



Title	An Essay on the Interaction between Chinese Nationalism and Political Democracy in the 20th Century : The Origins of Chinese Modern Nationalism and Political Democracy
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Citation	大阪外国語大学アジア学論叢. 1991, 1, p. 32-37
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/99636
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An Essay on the Interaction between Chinese Nationalism and Political Democracy in the 20th Century

—The Origins of Chinese Modern Nationalism and Political Democracy—

Nishimura Shigeo

There is a magnetic field of historical understanding in contemporary China, the so-called “patriotic-united front” theory, or “patriotism theory.”

This theory focuses on the period of 150 years from 1840 to 1990. Putting the year of 1949 the year of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in between, the first 110 years is the phase of “saving China,” and the next 40 years is the phase of “promoting China.” This historical understanding has been putting the identity of Chinese People in the core. Kazuo Iwama points out that there are two characteristic phases of his nationalism theory: “modern, social-contract, and historical product,” and “super-historical, naturally-given, and ethnic existence system.” The latter seems effective through out modern and contemporary Chinese Nationalism. If the nationalism is founded on the “super-historical, naturally-given, and ethnic existence system” theory, “modern, social-contract, and historical product,” theory can be put on this foundation. Admitting H.Cohn's principle, namely, that a “social contract shapes a modern nation,” it is possible to avoid an either/or understanding of nationalism which contains the above-mentioned two phases. What we need to find out is how these two phases are related to, and contradict, each other.

Once Lenin pointed out that when capitalism achieved a final victory over feudalism, it was connected with a nationalist movement. He also claimed that the economic foundation of the movement was “modern-capitalism.” He says that this movement shows a tendency to form a

nation state which can best meet its demand.

He concludes that the nation state is the typical and normal form in the era of capitalism as in 19th-century European history. Lenin points out that the movement to form a modern country, i.e., a nationstate, is motivated by the development of capitalism. Kazuo Iwama indicates that Lenin had a compound-eyed vision which found the close relationship between unification and development of the language, a mixture of super-historical and ethnic aspects, and capitalism. This unification and development of the language works as a base to bring a developing country and its periphery back to life historically, the so called "revival of language and nation."

Then when did the nationalism in Asian nations begin to contain two phases? The nationalism in Asia, especially in China, is generally regarded to have been directly effected by the "Western Impact". I mean that a thought and a movement were tied when natural relations, such as relations of blood and land, got exposed to danger of infringement. This movement--super-historical and naturally given things came up to the surface of a nation--is nothing but the birth of the nationalism. The thought and the movement were formed against the external danger which had existed since the first stage. When the thought and the movement were involved in the world-wide capitalism, it appeared to be a political movement to shape a nation state.

The Reform Movement of 1898 is one of the definite attainments. This movement contains a constitutional monarchy, but not an imperial autocracy, at its core. "Super-historical and naturally-given" energy was formed as the economic foundation of the nationalism, then the nation, not sufficiently but still surely, became a nation state thorough a new theory of formation. These two characters (super-historical, naturally-given, and ethnic existence system" and "modern, social-contract, and historical-

product ") can complement for each other.

At the same time, they contradict each other. Consequently, the Reform Movement of 1898 needs to be re-evaluated. Through this re-evaluation, it would be possible to establish a new phase of political development in modern Chinese history.

This possibility causes me to emphasize "Chinese political history in the 20th century." The reason why I use the term "Chinese political history in the 20th century " is that I need to place emphasize on the 20th century when the nationalism clearly came to have two different phases. Chinese history in the 20th century is a special formative period with unique historical aspects.

Now, we need to think how we may grasp the meaning of "Chinese political history in the 20th century ." First of all, note that it was not until the 20th century that we see the development of Chinese capitalism as a whole. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat appear as socially-coherent new classes can be existed. Secondly, having a new political character, "constitutional monarchy theory" became public. Although it was only in a short period of time, people were united against the increasing external danger. This became a beginning to shake the imperial autocracy theory, which was the core of the Chinese traditional political culture. This led to the collapse of the Qing-Dynasty and formation of a new multi-ethnic "nation state," mainly composed of Hans. Lastly, note that China became subordinate when it got involved in the international politics of the great powers. This is reflected in the conclusion of the Xin-chou treaty in 1901, the action of subjugation against the Yihetuan Movement. Thus, Chinese political history in the 20th century can be regarded as an epoch which formed a new character of Chinese political culture with two different phases.

The Chinese nationalism in the 20th century can be defined as a demo-

cratic nationalism, which was a spontaneous selfdefence reaction against anger to the state. Also, in this Chinese nationalism in the 20th century, in order to shape a multi-national nation state, the democratic energy was partly and destortedly absorbed.

Thus, the question is how the political democracy was formed in the Chinese political culture through the two defferent phases of the nationalism.

To put it concretely, the question can be stated as follows : whether European political democracy can be seen to exist with Asian political culture (in this case including Japan); and if not, then whether Asian countries have their own uniqueness or not. If we deny the existance of European political democracy as an element of Asian political culture, we thus mean to deny the "universality" of European political democracy.

In this paper, we must anylize concretely how the real political democracy has existed in the Chinese political history in the 20th century. This political democracy must not be defined as a deflection of the European political democracy. A. Nathan, who studied the Chinese Constitutions by anylizing the history of thoughts, points out some uniqueness of China and gives us a new vision to explicate the Chinese political culture. He also claims we need to find out what the political democracy should be in the real Chinese society. Let me clarify six distinct points of "political right" theory in the history of Chinese constitutions stated by A. Nathan. First, when he anylyzes the eleven constitutions (ranged from Daqing-ginding-imperial made constitutions to the constitution of the PRC in 1982), there is not a single one which considers that human rights were the essence of humanity. Second, the drafters of Chinese constitutions think that "human rights" are approved and can be reformed by the government. Third, "human rights" are placed so highly that it is actually impossible to attain or enjoy them. Fourth, consequently, any constitution vests the government with the authority to limit the human rights by

law. Fifth, there is no systematic rule to justify the constitutionality of any law. Sixth, all eleven constitutions but the one in the Qing-dynasty, acknowledge that sovereignty resides in the people in principle. These ten constitutions don't regulate the effective use of people's sovereignty. Therefore, the legislators are chosen by indirect or limited elections, and there was only limited influence of people on politics.

A. Nathan has beneficially compared these six points with the characteristic points of the "political human rights" theory of the U.S. Constitution. First according to his analysis of the Constitution, human rights are essentially possessed by human beings. Second, human rights are regarded as "natural rights" rather than "legal rights", and thus, human rights do not exist as a result of a demand or a temporary aim of a nation. Third, human rights should be exercised on the spot. They should not be suppressed just because the time is not opportune. Fourth, a law cannot restrict the human rights, but human rights should restrict a law. Fifth, there should be an independent organization to check instances of unconstitutionality. Sixth, civilians should have the power to influence the government by use of the vote.

His indications are regarded quite highly since they characterize what human rights in Chinese politics should be. He also posed some questions: how has the style of Western political democracy been changed in order to be adopted in Chinese political democracy, and what is the significance of Chinese political democracy?

Based on the speech of Deng Xiao-ping (on the leading system of the Party and the Government, delivered in August 1980), A. Nathan regards the vision of Chinese democracy as follows: not knowing the difference of whether or not democracy is an object or means, Chinese people tend to believe in a function of democracy. They believe that the democracy can resolve a social or an ideological conflict quietly. They also believe

that democracy can help make the national dignity higher, and that this is recognized when others accept one's opinion. Moreover, democracy is believed to improve the quality of the government and to prevent the bureaucracy. At the same time the democracy can help; improve stability, and therefore, political struggle can be regarded as " periodical and peaceful " activity. So far the advantages of the democracy is regarded to be a part of a reform---adjustment of the system against the political contradiction. As A. Nathan emphasizes, there has been a social base which won't find the political contradiction when advantages of democracy are introduced. It is because Chinese strongly believe that the ruler and the ruled share the same interests.

Therefore, the political democracy should be realized in both the existence and the exercise of the political sovereignty. It should be understood as functional democracy.

In this case, however, we will not care how functional the view of democracy in recent chinese society is. We must grasp how the real democracy has existed in the historical process of developing two phases of Chinese nationalism. We also need to find out how the political democracy enabled itself to realize its own object.