were dominated by European powers were socialised into western political culture which values equality, democracy and such, invariably they found that these supposedly “universal” values were not applied to them. This perception of humiliation and the sense of resentment is, according to Kedourie, the driving force of nationalism in Asia and Africa. Other theorists generally do not concern themselves with the mechanism of diffusion of nationalism, but if nationalism is indeed a function of various aspects of modernisation, which is largely the same as westernisation, then, as processes of westernisation unfold in various parts of the world, nationalism would inevitably accompany them. In regards to the diffusion of nationalism, Anderson has drawn our attention to what he calls the “modular” nature of nationalism, a suggestion which remains under-explored. Having defined nationalism (or nationality or nation-ness) as “cultural artefacts of a particular kind”, he proceeds to suggest:

The creation of these artefacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces; but [...] once created, they become ‘modular’, capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellation (Anderson 1991, 4).

He further comments: “twentieth-century nationalisms have [...] a profoundly modular character. They can, and do, draw on more than a century and a half of human experience and three earlier models of nationalism” (Anderson 1991, 135). An image of neatly packaged artefacts, an abstract object, being transplanted to flourish in different socio-historical contexts emerges from these lines.

The diffusionist model of the spread of nationalism is a logical extension of the European origin of nationalism thesis, which, nonetheless, has attracted objection and criticism. Most famously, Partha Chatterjee (1993, 5) has objected: “If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?” The charge here is that the diffusionist discourse does not acknowledge people in the colonised parts of the world as true subjects of history. Still, in so far as nationalism is understood as a form of politics, i.e. the building of the modern state, Chatterjee agrees that Anderson is correct to suggest that the post-colonial experience has been an emulation of the European/western models (Chatterjee 1993, 5-6). However, this is not the entire story. What the Indian political scientist proposes is to take the “private” sphere into account, a

sphere of life which has been free from intervention by the colonising Europeans, in which the nation has always been sovereign: the idea of India in the private sphere predates colonialism, which suggests that the Indians possess subjectivity (Chatterjee 1993, 6, 26).

The current article investigates the articulation of national identity in early twentieth century East Asia with a view to reviewing the diffusionist account and the European origin of nationalism thesis behind it. It is driven by a similar concern to Chatterjee's: can we see people of early twentieth century East Asia as true subjects of history? The case of early twentieth century East Asia is of a particular interest because of a more complex geopolitical situation than that of the Indian subcontinent. The East Asian experience is often described as a case of a "later comer" due to the region's aloofness from the Westphalian system largely until the nineteenth century. The East Asian entry to the Westphalian system was traumatic as seen most evidently in the First Opium War (1839-42). Extraterritoriality and unequal treaties were thrust upon the Middle Kingdom and the world it ordered. It is now established wisdom that Meiji Restoration of 1868 that took place in Japan was partly, if not largely, driven by elites in Japan of the time deeply concerned with what was inflicted upon Qing China by western powers. All these mean that the articulation of national identity in East Asia from the mid-nineteenth century was carried out in a particular context: the West was to be emulated and to catch up with. The driving idea was to become like the West so as to avoid being taken over by the West. The Japanese case is often seen as typical of this drive. Fukuzawa Yukichi, one of the architects, although not in the government, of Meiji Japan urged his fellow Japanese to get "out of Asia and (go) into Europe (脱亜入欧)". The Meiji government's policy was firmly oriented towards "civilisation and improvement (文明開化)" in order to renegotiate unequal treaties concluded with western powers under Tokugawa Shogunate. In order to achieve that, the government aimed at building a "wealthy nation, strong military (富国強兵)" through "the promotion of industry, the encouragement of new industries (殖産興業)". The West was always something to catch up with and to take over, and by the Pacific War (1941-1945), "overcoming modernity" had become the phrase to define the *zeitgeist*.

While the articulation of Japanese national identity in the early twentieth century was mainly carried out in a clear-cut context of catching up with and taking over the West, the articulation of national identity by those who were subsequently brought under Japanese imperial rule, directly or indirectly, was doubly refracted: against the West as the universal oppressor as well as post-Meiji Japan as an alternative hegemon with a claim that it represented alternative/truer modernity. Both Japanese and colonial intellectuals often mobilised civilisational referent such as *wangdao* (the Kingly Way). This, first and foremost, suggests the degree of subjective engagement on the part of these intellectuals with the project of articulating national identity and defining the nation, which points to the possibility of bringing agency back to the subjugated. At the same time, the mobilisation of old/traditional principles which do not conform to the template of western modernity suggests that a different conception of political community had existed in East Asia which had been functioning as an equivalent to nationalism before the region was violently brought into the Westphalian system of states. Examining the ways in which national identity was articulated in early twentieth century Japan as well as in places which were dominated by the Japanese Empire will, therefore, provide additional material to restoring agency to people of the non-West and to re-examine the basis of the orthodoxy in nationalism studies.

The article proceeds as follows. First, a brief historical background is offered. Then, the article examines the ways in which national identity was articulated in Japan in the first half of the twentieth century paying particular attention to the works by the Kyoto School of philosophy. What the Kyoto School proposed is then contrasted with the articulation of national identity in mainland China focusing on ideas put forward by Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙, 1866-1925) and in Taiwan focusing on the works by Tsai Pei-huo (蔡培火, 1889-1983). The article draws attention to the mobilisation of civilisational concepts in the articulation by both Sun and Tsai in response to the Japanese attempts and considers implications of this to the study of nationalism.

### **A brief history of the interaction between East Asia and the West**

East Asia was always in contact with Europe. The best known instance is the Silk Road which connected Xian, the ancient capital of China, with the Roman Empire as well as the Byzantine Empire (Liu 2010). Through the Silk Road, goods (silk, silver, ceramics and so on) and ideas (Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroasterism, to name but a few) were exchanged between Europe, Persia, China, Korea and Japan. Another example is the Mongol invasion of Europe in the thirteenth century whose implication to the subsequent development in Eastern and Central Europe is still debated. That there was a reasonable level of communication between East Asia and Europe around that time can be evidenced by Marco Polo's *Book of the Marvels of the World* which was published in around 1300. After the restoration of Han Chinese rule of China in the fourteenth century in the form of the Ming Dynasty, interaction between East Asia and Europe was somehow put on a back burner. Still, the Jesuits gained entry to Ming China and one of them, Matteo Ricci (1552-1602), became well-known as the introducer of western knowledge to the Sino-centric world (Fontana 2011). During the Ming Dynasty, the traditional tributary system was revived and maintained, and this was the system European merchants encountered when they came to look for trade with China in the sixteenth century. The tributary system, a relatively non-violent, and often mutually economically beneficial way of organising China's relationship with other countries, continued to baffle westerners. In 1793, the Qianlong Emperor famously rejected an offer of expanded trade and foreign relations by the British diplomat George Macartney on the basis of the worldview fully embedded in the tributary system. Japan, which had been much more open to trade with the West, became suspicious of the western power's intension of sending Christian missionaries, and effectively closed down on free trade with the West in the early seventeenth century. The West nonetheless continued to trade with Qing China and Japan, and gradually began to behave like imperial powers in East Asia. This was most clearly shown in the first and second Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60). The first Opium War broke out when Commissioner Lin Tse-hsü confiscated and destroyed a large amount of British opium in order to interrupt and ban the trade (and to resist British encroachment). With Qing's defeat culminating in the Treaty of Nanjing, the first Opium War is seen as the decisive moment in which China was dragged out of its Sino-centric world and thrown into the Westphalian system.

With Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan came out of the "old" Sino-centric world and entered a "new" world of West-centric order. It is widely known that the first years of the Meiji government were used to address the problem of unequal treaties with western powers which previous Tokugawa Shogunate concluded under duress or otherwise. While pursuing to right the perceived wrong in the form of unequal treaties, the Meiji government was quick to adapt to the Westphalian system. It proceeded with clarifying and settling the borders of Japan in accordance to international law (which had replaced the Sino-centric world order as the organising principle of the world in the mind of

Japanese elite), and the 1875 treaty with Russia clarified the northern border (Japan gave up all territorial claim to Sakhalin island in exchange for undisputed sovereignty over all the Kuril islands up to the Kamchatka peninsula) and unilaterally incorporated the Kingdom of Ryukyu to its territory in 1879. The first Sino-Japanese War of 1894 resulted in Japan's incorporation of Taiwan in its empire, and Korea was annexed to the Japanese polity in 1910 following Japanese victory over Russia in 1905. Japan participated in World War I on the winning side and inherited German leased territories and German colonies such as Marshall Islands. The major push for further territorial expansion was mounted vis-à-vis China and Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and established Manchukuo in 1932. The second Sino-Japanese War started in 1937 with Japan occupying various parts of China. The article is concerned with the articulation of national identity in Japan, China and Taiwan in the first half of the twentieth century when the Japanese Empire was expanding, a development which came to a halt in 1945.

### **The articulation of national identity in early twentieth century Japan: the Kyoto School**

According to the diffusionist approach which is dominant in the study of nationalism, nationalism arrived in Japan in the mid-nineteenth century as Tokugawa Shogunate was exposed to intensifying western expansionism and forced to "open up" the country. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 is typically seen as an expression of reformist nationalism, similar to the cases in Ottoman Turkey or Qing China (see, in particular, Breuilly 1982 and also Kedourie 1970). While there is a case to be made that the articulation of Japanese national identity preceded the Meiji Restoration (i.e. diffusion from the West) as it is found in the rise of *Kokugaku*, a nativist school of learning, in the eighteenth century (Ichijo 2013), it is fair to argue that the articulation of Japanese national identity in the early twentieth century was carried out by intellectuals who had accepted the dominant framework: Japan was a late comer to the world of nation-states. As a result, the articulation of Japanese national identity took on an aspect of challenges to what was perceived as western hegemony and was in tune with the rise of pan-Asianism. Pan-Asianism was multi-faceted. Okakura Tenshin (1862-1913) and Yanagi Sōetsu (1889-1961) held that in the sphere of art and culture the Asians were no inferior to the westerners as evidenced by the level of sophistication of their "eastern" art and culture. In the political sphere, a number of associations were set up to promote unity among the Asians against western imperialism and their political agenda attracted attention especially after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 (Saaler and Koschmann 2007).

In the articulation of both Japanese national identity and pan-Asianism in twentieth century Japan, the Kyoto School of philosophy looms large. It is often placed at the centre of those challenges to western hegemony: "a disciplined and well-informed challenge to the definition of history of philosophy itself" (Heisig 2001: 3). The label, "Kyoto School of philosophy", does not indicate a clearly demarcated school of thought, though; rather, it refers to "a sequence of appointments in philosophy at Kyoto University during and after Nishida's tenure there" (Carter, 2013: 5-6). At the core of the endeavour of Kyoto philosophers was an examination of philosophical works of Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), "Japan's first world-class modern philosopher" who presented "the Japanese perspective in a way that is understandable to Western readers" (Carter, 2013: 4). The philosophers associated with the Kyoto School were well versed in western philosophy and mounted a challenge to the hegemonic West by attempting to sketch out "world philosophy" mobilising their "eastern" background such as Buddhism in general and Zen in particular (Heisig 2001). The School became strongly associated in popular mind of war time Japan and its empire with well-known phrases such

as “overcoming modernity” and “the world-historical standpoint”. Both of them were the themes of a series of symposia that took place in the early 1940s. These symposia have come to embody “what went wrong in Japan in that war”, a set of statements by the regime’s foremost apologists made up both members and non-members of the Kyoto School. They were:

- November 1941, Kyoto: *The World-Historical Standpoint and Japan* symposium
- March 1942, Kyoto: *The Ethical and Historical Nature of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere* symposium
- July 1942, Tokyo: *The Overcoming Modernity* symposium
- November 1942, Kyoto: *The Philosophy of Total War* symposium

A total of thirteen intellectuals from philosophy, literature, ethics, musicology and physics took part in the third symposium, the infamous “Overcoming Modernity” symposium held in Tokyo whereas four members of the Kyoto School, Kōsaka Masaaki, Kōyama Iwao, Nishitani Kenji and Suzuki Shigetaka, were the participants of the remaining three symposia. While the edited proceedings of the “Overcoming Modernity” symposium was published in a literary magazine, *Bungakukai* (Literary World) in its September and October 1942 issues, the rest of the symposia held in Kyoto were organised and published in different issues of a general interest magazine, *Chūōkōron* (Central Public Debate). They were then published in a book form under the title of *The World-Historical Standpoint and Japan* in 1943. These symposia are generally seen as “the most important public debates of significance for Japan of the transformation of a European war into a global conflict in 1941” (Williams 2004: 55). The current article focuses on these symposia because they were produced for public consumption by the members of the Kyoto School, not as specialised works in philosophy, which with a possible exception of Nishida Kitarō’s *An Inquiry to the Good* (1911), were not widely read outside the academe.

It is widely acknowledged the Kyoto School was a major player in shaping discourse against western hegemony; however, their articulation of the essence of Japanese-ness or Japanese national was rather weak on clarity (Kawakami et al. 1979; Calichman 2008<sup>i</sup>). In the “Overcoming Modernity” symposium, for example, the participants were unanimous in acknowledging the modernity as they knew it was of a foreign, more precisely, European origin and in the cul-de-sac reflecting the views of contemporary European intellectuals such as Paul Valéry, and maintained therefore the realisation of Japan’s own modernity was essential in order for the Japanese/Japanese society to realise their true selves.

The symposium participants were eloquent in describing what was “wrong” and “problematic” with modernity: its effect on human spirit and morality, more precisely, the decline in spirituality or spiritual power. Kamei Katsuichirō described this as the tendency to abandon thinking on its own; the decline in sensitivity; the loss of ability to appreciate silence; reification of language – all these were symptoms of a weakening of human spirit and its eventual demise. Nakamura Mitsuo summarised modernity as a psychological/mental state in which humans were constantly compelled to search for something novel, which was deemed to be bad for human spirit. Modernity was seen as a spiritual malaise: modernity was bad because it damages human spirituality. Nishitani Kenji articulated his concern over modernity as the threat to the foundation on which an integrative worldview could be formed, for Nishitani believed that modernity was conditioned by three

different directions introduced by the Reformation, Renaissance and the rise of science. The loss of the possibility of forming an integrative worldview with a solid core was an inherent problem of modernity. Moroi Saburō agreed with Nishitani in his assessment of the problem of modernity as a danger for humanity to plunge into confusion in its attempt to self-understanding. Modernity was therefore a universal problem to be solved, not restricted to Japan. It was suggested time and time again in the symposium that Japan was the most important, if not sole, actor which could correct this universal problem.

However, the participants were rather unclear as to what this alternative, Japanese-derived modernity was and how it could be realised. Because they could not articulate the vision of alternative, truer modernity which was to overcome western hegemony, they were not successful in demarcating Japanese national identity, either. Many of the participants urged the restoration of spirituality but were rather vague about exactly what was to be restored and how it should be achieved. A number of them thought a rigorous re-examination of Japanese classics was necessary. For example, Kawakami Tetsutarō and Kamei Katsuichirō were of the view that problems associated with modernisation had not fundamentally derived from Japan since modernity was essentially foreign to Japan. Modernity was imposed from outside and implanted in a very different environment. Therefore the way to overcome modernity was to go back to the original state of Japan. There was a hint that this “original state of Japan” in their view roughly corresponded what *Kokugaku* scholars had advocated.

However, some cautioned against blinding oneself by believing the utopia would be found in the classics, a clear refutation of the call of *Kokugaku*. Moroi, amongst others, was clear as to what was needed: building their own culture. He added this could be achieved by putting senses/sensitivities back to their rightful place as means of making sense of the world in addition to reason, and by ensuring the superiority of spirit. According to Moroi, this was the utmost task for artists. Shimomura suggested a new conception of spirit was the only way without much further elaboration. Nishitani thought Oriental religiosity could be the way forward. His suggestion was ‘subjective nothingness’, affirmation of being through total self-denial. Through subjective nothingness, the pure and clear mind would be achieved, which in turn overcome modernity which had lost its wholeness/integrity, according to Nishitani. The symposium proceedings makes amply clear that the intellectuals who took part in the symposium were tackling the question of national identity via the concept of modernity in the clear-cut context of the West, the universal oppressor, versus Japan, the challenger to the oppressor. However, the symposium participants’ articulation of Japanese identity remained opaque.

The same can be seen in the three *Chūōkōron* symposia which were published under the title *The World-Historical Standpoint and Japan* (Kōsaka et al. 1943). The idea of the world-historical standpoint was built on an understanding of the contemporary situation as a world-historical era in which the western-centric world would disintegrate and the world would finally be truly unified. It is more of an expression of conviction that Japan was to play a significant role in the world where the existing order was collapsing than a clear proposition of methodology to study history (Koyasu 2007). According to the members of the Kyoto School, the world-historical era was deemed to be a period in which various states and nations would influence world culture through their unique characteristics. They further argued that Japan was to take the lead in this new era of history as a

fully self-aware subject because of its history of development by absorbing and digesting influences from both the West and the East, a clear echo of the civilisational discourse which was dominant at that time. In their own words:

The basis of Japan's leadership in East Asia lies in its consciousness of this world-historical vocation. ... the Japanese are a world historical people of the present. ... World historical peoples of the past were simply expanding oneself through the whole wide world and did not have the awareness to renew the order of the world while recognizing the subjectivity of the other' (Kōsaka et al. 1943: 157-9)

The war, at the time of the symposium, yet to develop into the Pacific War, had a particular "world-historical significance" because it was to reveal "a new idea of world history by realising unification of the East, thus, enabling the true unification of the world" (Suzuki 2010).

The symposia participants deliberated on the meaning of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere as well. It was noted that since the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was not governed by western logic but eastern ethics, it "cannot be thought of merely in terms of resources" and it should "find a place for all countries" (Kōsaka et al. 1943: 180-3). To the participants, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was moral:

The root of the morality of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere lies in passing on to each people the *moralische Energie* of Japan, raising their spiritual level to a height where they can co-operate with Japan, and in this way setting up a moral relationship among different ethnic peoples that can support the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (Kōsaka et al. 1943: 240)

The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was presented as a brand new world where the true history could unfold because of *moralische Energie* the Japanese were uniquely endowed with.

The symposia, which took place while the members of the Kyoto School were discreetly co-operating with the Navy, were certainly not a denunciation of Japanese imperial expansion and the idea of the world-historical standpoint is generally seen as an expression of the intellectuals' support for what is sometimes referred to as the Fifteen Years War. The second Sino-Japanese War was presented by the symposium participants to have a moral dimension in that it would lead to "Asian Awakening" rejecting imperialism, Soviet communism and fascism, all of which were deemed to represent logic of western powers (Suzuki 2010).

While the symposia could be dismissed as a self-centred exercise to justify Japanese militarist and imperialist expansion at a certain level, a closer look into what was discussed there points to a range of features which had potential to be used to resist or subvert Japanese imperialism. Because the world-historical standpoint perspective aspires to realise "true" universality, not the West-centric one which was dominant albeit in the process of crumbling at the time, the world-historical standpoint as an idea had potential to reject imperialist, self-expanding nationalism and to try to comprehend history beyond the confines of nations and states (Yonetani 2005). The vision was spelt out in a Japan-centric manner: in facilitating "Asian Awakening", Japan was expected to exercise



*moralische Energie*, which the declining West no longer possessed, and it was meant to advocate and realise multi-culturalism and multi-polarism in the world (Suzuki 2010). These were, nonetheless, some of the aspects of the world-historical standpoint approach which could be utilised to subvert Japanese imperialism, the very subject which the discussion was assumed to justify.

While the symposia provided some discursive tools for people in East Asia to challenge the legitimacy of Japanese imperialism and hegemony, they did not supply much concrete detail as to what Japanese national identity was. Japan was described as the only existence which could achieve the ultimate unity of the world because of its roots in both eastern and western cultures, the level of articulation of Japanese national identity remains highly abstract in these symposia. In the Japanese case, the influence of the 'West-versus-East' discursive framework is evident, which suggests that the Japanese intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century were more firmly embedded in the western-centric, diffusionist understanding of the world than they would care to admit.

### **The articulation of national identity in early twentieth century China: Sun Yat-sen**

When examining the articulation of national identity in twentieth century China, works by Sun Yat-sen cannot be overlooked. Within the context of this article, since writings by Sun precede the symposia examined above, the direction of influence, as it were, is from Sun to the symposia and the Kyoto School. As the Kyoto School explicitly draws from "eastern" heritage, it is clear Sun's utterances which often mobilises civilisational referent formed the background against which the Kyoto School's discourse was developed. Nevertheless, Sun was articulating Chinese national identity or Chinese-ness against the backdrop of the rise of Japan as a competitor to the West and as an aggressor to Asian countries, which places him in a more complex situation than the one in which the Kyoto School operated. In this section, transcript of two famous lectures by Sun is examined: "The Principle of Nationalism" given on 17 February 1924 (Sun in Kedourie 1970: 304-317) and "Greater Asianism" given on 28 November 1924 at Kobe Women's College in Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1967)<sup>ii</sup>.

The first lecture, the Principle of Nationalism, is part of the lecture series which was later published as *San Min Chu I (The Three principles of the People)* in Shanghai in 1929. The lecture series was given in response to the demand from the Chinese Communist Party, with which Sun's Kuomintang was formally allied in 1922, for a clearer party ideology. In this lecture, Sun called for the revival of "lost" Chinese nationalism as a means of redressing injustices inflicted on China by the West which was now advocating cosmopolitanism as a way of containing China and other oppressed peoples. It is evident that his articulation was made within the framework of the West versus the East, in which the East, despite its much longer history and more advanced civilisation, was oppressed by the West. As in many cases in Asia and Africa, as documented by Kedourie (1970), Sun presented an idea as nationalism as a means of liberation from the western domination and oppression in this lecture. When Sun describes the Chinese nation, the term he adopted was "race" reflecting the dominance of racist discourse of the time. He emphasised the size of the Chinese population: a quarter of the world population of the time, which according to him, was one of the reasons the West feared the "awakening" of China. As well as the size, Sun drew the audience's attention to the civilisational quality of the Chinese nation, which could be seen, according to Sun, in the fact that it abandoned the evil of imperialism by the time of the Han dynasty (roughly contemporary to the Roman Empire) which produced profound political philosophy opposing imperialism. The Chinese nation was

therefore presented as a civilisational race, whose major characteristic is their love of peace, “an outstanding quality of the Chinese character” (Sun in Kedourie 1970: 315). While Sun was clearly articulating Chinese national identity in the contemporary intellectual climate – the dominance of racist, if not racist, thinking, the emerging anti-imperialist discourse drawing from the idealisation of self-determination and so on -, his description of Chinese national identity was imbued with reference to civilisation highlighting the perception of fundamental difference between the East and the West.

The mobilisation of civilisational discourse is also evident in his second lecture on greater Asianism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1967). In the Japanese translation, Sun uses both “culture” and “civilisation” but since he is developing his view with reference to the oppositional framework of the East versus the West, it is quite clear the main reference point of his lecture was the contemporary debates on civilisation. Sun opened his lecture by asserting superiority of Asia by declaring “our Asia is the birthplace of the oldest culture” which was *the* source of all cultures and civilisations of the world. He acknowledged that Asia, the most ancient and highly developed civilisation, had been eclipsed by the West for the last few centuries and now the West dominated and oppressed Asia. Sun saw the signs of Asia’s fight back in the Japanese victory over Russia at the beginning of the century because of the fact itself (an Asian country defeated a European country and by so doing liberated itself from the yoke of unequal treaties) and because how it was seen by Asians across the world. He then argued that the revival of Asia was not merely something to be hoped for but was inevitable, and in justifying this, Sun mobilised the spiritual East versus the material West framework.

According to Sun, the western civilisation was essentially material and more importantly, “a culture that threatens people with military power (might)”; the western civilisation therefore ruled through fear, which Sun characterised as *badao* (霸道: *the rule of might*) in reference to Chinese classical thinking. In contrast, in the East, *badao* had been looked down upon as a principle of rule in favour of *wangdao* (王道: *the Kingly Way*) which is based on benevolence, justice and morality. In the East, the rulers did not threaten people with violence in order to secure their compliance; rather, *wangdao*, the Kingly Way, the fundamental principle in the East, put onus on the ruler to demonstrate his exceptional morality and sense of justice in order to solicit voluntary compliance from the population. In Sun’s eye, it was clear which was superior as the principle of organising society: *wangdao*. Because Greater Asianism, as Sun saw it, drew from this tradition of the Kingly Way which prioritised morality, spirituality and justice over might and material comfort, Sun believed Greater Asianism was ultimately superior to western civilisation. Greater Asianism was not about dominating weaker groups but about justice and respect to all, a fundamentally egalitarian and moral principle. This is where the complex context in which Sun produced his idea of the Chinese nation: the relationship between Japan, the rising star of the East, and China. He called upon Japan not to forget its civilisational heritage of *wangdao*, although it has caught up with the West in terms of material culture, in thinking about its future. According to Sun, it is up to the Japanese to decide whether to become a poodle of western *badao* or a champion of the Eastern Kingly Way. In praising the superiority of *wangdao*, Sun subtly indicated civilisational superiority of the Chinese people over the Japanese as the people who had developed this profound political philosophy. His articulation of Chinese national identity is ultimately conditioned by the claim to spiritual/civilisational superiority vis-à-vis the West and Japan, the newly emerging hegemon, whose

challenge was reflected on the Kyoto School's deliberation of the philosophy of world history in which the Japanese were explicitly presented as *the* actor to reunite the world overcoming both the West and ancient Chinese civilisation.

### **The articulation of national identity in early twentieth century Taiwan: Tsai Pei-huo**

Tsai Pei-huo (蔡培火, 1889-1983) was a multi-faceted politician and teacher of Taiwan, the first colony of Japan. He started his career as a teacher. He campaigned to introduce the Latin script in order to improve literacy among Taiwanese. He became involved in the Taiwan Assimilation Society formally in order to encourage assimilation of the Taiwanese into Japanese society but in reality to demand for equal treatment of the Taiwanese with the Japanese. As soon as it was founded, the Society was banned by the Governor-General in Taiwan in 1915 suspicious of its demand for the improved treatment of the Taiwanese, and Tsai lost his job as a teacher and exiled in Japan. While in Japan, Tsai played the key role in founding a bilingual (Japanese and Chinese) magazine, 『台湾青年 (*Taiwanese Youth*)』 in 1920. *Taiwanese Youth* was supported by both Japanese intellectuals and Taiwanese students and intellectuals residing in Japan and it counted eminent figures such as Uemura Masahisa and Yoshino Sakuzō as contributors. The magazine continued till 1922 and then was renamed as 『台湾 (*Taiwan*)』, which was further morphed into a newspaper, 『台湾民報 (*Taiwan People's News*)』 in 1923 (Yokoji 2004). Tsai went back to Taiwan during this period and petitioned the Japanese colonial office to install a local council for Taiwan.

Tsai was clearly a nationalist as seen in the fact that he accepted the nation-centric worldview at the beginning of his article, 「我島と我等 (Our island and ourselves)」 in *Taiwanese Youth* in 1920 (Tsai 1920). The article starts with the identification of nationalism as the prism through which the world is understood. It then states its aim as to offer an analysis of the condition in which Taiwan and the Taiwanese found themselves in the early twentieth century by asking the following questions: what kind of place Taiwan was and what the Taiwanese, who were born and lived on the island, should aspire to. Implicitly drawing from Watsuji's *Climate and Culture* thesis, the article engages with an examination of the nature of the Taiwanese in reference to Taiwan's climate, geology and natural resources. Tsai praised the physical beauty and the abundance of natural produce and resources of the island of Taiwan and argued that the Taiwanese had come to existence as the protector this previous treasure trove on the earth (Tsai 1920: 16). However, in his view, the Taiwanese in the early twentieth century were uninterested and unthinking, not innovative and lacked in creativity. This, in his view, had resulted in Taiwan's subjugated position in the world.

His analysis of the causes of the mentality of the Taiwanese is rather confusing in that he appeared to conflate the Taiwanese and the Chinese despite the stated aim of examining the nature of the Taiwanese. This probably reflects a complex relationship between Chinese and Taiwanese identity, which is not yet fully resolved and which Tsai and other intellectuals had just started to work out in the early twentieth century. Tsai attributed one of the causes of a particular mindset of the Taiwanese to the geography of the mainland China. He deployed a description which is now very familiar: that China proper is vast and there are too many people to achieve unity. Because of this historical background, "passive realism" (Tsai 1920: 17) had corrupted people's mind to the point that they no longer aspired for eternity. He pointed out the influence of Buddhism, which had exacerbated passive subjectivity of the Chinese (presumably including the Taiwanese) as the second

cause. Tsai then brought his focus back on Taiwan and argued that due to the encounter with the West and major changes in the environment that surrounded Taiwan, i.e., the colonisation by Japan, the Taiwanese were waking up and developing active subjectivity to engage with the world. He further argued that the Taiwanese could no longer afford to remain seen as incapable. “Taiwan is Taiwan in the Empire at the same time Taiwan of ours, of the Taiwanese” (Tsai 1920: 19) and he proposed a vision of a paradise in East Asia, a major trading post with developed industry blessed with favourable natural conditions in an increasingly peace-seeking world as what the Taiwanese should aspire for.

The identity of the Taiwanese articulated here remains vague and the Taiwanese and the Chinese are not very clearly differentiated. However, it is articulated in reference to the natural environment as the dominant discourse of the time and to a long history of China. Above all, it is articulated vis-à-vis imperial Japan. The article ends with a call for the equal treatment of the Taiwanese with the Japanese. This was necessary, in Tsai’s view, to attribute even more legitimacy to the Japanese opposition to racist policies implemented in the United States. In doing so, Tsai was mobilising the kind of Asiaism propagated by the imperial centre that the Japanese Empire was working for oppressed peoples of Asia. Tsai demanded that Japan should keep its word by treating the Taiwanese as equals so as to progress towards the realisation of universal equality, which then would benefit the Taiwanese as well as the Japanese.

Tsai’s use of Asianism in order to press for the equality for the Taiwanese and others in the Empire is more clearly seen in his book, 『東亜の子はかく思ふ (*Thus Thinks the Child of East Asia*)』, written in Japanese and published in 1937. Tsai mobilises the *bagdao* (the rule of might) vs *wangdao* (the Kingly Way) framework right from the beginning to argue for peace between Japan and China (Tsai 1937: 2-3). Driven by deep concern that the whole of East Asia was on the brink of catastrophic disaster due to war between Japan and China and more generally as a consequence of Japanese imperialism, Tsai declares that his nationalist concern for Taiwan was no longer relevant (p. 10). He then challenges the Japanese imperial centre to prove their world-historical credential by honouring its commitment to equality among five peoples in Manchuria (p. 5). He urges Japan to follow the Kingly Way in its dealing with China by respecting it as a senior rather than by following *baodao*, the western way, with a threat of force because “Japan has already qualified as the eldest brother in Asia” (p. 222). Being an elder according to Asianism as elaborated by Sun Yat-sen in his lecture and as shaped by the Kyoto School with an emphasis on the inherent ethical nature of the East means being obligated to act benevolently and morally in accordance to the true essence of eastern ethics. Tsai legitimately demands equal treatment of all peoples in the Japanese Empire by making use of its most dominant discourse. Demand for respect and autonomy, which was one of the reasons why the Taiwan Assimilation Society was banned by the Governor-General some twenty years before, was now presented in the imperialists’ language using their version of Asianism that Asia is inherently superior to the West because of its superior spirituality and Japan was uniquely placed to lead all peoples in the world to “true history”. While his plea was largely ignored, Tsai was articulating Taiwanese identity in a context which was conditioned not only by the Westphalian worldview but also by Asianism which drew from a certain type of civilisational discourse. This suggests that the way national identity was articulated in early twentieth century East Asia was not completely dominated by the discourse of the Westphalian system but was also influenced by alternative worldviews which East Asian intellectuals endeavoured to develop.

### **Concluding remarks**

The brief examination of three cases of articulation of national identity in the twentieth century has shown that since it was carried out within the framework of the West, the oppressor, versus the East, the subjugated, the diffusionist account of nationalism is largely held. It is also fair to state that the identity of the Japanese, Chinese and Taiwanese articulated by the intellectuals examined in this article largely remained vague. In the Japanese case, while the Kyoto School forcefully justified the leadership of Japan in the world, what made the Japanese special was poorly articulated. In the words of Sun Yat-sen, what characterised the Chinese appeared to be its vast number because it would make the rest of the world afraid of their “awakening”, and Tsai Pei-huo saw the subjectivity of the Taiwanese in a deplorable state. Nonetheless it is also clear that in articulating national identity, these intellectuals were conscious of alternative sources for their endeavour. Frequent reference was made to a type of civilisational discourse drawing from a long history of China and its way of doing things, which was mobilised by non-Japanese intellectuals to indicate their difference not only from the westerners but also from the Japanese. In using civilisational discourse, these intellectuals, both Japanese and non-Japanese, were engaged with a kind of archaeology of knowledge to search for a different conception of political community, governance and order in the historical development of East Asia. This suggests subjective engagement with the search for the self and self-expression on the part of East Asian intellectuals of the early twentieth century, which in turn suggests a scope for an investigation into multiple origins of nationalism.

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<sup>i</sup> The discussion of the "Overcoming Modernity" symposium draws from the Japanese edition (Kawakami et al. 1979) with the author's translation.

<sup>ii</sup> The discussion here is based on the Japanese version translated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and collected in *The Collected Works of Sun Wen* published in 1967. Translation from Japanese to English is mine.