Nationalism and peace in the Asia-Pacific region

The resurgence of nationalism in today’s Asia-Pacific region is an undisputable fact that has been emerging since the end of the Cold War. Nationalism can be theoretically categorized into ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism, cultural nationalism, state nationalism, and so on (Smith, 1995). However, these theories made no significant sense to Asia before the late 19th century. In his classical manifesto *New People Theory* (Xinmin Shuo), Liang Qichao, one of the most influential thinkers in China during the late Qing Dynasty, argued that before the 19th century, nationalism emerged as a dominant ideology only in modern Europe. The dominant ethos engaged in the mind of Chinese statesmen and gentry was culturalism, while patriotism and the search for national identity were underdeveloped until nationalism was introduced in China as a defensive strategy in response to the invasion of Western imperialism in the late 19th century (Liang, 1974). This path about the histories of nationalism was basically similar to what had happened to Japan and many other Asian countries.

More than half a century ago, B. R. Sen, the ambassador of India to the United States, had declared, “There can be no doubt that nationalism is the greatest social and political force in the life of Asia today” (1952: 108). The movement for national independence in Asia thrived after World War II, and the nationalism in that age could be understood as a more compounded kind:

> the true nationalist appeal in backward Asia consists not merely in preserving one’s country from outside control, as might be sufficient in the West, but of constructing one’s country anew, solving its many problems, uplifting its ragged millions, and making its society in every respect where it is now inadequate.

*(Sen, 1952: 112)*

However, it was pressed down by the ever-growing Cold War between the two rival camps of capitalist and communist countries.

The end of the Cold War in the 1990s revived various kinds of nationalism, thereby restoring political dynamics in this region nowadays. Asserting national identity and reconciling
people who were once divided by the Cold War ideology do construct as some contents of post-Cold War nationalism. Paradoxically, the new tide of post-Cold War nationalism focuses more on disputes in territorial sovereignty in the Asia-Pacific, which is the most primitive form of nationalism, and synergizes with the ‘energy and resources nationalism’, which is the new direction of nationalism in the region as it emerges in the 21st century. Conflicts have expanded to maritime sovereignty, which resulted in a crisis in regional security that was worse than that in the Cold War era (Collins, 2011). Frequent nationalistic maneuvers and debates aroused in Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines are directed toward China because of the dispute in the East and South China Seas (and also including Malaysia, Taiwan, Brunei, and the Philippines). The sovereign dispute over the Dokdo Island (referred to as Takesima Island in Japan) between South Korea and Japan also fueled movements in nationalism from these opposing countries. Among all countries in the Asia-Pacific, China has been the core of this tidal wave of nationalism because the country has too many disputes over territorial and maritime sovereignty with its neighboring countries, and its responses to the disputes are usually assertive. Some of these conflicts caused casualties (e.g. the Spratly Islands naval battle in March 1988 between China and Vietnam, which caused dozens of casualties) and hostile military presence, which added insult to the injury for countries involved. Given the hostilities in the South China Sea and Diaoyu Islands (referred to as the Senkaku Islands in Japan), societies in Greater China have formed their own nationalistic movements against rival countries. A very notable example of these initiatives is Defending Diaoyu Islands Movement against Japan in China Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and various overseas Chinese communities, which has been reviving from time to time for more than four decades since the 1970s. Once again, China became the target of concern, which also reveals the lingering presence of nationalistic disputes inspired by the Cold War’s ideology in the Asia-Pacific region in recent years (Vu, 2010).

The booming spirit of nationalism in the Asia-Pacific region causes people to worry about regional security. The proactive movement of nationalism in China, a country that is considered an important power in the Asia-Pacific and the second-biggest economy in the world, will certainly affect the balance of war and peace in the entire region. Other countries have been closely watching the tides of Chinese nationalism after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Rhetorically, the Chinese government has emphasized the peaceful nature of its national development since the launch of the reform and the opening-up policy, particularly after the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989, and proposed official diplomatic principles, such as “lay low, conceal ability and bide time” (taoguang yanghui) and “peaceful rise/development” (heping jueqi/fazhan). Despite these efforts, many observers still continue to believe that Chinese nationalism will evolve into the ideology experienced by Germany and Japan in the first half of the 20th century, and this form of nationalism is a potential source of instabilities and conflicts to the region.

To what extent and in what sense are these kinds of worries reasonable? A fair amount of prejudices have increasingly emerged with the rising attention on nationalism in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in China. These prejudices are not only found in Western countries, particularly the United States, but also in the countries neighboring China, especially those that have territorial or maritime sovereign disputes with China. These prejudices hinder people’s judgment on how governments in the Asia-Pacific region should rationally engage with nationalism. For example, while observers criticize China for ‘bullying’ its neighboring countries, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, over sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea, such observers may have overlooked the fact that social movements in Vietnamese nationalism impede the efforts of the Vietnamese government in dealing
Nationalism in the Asia-Pacific

with diplomatic negotiations, including the one over the South China Sea, in a calm and moderate manner (Li, 2014). To overview and review the major disputes and conflicts in nationalism in the Asia-Pacific region after the end of the Cold War, this chapter attempts to propose two sets of frameworks for analytical purpose (Jinri Daobao, 2012): The first framework pertains to noteworthy prejudices in reviewing nationalism in the region; the second framework pertains to the different types of relations and dynamics between government and nationalism in the region. Integrating the two frameworks and applying them in the analysis may help in examining and interpreting the trends of nationalism in the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific region with a more precise and thorough conclusion.

Prejudices in reviewing the nationalism in the Asia-Pacific

These prejudices can be observed in three perspectives. First, nationalism is evaluated on the ideological ground that is commonplace in democratic countries. Observers from democratic countries regard acts of nationalism in liberal democracies as reasonable and normal representations of the will of the people. In contrast to this view, acts of nationalism occurring in nondemocratic countries would be regarded as a result of top-down mobilization by authoritarian regimes. Similar nationalistic assertions and behaviors can be found in China, South Korea, and Japan; however, Chinese nationalism is usually criticized as a result of prejudice and stereotyped as an evidence of “the ‘China Threat’” to the region, or even to the world, following the country’s successful economic reform (Chang, 2001). Nationalism in liberal democracies is less criticized than the nationalism of China and is even applauded in some cases. For example, during the several years of rivalry between Taiwan and China across the Taiwan Strait, Taiwanese nationalism firmly stood by its determination to reject reunion with China, and this nationalistic determination is vitally connected with its development of liberal democracy in its political system (Chuang, 2013), gaining great sympathy from international public opinion led by the United States and Japan against China’s chauvinism (Friedman, 1999). As one of the most frightening military crises of the post-Cold War era, the 1995–96 Chinese missile exercises in the Taiwan Strait were viewed as motivated by Beijing’s desire to interfere in Taiwan’s 1996 presidential elections—the first direct elections of a state chief in Chinese history and the first chance for Taiwanese voters to express their sentiments on national issues unmediated by local issues (Nathan, 1999). By sending two aircraft carriers toward the Taiwan Strait to monitor Chinese military actions, which was the largest naval movement of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region since the Vietnam War, Washington’s involvement did not only reveal its ideological stance toward nationalistic contestation but also demonstrated the presence of residual Cold War ethos concerning liberal democracy versus authoritarianism or communism in people’s interpretation of the conflict in the region’s nationalism.

Second, prejudices arising from strategic interests can be observed from geopolitical perspectives. Some countries often define acts of nationalism in countries that share common geopolitical and strategic interests as reasonable ones but condemn similar acts of nationalism in countries with conflicting interests. For example, the United States and other Western countries allied with Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines opposing China’s act of nationalism in the maritime sovereign disputes over the East and South China Seas. In May 2013, Japan extended its air defense identification zone (ADIZ) covers across the disputed East China Sea. Six months later, China established an ADIZ in clear response to the Japanese extension of her ADIZ. The United States and its alliances in the Asia-Pacific were mostly inclined to criticize China; Australia’s Foreign Ministry summoned the Chinese
ambassador to Australia to express its negative regard toward China’s move. Beijing’s assertiveness in the disputes is consolidating Australia’s historical and cultural fears of Asia, and belief that dependence on a “great and power friend” (i.e. the United States) is fundamental for the defense of the nation (Scappatura, 2014). A few weeks after China’s act, South Korea announced its decision to extend its ADIZ to Socotra Rock (referred to as Suyan Islet in China and referred to as Leodo in South Korea), which is the subject of a sovereignty dispute with China. Washington immediately expressed its support for South Korea. ADIZ was actually created by the United States in the 1950s, and Japan defined its ADIZ as early as the end of the 1960s. This series of quarrels show that the United States and its Asia-Pacific alliances regard China as a geopolitical rival, and judgment to their rivals’ nationalistic acts is derived from the alliance’s common strategic interest rather than the appropriateness behind the acts. To a certain extent, it also sustains one of the theories that U.S. President Barack Obama’s geostrategy, ‘Pivot to Asia’, has intended to keep the Asia-Pacific since 2011, i.e. keeping Asia-Pacific divided and dependent on the United States in maintaining the ‘balance of power’ in the region (Beeson, 2009; Pan, 2014).

Third, prejudices are derived from moral ground, which are populist and intuitive, and people of all social groups in any society may be involved in judging nationalism from an over-moralized perspective. Moral judgment often happens between a big nation and a small nation and between strong power and weak state. People denounce acts of bullying of big and powerful nations over small and weak ones. By contrast, the challenging acts of small nations against big ones are celebrated. In the same vein, Chinese nationalism triggers negative reactions from other small countries, but the acts of nationalism of these small countries against China are seldom scrutinized fairly. For example, in the disputes between China and South Korea on border delineation along Tumen River and Hailan River, some right-wing nationalists in South Korea, to agitate for fighting restoration of the territory of ancient Baekje Kingdom (18 BC–AD 660), even claimed that the territory of present Beijing down to Zhejiang Province in China should be part of Korea (Hu and Zhong, 2008). This kind of extreme and provocative propaganda without rigorous historical evidence has been embraced by many South Korea youth. However, international media does not seem to shed sympathy toward unreasonable pressure on China, possibly because South Korea is regarded as a weak one compared with China. Assertion from the Philippines is even more straightforward in the sense of over-moralizing size and power: The image of “the ‘China Threat’” is bound to continue to loom large for the Philippines and China’s other smaller neighbors basically because of the asymmetry of power relations involved. “As a rising power, China will find itself caught between its desire to stand up to and be recognized as an equal by other great powers, and the apprehensions of smaller neighbors that it will become an unfriendly hegemon” (Pablo-Baviera, 2002: 262). Doubtlessly, others have played a role in exacerbating tensions in the region. The U.S. ‘pivot’ to the Asia-Pacific has undeniably played a significant part in worsening the tensions with China. However, at the end of the days, nations in the region see the little matter of the concerns of small countries not being given much weight by big and rising China. Hence, the suspicion and fear of what the future holds, and these small countries’ unfavorable view of China as “not so neighborly,” has risen over the past decade (Majid, 2014) (see Table 31.1).

These prejudices are commonplace among politicians, public media, or even academics; often intertwine with each other to be stronger bias and undermine precise analysis. With these prejudices, nationalism is usually deemed to be a leverage of authoritarian governments but is overlooked as a constraint against good governance and peaceful diplomacy that blocks the view of empathetic understanding and appreciation toward some governments’ efforts in managing nationalistic spirit within normative boundary. Figuring out different types of
Nationalism in the Asia-Pacific

Theoretically speaking, nationalism deals with the relation of one country with the others. Its prominent symptom is the one self stands in the right side, while the others are definitely in the wrong side. In many circumstances, one nation’s acts of nationalism bias against the others, in the meantime prejudice for itself. Therefore, mishandling nationalism would not only damage the interest of others but also of itself. History tells people that nationalism caused several wars and conflicts between sovereign countries, and also inside the countries. After the Cold War, nationalism continued to exist and even escalated in the Asia-Pacific region. Concerning the internal conflicts that happen in the sovereign countries, Sarawak nationalists in Malaysia are not really radical. Regrettably, more are those characterized by violence and bloodshed, which are more severely attributed to nationalism than the Cold War, including the Karen people in East Myanmar, Muslims in Southern Thailand, and China’s ethnic minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Will nationalism in the Asia-Pacific region evolve into violent conflicts or even wars? The answer to this question hinges on the ways governments are handling their relationship with nationalism. Although nationalism is inevitable, conflicts and wars are not unavoidable given the most important role played by the governments in these acts. The government’s way to

---

Table 31.1 China’s favorability trends, 2002–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Japan (%)</th>
<th>South Korea (%)</th>
<th>The Philippines (%)</th>
<th>Vietnam (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

handle its relationship with nationalism could be conceptualized in three types of roles. First, the government acts as mobilizer, under two different sociopolitical backgrounds—in some societies without a strong spirit of nationalism, the government utilizes its resources, such as through organizational and ideological propaganda, to engineer the conditions for the rise of nationalism that fits government’s strategy to reach its goals. It this case, the government is an active mobilizer in constructing nationalism. For example, the mobilization of nationalism in Europe in the 19th century fortified the sense of identification within nations in order to fight for founding sovereign nation-states but also caused endless wars and conflicts between countries. The most typical example of these cases in the Asia-Pacific region is imperialist Japan on the eve of World War II when the government proactively initiated heavily aggressive nationalism. Some opinions in recent years, including those from China (Hu and Zhong, 2008), show concerns over the relapse of Japanese nationalism under Koizumi and Abe administrations. Nonetheless, there are observers arguing that the scenario in China is also another prominent example of this role. To clear the road for launching economic reform and opening up, the nationalistic fever during Mao Zedong era was quietened down for more than a decade after the end of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Since the regime’s legitimacy was severely struck by political crisis and diplomatic frustration after the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989, the Chinese Communist Party purposely and strongly forged patriotism again in education and other cultural domains to remount its legitimacy over the society, which was founded on resistance against Western powers (Lee, 1996; Wang, 2012; Zhao, 1997).

Another type of mobilizer finds that nationalistic ideology has been existing in the society; governments and politicians utilize the sociopolitical opportunities to pursue their own interest. For instance, the Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan is considered as a master of such maneuvers and not only in local elections; it even won as the ruling party by resorting to this type of mobilization as one of its important election campaign strategies for the past three decades (Qi, 2012). In Hong Kong, after a series of setbacks in asking for democratization from the Chinese government and the sense of victimization in a lot of cultural encounters with mainland Chinese after the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the young generation of political activists finally articulated that Hong Kong people belong to a ‘nation’ different from that of people in Mainland China. This new breed of political activists advocates self-determination and independence for Hong Kong in dealing with the obvious blows to the Legislative Council operations and the elections (Chen and Szeto, 2015).

The second type of role that governments play in dealing with nationalism could be conceptualized as a reactor. This view sees nationalism and related sentiment already existing in the society and reaches their climax every now and then. Some outbreaks happen in response to certain events, which leads to other political incidents. Governments are carefully responding to these crises and potential outbreaks because of their external and internal impacts. The ethnic nationalism exists within the sovereignty countries is typical example of this situation, such as aforementioned Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and China. Although the countries are ruled by authoritarian regimes, these governments’ capacity in dealing with these nationalistic challenges should not be overestimated since pressure from the tide of respecting ‘universal values’ (e.g. multiculturalism, self-determination) driven by globalization constrains their policy choices (Mackerra, 2004; South, 2011).

The third type of role is like a rider surfing across the previous two contexts and suggests that governments make use of nationalism to legitimize its policies. Once nationalism comes into being, neither a democratic government nor an authoritarian government could ignore it. Given that nationalism is an objective reality, governments should leverage this
Nationalism in the Asia-Pacific

resource to legitimize policies. Controversially, quite a few China experts argue that the Chinese Communist Party did not invent it but mainly depend on preexisting nationalism (and also drastic economic growth), instead of socialism, to maintain its ruling legitimacy and strengthen its control and governance after the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989 (Zhao, 1997, 2000). Similar perspective of analysis makes good sense to apply in other Asia-Pacific countries. To enable Singapore citizens to appreciate the authoritarian ruling of People's Action Party, for most of his political lifetime, Lee Kuan Yew constantly reminded them of threats from Indonesia and Malaysia (Lee, 2011). National unity in Indonesia continued to deteriorate after the fall of the Suharto regime (1967–98), as a result, the sovereignty dispute with Malaysia over the Celebes Sea was fittingly used to instigate nationalism to ease the pressure of democratization and economic difficulties faced by the Indonesian government (Yaakub, 2010).

The three types of relationships between government and nationalism provide insight into the trends and changes of post-Cold War nationalism in the Asia-Pacific region. In China, because of the nonexistence of authentic electoral politics, the legitimacy of the party-state and its policies is not rooted in public opinion, particularly the nationalistic ideology of the people. In academic language, the Chinese government is assertive and with high autonomy in dealing its relationship with nationalism, as proven in the practices of the government over the past few decades. During Mao Zedong era, the society was still weak, and nationalism was a top-down movement mobilized by the party-state, especially in the policies in struggle against the hegemony of the United States and the Soviet Union. However, the Chinese government has aimed to regulate and control nationalism since the new age of the economic reform and opening-up policy. China also launched patriotic campaigns and tried to influence nationalism in the society but mainly aims to stabilize the masses internally instead of stirring up the external world. In the government’s perspective, Chinese nationalism is mainly a response of the government toward preexisting nationalism in the society. As a rising power, China witnesses waves of nationalism that feature increasing spontaneity in the society, which reveals that nationalism has become an objective reality in China. The government does leverage this situation to legitimize some of its policies but with considerable restraint exercised. No officials from the central to local governments are able or allowed to hype up nationalism or make use of it to appeal to people. On the contrary, the government focuses on management and regulation of nationalism, even though its restrained attitude has been often criticized by domestic and overseas nationalists. The non-proactive participation and guidance from the government leave big leeway for the radical development of nationalism at the societal level. Ironically, in the eyes of China’s regional neighbors (such as South Korea), it is still believed that the nationalistic movements in Chinese society in recent years (such as the anti-Japanese movement in 2005) are intentionally mobilized by the central government (Li, 2012). This situation leads to considerable destructive impact and hyper-pressure on the government, especially when it is dealing with nationalistic disputes with other countries in the region (Gries, 2004; Hughes, 2006). In the light of this kind of risks, the Chinese government should increase its effort and capacity in this regard to facilitate the advantages of nationalism to national interest in more rational orientation.

Unlike the approach adopted by the Chinese government, the Japanese government moves toward mobilizing its nationalism these years. Similar to other developed countries, mass democracy in Japan increases the difficulty of achieving a government with strong state capacity. Politicians in Japan often mobilize traditionally existing nationalism with populist politics in the name of democracy. This practice causes the country's relations with other countries to suffer, particularly with its neighbors China and South Korea. Such a tendency
has getting worse since Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi made use of North Korea’s missile threat (2012–13) and terrorism in Indonesia and the Philippines to call for the national debate on the issue of amending Article 9 of the Constitution concerning the substantial increase of military expenditure (Matthews, 2003). Shinzo Abe’s second administration (since 2012) proactively drummed up Japanese nationalism to its peak by standing up to China over the Diaoyu Islands territorial dispute and demonstrated a determination to endow Japan with the right of collective self-defense. Abe’s nationalistic narrative is that the security legislation is the homework left by the Nobusuke Kishi Cabinet in 1960, based on a desire to recover full autonomy for Japan as a great power (Kishi is Abe’s grandfather). Strong forces in Japan appeal to nationalism from the ruling party of the central government and local political-bureaucratic elites, with mass media’s cooperation, and often receive echoes from oppositional parties and from the society as well. Compared with the practice in China, Japanese nationalism is far more top-down maneuvered. Japanese perception of Chinese aggression in the territorial dispute provided an impending sense of danger that the nationalistic Abe administration could use to its advantages (Pugliese, 2015). Regrettably, Japanese new nationalism’s growth stimulates reactionary nationalism in China and South Korea (and somehow in Singapore as well) resulting from bruised feelings of national dignity, which has been unresolved since the end of World War II (Moore, 2014).

Paradoxically, in terms of the relation between government and nationalism, the situation in South Korea is similar to that in Japan (and probably in China as well), wherein the government with weak legitimacy or popularity generates a high appeal to nationalism. Furthermore, South Korean government’s cultural policies served as a political tool, allowing the military regimes (1960s–80s) to enhance its coercive authority and to facilitate the public’s acceptance of anti-communist rhetoric; the inequalities of rapid economic growth and state militarism were actually emulating Japanese strategies for cultivating loyalty and a sense of belonging to the nation. After the transition to civilian authority, nationalistic cultural policy has often still been revisited—from Kim Young Sam to Lee Myung-bak—actively looking to the Japanese model, all regimes marshaling nationalistic cultural policies to legitimize their authority (Park, 2010), while the straw man is not only North Korea, on an ad hoc basis, and is also hegemonic Japan and China.

Nationalism has also escalated in other Asia-Pacific countries, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, as a result of their relations with China. These countries are smaller than China, and their governments are also less powerful than their Chinese counterparts. Therefore, the governments of these countries also mobilize nationalism to gain legitimacy and relieve domestic tensions at the cost of their relations with their diplomatic counterparts while constraining their own autonomy in domestic administration. For example, the clash between Vietnamese and Chinese boats in the waters of the South China Sea in May 2011 led to a surge in anti-Chinese sentiment among the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese government initially took appeasing attitude to the street protests but started restraining them for fear that the anti-Chinese movement will worsen and switch its orientation similar to the Arab Spring Democratic Movements (2010–12). These restraining measures were implemented when Vietnamese anti-communist and anti-government forces located overseas penetrated into the movement, such as the Vietnam Reform Party and Thich Quang Do, who is a Buddhist dissident leader (Li, 2014). However, to avoid criticism for weak diplomacy, the Vietnamese government adopted a hard-line posture in its relationship with China, which was of no help for reconciliation. A similar but even much worse crisis happened 3 years later: A series of anti-Chinese demonstrations regrettable followed by waves of riots across Vietnam in May 2014 in response to China deploying oil rig to the disputed
South China Sea (referred to as East Asia in Vietnam), dozens innocent ethnic Chinese were killed. The nationalistic riots did not target people from China only, but ethnic Chinese from Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore were severely victimized. Vietnamese government was under dilemma and needed to make politically correct definition to the protests officially as an assertion of patriotism—the government understood the hidden agenda of the protests were organized to complain about the government’s repression of free speech and its weak diplomatic attitude toward China. The government’s backlash against the protests would flare up the anti-government crisis at high risk (Dou and Paddock, 2014).

The spirit of nationalism in small countries, including South Korea and the Philippines, is often directed against China with the involvement of the United States. To further its geopolitical ambition, the United States fuels up the nationalism of these small countries by hyping up their theory on “the ‘China Threat’” (Gertz, 2000; Vairon, 2013). Such tactics for heating up nationalism increases the complexity of existing international relations and dims the prospect of constructing a mutually beneficial and peaceful Pan-Asia community (Shin, 2007).

Concluding remark: hold the double-edged sword rationally

Some governments in a globalized world become weak given the fact that some countries move toward globalization faster than others. Theoretically, this era is still characterized by sovereign countries or nation-states, but the governments of these countries can no longer manipulate people within their jurisdictions the way they traditionally exercised control in the past. Societal forces are increasingly growing. These forces have functions that enable them to play an increasingly important role in the international political arena. Nationalism in societal level can lead to disputes and conflicts between countries that cannot be solved by their respective governments, thereby compelling them to seek help from other sovereign governments. Given this possibility, governments of sovereign countries should cooperate and exercise rationality when dealing with nationalism, instead of instigating nationalism for their own selfish interest and to scapegoat other countries. Any government should formidable handle preexisting nationalism to facilitate historical experience and address practical challenges. For example, the restrained and rational attitude of China toward Japan in the sovereignty dispute of Diaoyu Islands in the 1990s was positively recognized by several analysts (Downs and Saunders, 1999). Will such a rational attitude of the government be fettered by the masses’ nationalistic fever due to the great economic achievement over the past two decades, or the ruling party’s legitimacy anxiety due to the economic downturn during recent years and the problems to come? Although the Chinese government spends considerable efforts to control forces of social movements, netizens, development of civil society and democratization in recent years (Law, 2012, 2015), the country’s tighter engagement to globalization increased pressure on the government to domesticate these societal forces into a ‘birdcage’.

Nationalism is a complicated issue also because of its paradoxical nature. In some countries, the government may gain domestic backup for its diplomatic initiative once nationalism is given the green light. In the other cases, such as in Sino-Japanese territorial dispute, leaders should be warned that drummed-up grassroots nationalism might tie leaders’ hands for making concession (Gibler, 2014), especially it ought to note that both the Chinese and Japanese governments characterize their respective states as responsible upholders of international order and peace diplomacy in the region. In a Joint Japan-China Public Opinion Poll conducted in 2014, 63.7 percent of Chinese respondents favored more forceful assertions
of effective control in the Diaoyu Islands, in contrast to 22.7 percent of Japanese respondents (Pugliese, 2015). While Beijing leaders may be at high risk of being hands tied by grassroots nationalism, Tokyo’s leaders are also at the risk of getting lost in the limits and complications of top-down push of reviving nationalism. Similar cases probably happen in the Philippines: It is possible to argue that the contents of nationalism have consistently eschewed democratic ideals. The nationalistic projects have been carried most forcefully by nondemocratic political current of the right or the left (Putzel, 2002). Once nationalism becomes appeased, unmanageable or even spoiled, radical political groups would use such an opportunity to kidnap the administration, might eventually result in conflicts or even wars between countries.

Bibliography

Nationalism in the Asia-Pacific


Liang, Qichao (1974). Yimingshi Quanjii (Collected Works from the Ice-Drinker’s Studio). Hong Kong: Tia nxing Publisher. (in Chinese)


