

New Nationalist Identities in Post-Leninist Transformations

The Implications for China

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THE complexities and contradictions of an extraordinarily diverse China full of conflicting potential do not yet define or confine China to any necessary future. This essay explores one possible outcome linked to a theoretical model derived from general Leninist experience. What follows is not *the truth* about China, but an attempt to imagine what could happen should one crucial factor change in China as in other Leninist states. That factor is the delegitimation of anti-imperialist nationalism.

Leninist nationalism imagines a capitalist world as the enemy of an entire people and legitimates rule by a dictatorial Leninist system with a command economy because only such a ruling group purportedly has the insight and capacity to reject, negate and check a murderous, predatory capitalism alleged to be the cause of a blood-thirsty imperialism that permanently threatens the nation's most precious values, indeed threatens the very independence of the people. This core legitimation of Leninist anti-imperialism, as Professor Jerry Hough has shown, is a kind of xenophobic Khomeini-like fundamentalism that is in conflict with the reform imperative of economic openness to the world market that is necessary for growth in the era of post-steel technologies,

flexible production and instantaneous international finance. China's post-Mao rulers, who understand that economic growth at the end of the twentieth century requires tying in with a wealth-expanding world market, do not have an easy task in winning supporters from those who still give their primary loyalty to policies premised on treating that market world as an ultimate enemy. A reforming Leninist state ignites an explosive contradiction because new policies destroy the old legitimation. To confront the delegitimation of Leninist anti-imperialism and accept the imperative of economic reform, including the loss of a hate-filled nationalism that was the emotional glue of the polity, causes a deep crisis. In addition, in a Leninist reform era, the artificial "socialist" culture loses its binding force and the command economy's place-specific, stratified mode of distribution and politically-created economic disparities inevitably foster political, tax and budget backlashes that give more power to regions, thereby reinforcing loyalties to historically regional, newly "nationalized" and primary mobilizing identities. New populist nationalisms are waiting to explode and bury the old discredited unity previously premised on anti-imperialist nationalism. Unexpectedly for the Leninist reformers, saving the nation actually threatens the nation, at least in its Leninist guise.

The Soviet Union has already broken down. The disintegration of Yugoslavia seems imminent. Observers in the 1990s look at Ethiopia, Czechoslovakia and other reform Leninist or post-Leninist systems and wonder whether all such overly centralized, rigidified states will break apart. The consequences of re-imagined communalist loyalties are earth-shaking. Do the forces undercutting the old Leninist nationalisms in ossified systems elsewhere reflect general patterns providing clues to China's future? My conclusion is that similar forces are weakening the glue of patriotic appeals of outmoded Leninists in Beijing. The evidence for such a conclusion is overwhelming.

The explosion of the new nationalisms challenges a major social science generalization of the twentieth century, that patriotic attachment to an anti-imperialist center was the strongest political binding force of the era. As the twentieth century comes to its end, this old truism is no longer so obviously true. Since World War Two until the 1990s, only Bangladesh succeeded as a breakaway state.

But suddenly a host of new nations are joining the United Nations. All over the planet, that long established nationalistic ideological priority seems undermined from without and from below, by both the growing weight of transnational forces, best reflected in the surging emergence of a single European economic community, and by subversion from below, from state-shattering regional, ethnic, lingual, tribal, religious and other sub-national primary loyalties and identities. Penetrated and subverted, losing loyalty, effectiveness and relevance, the old centralized nation-state identity is no longer the end-all and be-all of political loyalty. The most vulnerable of the centralized Leninist states embodies command economies whose narrow and selfish rule seems to serve but one community to the exclusion of most of the people.

A de-nationalizing transformation has been most manifest in Leninist states because the political logic and social dynamics of Leninist states most completely create legitimate and weighty forces capable of defeating the delegitimated and weakened anti-imperialist central governmental power. This was most obvious in the 1980s in the Soviet Union and in Yugoslavia. But similar forces have been undermining top-down centralized unity in numerous Leninist states, from Nicaragua to Angola and from Ethiopia to Czechoslovakia. The East German state has disappeared from the family of nations. North Korea, suddenly forced to seek an independent seat in the United Nations, a policy it previously damned as an imperialist plot, is likewise in trouble. The generality of this challenge to neo-Stalinist centralized state power and Leninist national centers leads to the question: what are the implications for Beijing (and Taipei and Hong Kong), that is, can the People's Republic of China (PRC) survive? Has the glue of its nationalism so desiccated that Leninists in Beijing will soon cease to be able to hold things together? Students of Leninist China recall those who earlier speculated that Mao's Cultural Revolution or the death of Mao might bring division or civil war, and recall shrewd observers who analyzed China's various field armies and found institutionalized regional forces. But these strong regional tendencies surfaced before the legitimacy of Leninist anti-imperialist nationalism had been exposed as self-serving hypocrisy. Today such regional forces might win out because the defense of the old consensus of super-patriotism, of a strong national center as required to keep

out imperialists, no longer exists. In an era where citizens see the sons of the Leninist elders selling Chinese weapons abroad and pocketing the profits, while China's international debt grows, the old Leninist regime can no longer attract patriotic loyalty. A real national family must be re-imagined and created to oppose the selfish family of traitorous rulers.

National disintegration for China is an extraordinary question, until recently, almost an unthinkable one. Whatever else analysts of the PRC differed on, it was beyond question that Mao's revolution was patriotic, an extreme embodiment of Chinese nationalism. Wherever a person stood on socialism or Stalinism or some other controversialism, almost no one challenged the consensus that Mao's armed struggle unified the nation, threw out the foreigners, and built a strong and powerful centralized state that won dignity and standing for China and Chinese in the world arena. This Leninist anti-imperialist litany remained the core legitimation of neo-Stalinist ruling groups in post-Mao China. The litany now sends like a dirge, a death knell for scoundrels and an elegy for martyrs who gave their lives in vain to a betrayed nationalism.

But do new nationalist movements elsewhere really suggest that the ground is also moving from under the feet of post-Mao powerholders and that the rug can be pulled out from the seemingly oh-so-stable power position of China's elders backed by a conservative military and politically loyal security forces? Do developments in other Leninist systems that challenge both an outmoded centralized state and anti-imperialist nationalism foreshadow forthcoming events in China? Or is China a uniquely nationalistic success? This study finds that the logic of Leninist disintegration is already at work in China too.

However, what one hears in Beijing, and not only from apologists for the regime, is that China is unique, almost a law unto itself. Of course, everything and everyone is unique somewhat. Still it is worth examining this portentous matter of the general weakening of and discrediting of archaic Leninist nationalisms because all Leninist systems suffer the same debilitating diseases that turn fearsome tyranny into sclerotic rigidities that auger weakness, decline and death for the anti-imperialist Leninist center.

New national explosions in Eastern Europe are, nonetheless, dismissed in China as irrelevant because those European regimes

are said to reflect long illegitimate Soviet conquests rather than indigenous, popular struggles. The great democratic revolutions of 1989 are dismissed as liberation struggles of the old anti-colonial variety, merely ending foreign control from Moscow. Leninism in China, in contrast, it is claimed, resulted from a true national struggle, turning Chinese into death-defying loyalists of the Leninist system.

Nativistic elders in China are contemptuous of any close comparison of China to other places. China is China, a world to itself. As for the Soviet Union, its disintegration is treated as a Gorbachev (and Yeltsin) made disaster. It supposedly only represents bad leadership, a rather shallow and whole unpersuasive explanatory argument for a profound global phenomenon. Blaming leaders is whistling in the dark to scare away ghosts. China's elders, however, insist that what is changing the political features of East Europe, Africa, Latin America and the Soviet Union should be treated as a mere anomaly, a triviality of no relevance to Leninist-Stalinist China. Reports of the elders seeking out the latest news from the Soviet Union belie this tale of serene Chinese rulers not at all concerned with extraordinary ruptures throughout the world of Leninist states. Surely when so many Leninist states have similar experiences, one must examine China too to learn if it too is experiencing the discrediting of Leninist nationalism.

Do Leninist developments elsewhere indeed embody mere idiosyncratic historical peculiarities such that state-centralized, anti-imperialist Chinese nationalism is uniquely deep and lasting? Or must the tendencies at work in so many and diverse Leninist states reshape the future of China, too? Is the old nationalism, the core legitimation of Beijing's anti-imperialist dictatorship, crumbling? Given the way Chinese talk about the military's role in the Cultural Revolution, in the 1979 unpopular invasion of Vietnam, and in the June 1989 massacre, that Great Wall of Steel is turning from a treasured protector to a rusted, outmoded relic. The wall may be crumbling. In the silence, one hears the thunder, as Lu Xun wrote. The props of the old order could fall and produce a collapse. Those within Zhongnanhai may one day be found in a rubble of traitors if a re-experienced nation, a redefined people, creates a new, ultimate loyalty. This paper finds that such a mind-boggling change is already underway in China.

After all, it is patently untrue that China and East Europe have had fundamentally different experiences of nationalism. Yugoslavia's Leninist state was not a Soviet imposition. It embodied a powerful indigenous nationalism, one that Professor Chalmers Johnson some 30 years ago in his book on peasant nationalism and communist power correctly identified as similar to China's nationalism, a view quite publicly expressed by China's post-Mao leaders during Tito's 1977 visit to China. East Europe's turn against Leninist dictators in Yugoslavia, Albania, Romania, East Germany and Czechoslovakia is not a matter of overthrowing unpatriotic puppets of Moscow. All these regimes insisted on Leninist anti-imperialism as their core legitimation. A transvaluation of values is underway throughout the Leninist world that has redefined Leninism as the ugly enemy of the peoples.

With democratic emergences responding to Leninist delegitimation even in Leninist regimes established by prolonged wars of liberation in Nicaragua, Albania, Mozambique and Angola, there is little historical basis for locating the delegitimation of the old anti-imperialist nationalism or the democratic urge only in Leninist states with a Soviet master or a European cultural heritage, either. Democracy is positively attractive, Leninism repulsive. What is happening is also transforming Mongolia and what was once the U.S.S.R. Despite the will of Leninist elders to remain a law and world unto themselves, China is inescapably part of this larger Leninist experience. The panicky search of China's elders for new legitimations, one day in Confucianism, another day in Maoism, and yet another day in traditional Han chauvinism, suggests that even the Leninist rulers know that a general process of Leninist delegitimation is occurring, that it is at work in China, too, and that only a new national legitimation can hold the polity together.

The old problematique of Leninist nationalism was defined by the defenders of the system in terms of a fundamentalist militarized patriotism that imagined permanent threats to the nation requiring sacrifice to obtain missiles, atomic weapons and a large, powerful military, to require sacrifice to maintain chauvinist values and build high and great walls to keep out supposedly subversive ideas and forms. Leninism was, at its core, the war communism descended from Robespierre's French Revolution Jacobin vigilante terror state with its state-imposed maximum price on grain. The

dynamics of such a system eventually alienated a people, as Robespierre learned. Leninist developments and transcendences elsewhere reveal that corrupt privileged power and an inordinately rigid, expensive and wasteful economic system eventually lead citizens to re-imagine nationalism such that standing up in the world requires negating this old-style anti-imperialist nationalism, re-imagined as something that keeps the Chinese people down, an *ersatz* public realm and a real private realm that relegates the people to groveling, fawning and lying to incompetent, corrupt parasites who live off the hard work of a suffering people.

This revolutionary transformation of national, political consciousness has occurred in the democratizing parts of the post-Leninist world, although sections of the old system, especially the institutions of coercive control and the regions of privileged nationalities, try to hang on to the legitimations of the old Leninist nationalism in order to maintain their privileged, permanent, arbitrary and unaccountable power. The poisoned potent alternative to democratization, however, does not seem to be a stagnant Leninism, but rather a reborn chauvinism of the dominant ethnic group. Not enough analytic attention has been given to Deng Xiaoping's increasing invocation of the symbols of traditional Han chauvinism.

Whatever the ultimate and unpredictable outcome of new nationalist legitimation, this transvaluation of values away from Leninism in China has already gone a far way. How many or few still believe in the one quotation from Mao that even anti-Maoists used to take as an absolute truth, that the Chinese people had stood up? The contrasting, actual, popular experience that negates the ubiquitous claim of Maoist anti-imperialist nationalism was expressed by novelist Zhang Jie, in "The Ark." She wrote,

It has started all over again this life of pleading and begging. Whether you wanted to get a divorce, an apartment to live in or a suitable job, it always involved grovelling at the feet of others in the hopes that they would show pity and understanding. What was so extraordinary about such requests? They were not asking for more than their fair share. When would Liu Quan at last know what it felt like to stand

up proud and straight? She was not yet old, but she felt as if her back had been bent for a whole long lifetime.¹

Or, as Chai Ling said to a Taiwan reporter in June 1989, “we must raise our heads, straighten our backs – and fight to the end. We must keep our backs straight ... or China will not move forward.” In fact, Mao’s flawed and failed Leninist nationalism has kept the people down and has prevented the Chinese people from standing up. That is the spreading, popular perception. Chinese people know they do not stand high in the world, whether measured in Nobel Prizes, per capita spending on education, human rights, or material standards of living. They even joke about it.

American President George Bush asks God: “When will the United States become a heaven on Earth?” “Oh, maybe twenty years or so.” Bush breaks out in tears, saying, “But by then I won’t be president anymore! Someone else will get all the credit!” After Bush leaves, Gorbachev shows up. “When will the standard of living in the Soviet Union equal that of the United States?” he queries. “Give it about fifty years, I guess.” Gorbachev pounds his breast and weeps: “In fifty years I’ll be dead! It’s a day I’ll never see!” The leader of mainland China then makes his appearance. “If China follows the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, when will it surpass capitalist nations?” This time God is the one who bursts out crying: “Not even I will live to see that day!”²

Embarrassment, not pride, is ever more the inheritance of Leninism to China’s people. Leninist anti-imperialism has been exposed as a laughing stock.

In 1958 Mao promised to overtake Britain and America. A generation later China’s Communist Party (CP) leadership is surrendering even on the possibility of catching up with Taiwan or South Korea. This failed ruling group is increasingly a humiliation. Few educated individuals read its publications any more. Educated people are aware that even the nation of India graduates more

people from college than does China. That India, previously the fallback nation used by anti-imperialist Chinese to prove that China was doing well, that even India is known, at the end of the twentieth century, to be doing better than China, despite India’s extraordinary handicap of inherited ethnic and religious divisiveness, reflects nationalist delegitimation in China. That Chinese more and more know India’s achievements and state them is, I believe, a very good indicator of the delegitimation of the old Leninist nationalism.

Hidden forces within Leninist structural dynamics inevitably undermine the supposedly unassailable walls of Stalinist power. Quietly eroding such institutionalized control in Leninist states till it produced the amazing transformation of 1989 was disillusionment, the loss of illusions. Hannah Arendt was the one and only political analyst who early on comprehended the fragility of Leninist power. She noted, in the wake of Hungary’s great 1956 revolution, that once the spell of ideology or charisma is snapped, once the young experience their parents as forced to act immorally, surviving by complicitousness with a hypocritical regime of selfish and cruel rulers, then these once invincible rulers can be re-experienced as alien to the nation because interested only in their private successes. What presented itself as a socialist state is suddenly revealed as a private monopoly serving the personal interests of selfish rulers. In that newly illuminated world, Arendt concluded, to live in truth and dignity could require linking up with historically rooted traditions and identities, presuppositional givens of a better, more decent community.³ The world is revisioned. In Russia (not the Soviet Union), Lenin and the other Bolshevik founders were reconceived as non-Russian. Leninism was suddenly a betrayal of Russia.

Can one similarly imagine Chinese dismissing their Leninist state as alien? The fact is that, more and more, they already do. A Chinese denigrating Deng Xiaoping notes that he is a Hakka, notes that Marx is non-Chinese, notes that Mao was turned into a backward person by his long stay in China’s most backward northern hinterland regions. This is frequent gossip in China. De-nationalizing Leninism is a transformation, in fact, already underway in Chinese consciousness. Leninism is re-experienced as an emanation of what is backward and foreign to any better future for the

people. What is still an open question is when, where and how the political consequences will appear.

This redefinition of the content of Chinese national and personal identity was palpable in spring 1989 in the extraordinary experience of people suddenly helping strangers. They felt a new bond of living in truth as a community. They continued, after June 1989, to support each other against the discredited northern, backward, state center, and, in so doing, began to give life to a new, humane society to replace Leninist tyranny.

The delegitimation crisis can be delayed by war (Stalin's Great Patriotic War kept Soviet Russia legitimate) or a real threat (the USA for Fidel Castro in Cuba) or charismatic loyalty to an older generation of revolutionary nationalists, but delaying the forces of delegitimation cannot forever deny them. More and more, anti-imperialist nationalism seems a nakedly self-serving discourse of a privileged and parasitic ruling group.

Stalin defined the Leninist nation as "an historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." But since there was no universally spoken language in China, Leninists interpreted Lenin to mean that "those who live together learn the language spoken by the most people."⁴ In practice, China's Leninist rulers took the language of the capital and a sanitized version of its culture as advanced and socialist, something to impose on other regions and cultures, treated as old, backward and traditional. Yet daily gossip reports how even Leninist leaders, from Chen Yun to Chen Yi went to great lengths to stay tied to their very different regional cultures.

Combining Lewis Henry Morgan's racist anthropology that privileges modern Aryans with Marx's telos that treats all non-proletarians as backward and bound to die out, China's Leninist state imposed all the oppressive colonialist categories of orientalism. The rulers define groups by an anthropology of the advanced and the backward, with most industrialized areas tied to the Leninist ruler's capital treated as the most advanced. In other regions, communities had to make themselves over in the image of an artificial "socialist" culture or be treated as primitive and reactionary. What is demanded is deculturation. However much affectively bonded groups conform on the surface to the artificial

socialist culture; inwardly and very deeply, resistance is real. Once state terror and charismatic rule evaporate, outrage against the experientially oppressive and deculturating Leninist center and ultimate loyalty to the local community of the long suffering begins to reshape identity, community and the polity.

Not shaping their development, ruled by outsiders, forced to destroy their basic identities, peoples in diverse regions resist, finding allies in those who are truly at one with them. Natives of Hainan island tell each other that none of their counties were run by their people until 1982-83; Shanghai-ese remark that they are still controlled by non-Shanghai-ese; Guangdong people comment on their 1980s good luck in their native governor. Quotidian events and daily gossip shape a new identity, an oppositional community. The shared enemy of all communities is the old anti-imperialist center. Loyalty to that murderous nation would require treason against one's own kind.

Away from the capital and exploited by the privileged regions, communities have long noted which areas and people got the least investment, paid the most taxes, suffered the worst schools. In the Leninist era, local rulers, the agents of the center, congregate in regional capitals and make themselves the major beneficiaries – experienced as monopolistic beneficiaries – of the center's distribution of goods through privileged networks to the center's people. China's west not only got least, but what it got was concentrated in the provincial capitals. The Leninist war against the market locked peripheralized groups into their places, thus intensifying regional contradictions and the oppositional identities and communities. Politico-economic geography and cultural identity became reinforcing hierarchies. Treated crudely and condescendingly, over time, the regional communities grow more conscious of the hypocrisy of the regime's socialist legitimization of fairness through administrative rationing, noting how housing – or most any other prized or scarce good – goes first to the outsiders from the Leninist center and their sycophants, noting how the notion of rationing or waiting in line as fair distribution is in fact a fraud masking intolerable injustice. To believe that Leninist socialism is just would require one to abandon one's own community bonds of belonging.

When reforms begin, a backlash inevitably occurs as these long

repressed anti-Leninist valuations become potent political forces. Regionally, local people are experienced as a previously martyred community. They have come to believe that only they can care for their own. This experience is intensified by its invisibility to the people in previously privileged regions. There, seeing themselves and their culture also as victims of the Leninist-Stalinist system that also repressed parts of their cherished culture, privileged people cannot hear, let alone respond to, the cry of distant victims, whom they actually experience as pampered beneficiaries of subsidized largesse. Thus, the powerful forces creating new identities and communities are allowed to, even forced to, fester and keep growing. The social dynamite of revolution awaits only an igniting spark and favorable political winds.

When reforms begin, the previously excluded surge into privileged redoubts. Each region tries to maximize its gains against the center. The reformed center finds budget funds slipping through its hands. A conflict grows over budget and taxes. A war between center and regions intensifies and barriers are erected in a struggle in which the center seems increasingly foreign even to its local sufferers as it seems to stifle the reforms to which it claims to be committed. While the center loses power and legitimacy, local communities become stronger, not only politically and economically, but as recipients of passionate loyalty and hope. The strongly centralized Leninist state threatens to fall apart on regional and communalist fissures. Whether the outcome is civil war, or autonomy, or federalism, or new self-determinations, or whether something else wins out, a political struggle is unleashed in which regional communities contest the legitimacy of a Leninist center experienced as a privileged, parasitic and incompetent plunderer. This struggle has long been underway in China.

Although the Chinese government talks about the contradiction between coast and inland provinces, although it worries openly about nationalist tendencies in its central Asian region, the division that manifestly threatens to split the anti-imperialist nation is between north and south, categories with a geographical core but a stronger essence in terms of national identity, a war between the nation of the old anti-imperialism and the nation of a new nationalism capable of succeeding and winning in the world market. Daily stories appear in the media and in gossip about the

north this or the south that. They are the defining categories of a split in national loyalty. What compels interest is the content given to north and south.

As embodied at the founding of the People's Republic in the notion of sending officials to the south (*nan xia ganbu*), Leninist nationalism embodied the idea that Chinese from the loess soil of the north, as in Mao's guerrilla headquarters in Yan'an in *Shanbei*, defeated the imperialists and conquered the south. Historiography treated the victory of anti-imperialist nationalism as the fulfillment of a 4,000 year history of a northern-based people. But in late twentieth century consciousness, Chinese talk of how, as with Taiping Tianguo, the revolution began in the south and then went north. So it did with the Northern Expedition and again with the Long March. Conscious Chinese patriots who can take the lead are now re-experienced as southerners. A transvaluation of values and spaces valorizes the south and stigmatizes the north. This profound transformation occurs with no public propaganda on its behalf. It is a reformation at the level of values that, the great German philosopher Hegel noted, always foreshadows a genuine revolution.

Since former Party Secretary Hu Yaobang was experienced as on the progressive side, he was decoded as a southerner. He was not seen as a Hakka, although he was Hakka, as was the much-praised former Guangdong Governor. People saw friends and enemies in south-north terms. "Hu Yaobang has been staring at his head, which is characteristic of a Southern Chinese," noted a hagiographer.⁵ In the south, northern official power is experienced as holding China back, and backward.

The national identity of an agrarian, northern-originating Han people that defined itself by a patriotic struggle first against the Manchus and then against foreign imperialists is a superficial cultural construction, not an emanation from society's history. The regional forces that actually helped undermine Manchu rule and the regional forces that fostered decades of twentieth century warlordism have long and deep roots. In the old empire held together by an emperor, by shared religious orientations, and by a national administration with a common written language, these regional differences did not overly conflict with the minimalist imperatives of territorial unity. But these regional cultures and

communities tied to different political economies have been greatly strengthened by Leninist dynamics and by new anti-Leninist identities and regional systems. What if *Subei* and *Jiangnan* will not unite when the anti-imperialist center falls? What if the northeast or the west or minority regions emotionally close to kith and kin on the other side of a border do not wish to be at one with the new south anymore than with the old north? As with the Soviet Union, so with the PRC, pundits erred when they saw a Leninist state as a happy and full solution to a nationalities problem. The common wisdom at the height of Mao Zedong's power made it impossible even to imagine China shaped and divided by raw, powerful, traditional and primordial distinctions. One highly regarded pundit erroneously found,

All that remains of the old society collapsed under the Communist blows Now that the bulldozer of Marxism has passed over ancient China, the international type of Marxist-Leninist society is springing up The Chinese is in the course of becoming ... a man who has placed an ocean between himself and the past.⁶

The past, however, was always there, just beneath the surface, indeed perhaps growing much stronger than it had been in any recent past. The past that can reappear then is not uniquely a south-defined nation. Peasantries are numerous, diverse and regional communities. They may be loyal to *Jiangnan* not the south, for example. All the divisions of China's multiple communities could come to the fore once the anti-imperialist Leninist state disintegrates. Fear is spreading. Parents seek to get their children out of the way of an impending disaster. Beijing woos support by claiming that its rule is all that stands between the Chinese people and chaos. All sorts of new combinations or confederations or divisions may be possible. But it is in the south that people do not fear positive association with Hong Kong or Taiwan or the rest of the dynamic world economy. Whether or not a southern-based notion of nation wins out, the Leninist elders in the north are discredited.

An outraged southerner dismisses a Deng Xiaoping he finds useless as "a dirty little Hakka," or comments on how "Deng has come to Hunan to speak that language with the other Hakka."

Were Deng a favorite, the southerner might have embraced him as a southerner, as he embraces the martyred Hu Yaobang. Although officialdom categorizes Hakka as Han, southerners see Hakka as not their people. In fact, given how Hakka were forced historically to live in high hills, the source of many of Mao's guerrilla recruits and a disproportionate number of CP leaders have been Hakka. There is already an incipient tendency toward dismissing China's CP as not even [Han] Chinese, as Russian patriots in the late twentieth century dismiss Bolshevik leaders as not even Russian.

Because the north-south division is part of ordinary consciousness, in the far northern city of Shenyang during the 1989 democracy movement, it was noted that "The leader, Ji Futang ... had originally come ... from [the southern city of] Wuhan and the south China component was said to be strong. One student at the Northeast Engineering Institute claimed that there was no student from the Northeast on the students' steering committee or thinktanks. Some student leaders dismissed people from the Northeast as being 'asleep'."⁷

The new consciousness is so deep and presuppositional as not to be upset by more facts about the large number of dedicated democrats in the north. Despite the Beijing democracy movement, it was the south that was experienced as China's progressive part. The new national consciousness is a major force in giving meaning to what and where are China's future. The 1989 democracy movement in Beijing did not valorize the north.

To the extent that southern consciousness permeates the north, the category is not geographical. Northerners who see the south as a land of opportunity and use any means to get to Shenzhen or Canton, experienced as the center of China's future, have accepted the new national identity. A change in consciousness and political loyalty *need not* splinter the territorial state, however much it divides people and shapes political conflicts that *could* splinter the territorial state. While this essay can delineate the forces at work, only actual political combat will decide among possible outcomes.

The other side of this north-south coin is the conservative, chauvinistic north conceiving the south as alien and immoral. Southerners, in a tale recounted by Bette Bao Lord, are categorized as enemies of war communism, not on the side of the military or of anti-capitalism: "Shyster, the lot of them – buying cheap down

south and selling dear up north things nobody with good sense needed anyway. The bums ought to be turned up and spruced up and signed up. In no time the army would turn them into real men"⁸ Southerners are not true Chinese in the eyes of anti-reform northerners.

Northerners tend to be treated as, and feel as, bumpkins or foreigners in the south. One commented to me that visiting Canton seemed similar to visiting Hanoi. Beijing is seen in the south as the heir of lazy corrupt, useless emperors who long lived off the wealth and productivity of the south.

An opponent of that regime in the north, Fang Lizhi, seeing it as reactionary, predicted in July 1990, as reported on August 29 in *The Free China Journal*, that "[a]s soon as Deng Xiaoping dies, central control will fall, weaken, and local forces will rise. Guangdong, Fujian and Shanghai will ask for more democracy." "The strong autonomous tendency among local authorities ... can put an end to the oligarchy in China." Democratic forces are equated with the south. In like manner, economist Liu Guoguang predicted that if an "institutionalized, legislated track" of national democracy does not arrest the political bite in this "[r]egionalism, total chaos and the back and forth central versus local power struggle" will deepen.⁹ With Peng Zhen's reactionary party apparatus running Beijing, with state ministries there loyal to the reactionary groups of Bo Yibo and Chen Yun, reformers once at the center have literally abandoned the north to seek jobs in the more progressive south. Optimists are those who believe that all the efforts of the conservative north to control from the top, as through wasteful state enterprises, will eventually be subverted by local, even rural, mainly southern, internationally competitive enterprises that by 1991 earned almost 40% of China's foreign exchange. Reformers threw their energies into those "southern" efforts and left the outmoded northern economy to drag its region down.

One increasingly finds Chinese re-imaging history so the progressive thrust comes from the south, perhaps as Huang Taopo from Hainan brought north cotton growing, spinning and weaving. Southerner Sun Yat-sen [Zhongshan] can be seen as embodying the promises of a republic. After Sun's death, the descendants of Sun's northern adversary, who would turn the clock back, Yuan Shikai, was followed to power by the reactionary northern war-

lords (*Beiyang pai*) until Zhejiang's patriotic Jiang Jieshi marched north to overthrow those northern warlords. Given the transvaluation of values, Jiang is no longer a source of evil. The southern Jiang is popularly depicted as a shrewd fellow who knew how to get money from the Americans, a trick the northerners cannot perform.

The north-south split pits two Chinese national histories, an imperial and frightened northern one, and a resurgent and popularly rooted southern one. But at the end of the twentieth century, it is the past of the south as a promise for China's future that seems far more attractive to the people of China. As the twentieth century American writer William Faulkner noted, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Guangdong at the outset of the 1990s embraced its past and its promise in holding the First International Guangdong Opera Festival bringing groups from Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and elsewhere. Guangdong also held its first international seminar on the relationship between Guangdong and the cultures of Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Overseas Chinese. A historical museum in Canton tells the story of a southern people. The United Kingdom has recognized this growing regional southern force with its links to numerous dynamic Chinese cultural and economic regions off the mainland of China by sending a political officer to Hong Kong to follow these overlapping southern trends and places. The US - China Business Council has held seminars to study these ties and forces of a new region and a new identity.

Chinese scholars too recognize the implications of the prospering south. To them, there are extreme imbalances in China in terms of local development. For example, Hainan, Guangdong, Fujian and other coastal open cities differ considerably from other areas in their economy, politics, cultures and religions. Yet, the former enjoy relatively more independence than other areas. Such an imbalance has a tendency to grow. The existence of such independent areas and interest groups should gradually weaken the highly centralized, vertically controlled political system.

The north, the Leninist regime, will demand more equality for all, meaning more subsidies from the south and the coastal provinces for itself and supposedly the rest of China, but more likely strategic regional allies. Or, if that is impossible, the regime will

slowdown reform and openness. The consequence, predicts Columbia University Professor Andrew Nathan, will be that coastal "enterprises are likely to ignore the orders coming from far-away Beijing for an economic slowdown and to continue their rapid growth. If the days of reform from above are finished, the days of reform from below may be just beginning."¹⁰ Below implies south. Above, in Chinese popular consciousness, implies north.

While the particular categories of the new nationalism reflect Chinese particularities, the forces at work are not uniquely Chinese. The hierarchical, status-based, frozen Leninist system of groups and categories only seems legitimate in a modern sense when a war situation and charismatic ruler can create a nation of shared sacrifice, a temporary and artificial community of ultimate meaning. But an atmosphere of permanent combat is not easy to sustain, especially if a new legitimation insists on delivery of the material blessings of the modern world. When war fear gives way to the promise of plenty, reform becomes a moment most dangerous for the rulers. As social historian Reinhard Bendix noted, based on the insight of Tocqueville,

"[I]n the crisis of transition, the masters retained their privileges but no longer performed their obligations ..." in consequence, the servants considered that the traditional claims of their states had been abrogated unilaterally and/or that they were now entitled to an equality of rights with all other social ranks since in his capacity as a citizen every man was the equal of every other.¹¹

Hence, normal political analysis explains why the south seeks the right to control its destiny when the north is palpably incapable of delivering the goods. It would seem that China's old Leninist nationalism is caught on the horns of an insoluble dilemma. To dynamize the economy requires openness and labor mobility. But that undercuts the northern control of a state-run economy that provides subsidized grain to urban dwellers, the military and the state-party apparatuses. If northern conservatives energize the economy, they unleash a mobility that can undermine their Leninist system. But if northern conservatives maintain the inefficient system, then they make the economy stagnant and force

Chinese to think about reappropriating their rights. Since the mid- or late-1980s, the conservative leadership has zigged and zagged between unpalatable alternatives, but tending increasingly in the direction of a shortrun political safety that could eventually unleash a demand by the alienated nation for a right to determine its own destiny.

With China's healthy forces seen as southerners, individuals such as Peng Dehuai and Zhou Enlai (imagined as informed by his *Jiangnan* ties) are described as southerners trying to check an irrational and backward-looking Mao Zedong (whose consciousness is seen as coming from the backward, authoritarian and traditional northern peasantry of *Shanbei*).¹² Mao is envisioned as in the line of closed-minded emperors who hurt China by persecuting the educated, burning the books and shutting the country off from the common human inheritance of science, technology and economic progress. Mao is equated with Ming emperors who eroded China's dynamic involvement with the world economy and world science.

Hated moments in the PRC history, such as the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai, are imagined as know-nothing impositions by crude and ignorant northerners such as Wong Hungwen, seen as a *Subei* person. (Actually he was not, although his wife was from *Subei*.) In the cinema, the cultural split pits the northern Yan'an school against the southern Shanghai school. Even the nationalism of the north is discredited as a disaster for the nation, with Mao's notion of progressive northern Boxers (*Yi He Tuan*) rejected and the nativistic, superstitious Boxers judged incapable of accomplishing any constructive, progressive purpose. Such a transvaluation of values has redefined daily discourse.

Post-Mao enterprising peasants are imagined as innovative and southern. The peasantry, as a category, is contested by south and north in order to define one's project as nationalistic, with each political tendency imagining a different peasantry. What neither side sees is that the numerous, regional peasant communities and cultures may not share either northern or southern projection. As with other post-Leninist states, once the transition speeds up, it may splinter in many unexpected ways.

Reformers imagine peasants in terms of their market-oriented politico-economic preoccupations. They support hardworking, in-

dustrious and mobile villagers. In contrast, the opponents of reform, embodied in the "roots" school of writers, embrace a virile and reactionary chauvinist notion of a peasantry, one that excludes the successful rural entrepreneurs in factories that export and earn foreign exchange, that condemns rural consumers who buy in the city, that mocks hardworking rural construction teams that make possible speedy and cheap urban progress. Roots writers, virtually proto-fascist nativists, are contemptuous of liberal tendencies and "capitalist"-like reforms. Money, market, city, individualism, freedom, and foreign are portrayed as alienating and dehumanizing immoralities that would subvert some romantically imagined warm village world of caring, obedient, patriarchal peasants who suffer much and ask little so a tough, pure, simple and militarized nation survives. A good woman, as a traditional peasant, sacrifices for the patriarchal nation. A roots writer can find the essence of the essentialized peasantry in a tale of a woman who sold "herself for a bit of grain to feed her starving husband. She stripped off her cotton tunic in exchange for two sesame seed rolls and stuffed them into his hands as she left. It was then that I began to really know our suffering motherland and our people."¹³

The struggle over national identity in China, over who is the martyred people, reaches from high culture to popular gossip. It is a pervasive reality. A key question is whether the policies and strategies of the rulers in the capital city in the north, abandoning Leninism and trying to make maximum use of extreme chauvinist appeals, will backfire and make the rulers instead seem traitors to the nation.

The north is ruled by people who rely on Japan, a nation that could be seen by nationalists as the enemy of China's people, since Japan perpetrated the Nanjing massacre (and denies it), since Japanese cheated China at the Baogang Steel Plant in Shanghai, and since Japan refused, through the 1980s, to make modern technology available or to invest large sums in high tech industries in China. Although southerner Hu Yaobang was scapegoated by the northern elders for closeness to the Japanese, the northern Li Peng government seems forced to rely on Japan because Japan is silent about human rights abuses and is generous with cash aid to rulers in Beijing, as long as rich business deals ensue. Dalian almost seemed a Japanese semi-colony by 1991. In the 1990s, will the

northeast come to seem an old-fashioned Japanese sphere of influence? Will dependence on Japanese loans and goodwill make it seem as if the purportedly patriotic rulers in the north are actually traitors to the original anti-imperialist revolution? Will even northern people turn on them, redefining them as enemies to the Chinese nation?

In the analysis of the Li Peng government, Japan modernized in the nineteenth century Meiji era through state socialism. Hence, in emulating Japan, China supposedly can stick to its socialist principles of protecting the people from a cruel polarization that Chinese supposedly would suffer if market forces were allowed to dictate China's economic development. In contrast to this imagined Japanese state socialism, market-oriented and democratic America, Europe and Eastern Europe dwell on human rights and therefore would intervene in Chinese domestic politics, supposedly wounding China's sovereign dignity. In contrast, the new, enlightened patriots note that China is a signatory to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They see the northern regime arbitrarily disregarding human rights, wounding the dignity of the Chinese people and lowering China's standing in the world community. They see the northern Leninists as isolating China from the world, leaving the Chinese people only with friends like Myanmar and North Korea. The northern regime seems ridiculous.

Whereas the out-of-touch old guard in the north mocks Taiwan as a weak economy requiring the succor of the socialist state, in contrast, in the south where investment money comes from Chinese from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand, people know they can benefit from openness to the world economy that actually expands ties among Chinese. The south grows, with Chinese from elsewhere, at an extraordinary rate, because it knows how to do business in the world economy. The north is slow, stagnant and scared. The north, dominated by money-losing, resource-inefficient and non-competitive state industries is forced to plunder the south, to beg and borrow from Japan and other non-national resources, and to turn the printing press to churn out more money for wasteful subsidies that threaten an explosive and destructive inflation. Given the hidden forces transforming popular consciousness, the failure of the northern

regime raises the prospect of a politico-economic crisis being explained by Chinese in terms of the spreading transvaluation of values, explained as a legitimating cause of a very different national identity that privileges the experience of the anti-Leninist southern patriots. For any hopeful future for Chinese, the northern rulers are, at best, an irrelevancy.

This does not mean that China must split north from south around the Yangtze, but that this reconceptualized nation is a challenge to the old and outmoded anti-imperialist nationalism that previously legitimated chauvinist rulers in Beijing who appealed to Leninist anti-imperialism. That Leninist system is no longer seen as protecting the nation. The Leninist order is a self-wounding economic system that brings decreased productivity, while increasing heavy industrial output that serves no human purpose, much of it left to rot, rust and run to ruin in heavily guarded warehouses lest the scarce goods be stolen or sold on the market and put to productive use by non-state entrepreneurs. Those ever-present warehouses, more impregnable than high security prisons, are symbols of a national potential now locked away to die. Chinese know where those warehouses are. They symbolize the wasted opportunity that rule by the north has come to mean. To save China, its people seek a new nationalism. They find it by identifying with the dynamism of the south.

All over China, in the interstices of the outmoded center's ever-more inefficient command economy, local, small industry grows to meet public demand and satisfy needs. The optimists in China entering the 1990s are those who believe that, in the not too distant future, the old guard will die off, the political orientation will change, and this economically dynamic force outside of the control of the north, an economic force that is especially strong in the south, will then be channelled successfully as part of a renewed and rapidly developing Chinese nation.

The north-south division is not experienced as a creation of contemporary imagination or imperatives. It seems as real and as vivid as the clear cultural distinction that Chinese make between people from *Jiangnan* and *Subei*. It seems like natural historical continuity. The resurgent Chinese Ming dynasty, based in the south, found the north corrupted over the centuries by non-Chinese rule, and therefore requiring a government decree that all

Chinese return to the dress of the Tang Dynasty and that Mongol customs and surnames be discontinued. When the Ming capital was moved north to help sinicize virtually alien northern territory, it required grain from the south via the Grand Canal to survive. While the north remained economically dependent, became culturally conservative and embodied bureaucratic politics, the south, in contrast, in popular history, monetized its economy, expanded its trade and increased its urban component. South China benefitted greatly from silver carried to it through international trade. The rulers in the north never figured out how to reform to compete in that world economy and instead increased the tax burden on productive people.

The northern Manchu conquest and the subsequent northern Mao era continued this politically bureaucratic, culturally conservative and economically unreformed northern rule. The last gasp of Ming patriots came in southern and coastal regions. The northern, foreign Manchus then imposed super-orthodox Confucian values, while, in the south, popular sects and openness to the world economy imagined a more popular, progressive alternative to traditional Manchu-Confucian rule. The Li Peng government trying to hold power in the 1990s by promoting Confucianism and opposing the heterodox, and fearing the south's successful opening to the world economy deepens a historical fissure that has split China for a millennia, creating a stark division between north and south in which the rule of the obscurantist north can only widen the gap that leaves the Chinese ever further behind the rapidly developing world.

Archeological discoveries are sensitizing Chinese to the fact that the Han people are not Mao's monolithic descendants of the yellow soil of the loess regions of North China and that civilization in China has multiple sources originating in diverse parts of a multicultural land. The northern peasant, the base of Mao's anti-imperialist revolution, is no longer privileged as China's true patriot and savior in pre-conscious nationalist categorization. Archeologists in China announce that it is untrue that Chinese are merely the heirs of the people of the northern plain around the Yellow River.

Traditional China can be conceived as a multinational empire of military conquest. As European settlers in the Americas or

Australia experienced themselves as on virgin territory, in like manner, traditional court-centered Chinese notions treated peasant land or the land of the next region as virgin territory. Traditionally tillers and outsiders are lower than people (*min*). They are seen, as Mao pictured them, as simple and natural, a blank sheet of paper. Hence the rich cultures which in fact distinguish, say, a *minnan* peasant culture from a *huabei* peasant culture have long been virtually invisible in a twentieth century imagining of Chinese historical development as a unity. In the nineteenth century, these rich cultural traditions began to be seen by the educated Chinese elite as a hodgepodge of local ties, unscientific religions and useless superstitions that had to be destroyed if China were to modernize. A Han nation was invented. Imaging all Chinese as united in overthrowing the foreign Manchu monarchy, would-be patriots ignored the power and diversity of regional cultural communities. In Hebei, where I have done research, the revolution's restoration of order permitted the local community to invest in Hebei opera which Mao's Cultural Revolution subsequently treated as a feudal fossil that should be destroyed. The Leninist order was the enemy of passionately experienced community bonds and regional cultures.

Superficially the old Khomeini-like anti-imperialist chauvinism seems a potent source of popular support for the post-Mao rulers. This manipulated passion resembles East Germany's pride in its nation-building, a wall that seemed unassailable until the day the wall fell. Then the new national legitimation of raising consumer standards of living revealed the old Leninist ideology as almost without adherents, except for a small strata of intellectuals and a part of the old statist hierarchy. Because the imperatives of survival in a Leninist order force people to be complicitous, and because people try to give themselves good conscience, they embrace the most popular part of Leninist ideology, in China, patriotism. Therefore, even honest informants are unaware of how rapidly and completely they can change when that artificial and corrupting Leninist system disintegrates. As soon as complicity is no longer required, most people simply stop bowing to the fraudulent gods of Leninist chauvinism.

To be sure, the regime endlessly reproduces ritual proof of its eternal nature to impress the complicitous, and foreign observers.

To doubt this reality, while the regime produces its rituals of manufacturing support, may invite ridicule. But the history of post-Leninism globally is a warning against the danger of overestimating the staying power of what is manifest but superficial.

Yet that does not mean that the alternative to post-Mao chauvinism must win. Consider the Czarist autocracy of the mid-nineteenth century. It was a useless anachronism. There was no positive reason for it to survive. And yet its life was prolonged into the second decade of the twentieth century. When it finally disappeared virtually without a trace in the blink of an eye during the First World War, a 60-year-old analysis of the emptiness of the Czarist body politic was proved right. And yet it had lived for 60 years too long, at least. It would not self-destruct. Something had to deliver the final, fatal blow.

So it is with post-Mao chauvinistic Leninism and the northern regime. It too just might survive on inertia, complicity, fear of worse, chauvinism, the provision of guaranteed minimums and the like. It need not disappear tomorrow. Politics will be decisive. One cannot predict the varying force of what shapes politics: leadership, alliances, timing, strategy, coalition-building, appeals, etc., or how they will combine. Still why would one wager on no final blow burying the northern corpse that is today's delegitimated Chinese nationalism? Either one believes that the same forces that undercut Leninist states elsewhere are at work in China or one embraces China as a peculiar entity. This essay has offered reasons for betting on the universal tendencies delegitimizing the old, northern, Leninist nationalism.

To quote the theologian and historian Paul Tillich, "The present is a consequence of the past but not at all an anticipation of the future." In China, the Leninist past virtually guarantees that the regime in the north will fail. But the fate and future of the nation continues to be contested. Even who and what the nation is is contested. But such struggles reflect similar explosive or implosive potentialities in post-Leninist states elsewhere that should lead one to anticipate some Chinese future premised on a new nationalism, or nationalisms.

Notes

1. Zhang Jie, "The Ark," in *Love Must Not Be Forgotten* (Beijing: Panda Book, 1986), p. 159.
2. Cited in *Inside China Mainland*, September 1991, translated from *Fandou Monthly* (Hong Kong), July 1991, p. 62.
3. Arendt's essay on the 1956 Hungarian revolution as a paradigm for the democratization of Leninist tyrannies appears as a concluding appendix to her classic study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Her theory's implications for democratization in China are spelled out in Edward Friedman, "Was Mao Tse-tung A Revolutionary?" *Issues and Studies* Vol. 26, No. 8 (August 1990), pp. 38-42.
4. Chen Zhanqiang and Chen Jianmin, "Sociolinguistic research based on Chinese reality," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* Vol. 81 (1990), p. 31.
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9. "Zai zhili zhendun jichu shang jin yibu shenhua gaige de sikao," (Thoughts on Further Deepening Reform on the Basis of Retrenchment) *Caimao Jingji (Finance and Trade Economics)*, No. 99 (March 11, 1990), pp. 3-10.
10. Andrew Nathan, *China's Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 120.
11. Reinhard Bendix, "The Lower Classes and the 'Democratic Revolution'," *Industrial Relations* Vol. 1 (October 1961), pp. 91-116.
12. For example, 1980s military histories of the late 1940s civil war written by Li Ruqing praised Jiang Jieshi's strategy, while

criticizing Mao's strategy as "feudal." (June Teufel Dreyer, "The Role of the PLA in the Post-Tiananmen Period," *Asian Outlook* Vol. 26, No. 5 (July-August 1991), p. 14.

13. Helen Siu, ed., *Furrows* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 307.