

# 行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫成果報告

## 民主民族與後現代 Democratic Nationhood and Postmodernity

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### 一、中文摘要

趙剛在《新的民族主義，還是舊的？》(Zhao 1996)一文中標舉「民主民族」的觀念，在批判他所謂「舊的」民族主義之餘提出了正面的積極主張。這在台灣文化研究領域裡一片反「國族」主義聲浪的情況下是較少見的嘗試，含有與本土實況對話的意義。但是何謂民主民族？民主民族怎樣解決民族主義所不能解決，或避免民族主義所不能避免的問題？趙剛在這篇論文裡並沒有實質性的說明。其實這篇論文的立場偏重現代式的普遍理性，雖然在最後標舉了「激進民主」的非現代觀念，對其中可能隱藏的矛盾並沒有較深入的交代。本計畫想從後現代思想的角度來檢討這個問題，希望釐清民主與民族這兩種觀念裡現代與後現代觀念的複雜關係，為「民主民族」的界定提供一個途徑，也為台灣文化研究提供一個落實於本土實況的觀點。

**關鍵詞：**民族主義、根本民主、後現代、文化認同

### Abstract

In "New Nationalism, or Old?" (1996), Zhao Gang proposes the "democratic nation" as a way to counter the "old" nationalism claimed by him to be dominant in contemporary Taiwan and criticized as reactionary. This should be welcomed as an attempt to go beyond the overwhelmingly anti-nationalist

(or "post-national") discourse of cultural criticism in Taiwan and to dialogically come to terms with the local situation. Nevertheless, Zhao's sketchy account has not been very helpful in explaining what a "democratic nation" is and how such a conception of nationhood is going to solve problems unsolved by nationalism or defuse traps that are said to have plagued nationalism, old and new. In fact, Zhao's article is squarely positioned within a modernist insistence on universal rationality (explicitly pitted against "postmodern difference"). Although the final appeal is to "radical democracy," contradictions are necessarily present in such an uneasy amalgamation of modernity and postmodernity. The present project proposes to rethink the whole problematic through further engagement with postmodernity, hopefully to sort out the convoluted interrelatedness between modernity and postmodernity faced by any attempt to articulate an analysis of nationhood with some conception of democratic politics.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Radical Democracy, Postmodernity, Cultural Identification

### 二、緣由與目的

By now we are all familiar with the thesis that the "decentering of the subject" is a major theme of postmodernity. As early as 1963, the emergence of a "new aesthetic" was already attracting attention: "Man is no longer to be the measure of all things, the

center of the universe. He has been measured and found to be an undistinguished bit of matter different in no essential way from bacteria, stones, and trees" (Meyer 1963: 186). Aesthetically, this new position allows artists to return to "the native and primitive enjoyment of sensations and things for their own sakes" (175). With the rise of poststructuralism, the aesthetically defined (and therefore depoliticized) decentering of the earlier phase deepens into a general incredulity toward "metanarratives," an insistent demand that all man-made fictions should also be subjected to decentering. National and nationalist sentiments, being closely tied to (invented) symbolic constructions and the will to exclusionary state power, are favorite targets of such debunking. As a recent study of Bosnia expresses it, "inscribing the boundaries that make the installation of the nationalist imaginary possible requires the expulsion from the resultant 'domestic' space of all that comes to be regarded as alien, foreign, and dangerous. The nationalist imaginary thus demands a violent relationship with the other" (Campbell 1998: 13). The problem with his "politics of difference" is that, even when politicized by appeals to the resistance of the "other," it still lacks an account of the particularity of the "other" which would endow it with some sort of political agency but which would also mean that the subject is real and no longer decentered. That is why Zhao Gang, after acknowledging the usefulness of "postmodern sensitivities" in the fight against modernist rationality and nationalism, immediately qualifies such "aesthetic liberation on the individual level" by complementary values from universalist "critical discourses" (1996: 63f).

What is usually missed is, of course, the fact that debates on such issues have also led to a "return of the subject" in the late 1980s, by which the subject is given back a degree of micropolitical agency and charged with the waging of guerrilla warfare against grand narratives (for a discussion see Bertens 1995: 100f). By the 1990s, Ernesto Laclau is

referring to "the death of the death of the subject" (1996: 21); Hal Foster is suggesting a "return of the real" in full recognition of the depth of the subject as lack (1995; see also Liao 1997); and Taussig is reminding us of the need to investigate what lies behind postmodern "constructivism": "If life is constructed, how come it appears so immutable? How come culture appears so natural? If things coarse and subtle are constructed, then surely they can be reconstrued as well? To adopt Hegel, the beginnings of knowledge were made to pass for actual knowing" (1993: xvi). Our task is, therefore, to theorize the parallel dimension of the real in search of *postmodern* grounds which will recalibrate modernist appeals to universality to allow the particular and the universal to really engage with each other. Without an account of how this engagement is going to come about, the "democratic nation" will never be accessible to theory as a real possibility.

### 三、結果與討論

I will not go into a detailed discussion of Zhao's critique of nationalism. But one revealing instance of discursive blindness may be cited from this critique to illustrate the importance of further clarifying the meaning of "radical democracy." This is the place where Zhao charges his "nationalist" opponent of misreading Benedict Anderson's *Imaginary Communities*, but himself misrepresents Anderson in more than one way. For example, while Anderson repeatedly distances himself from those who insist on the "near-pathological character of nationalism," and feels compelled to remind us that "nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love" (1991: 141; see also 6, 161), Zhao represents him as another zealous denouncer of nationalism. In fact, Anderson is given the choice of either denouncing or celebrating "right-wing nationalism," with no room left for any non-monolithic conceptions of the issues (see Zhao 1996: 30). When Anderson refers to the "armed conflicts of 1978-79 in Indochina" in his preface to the

second edition of the book, and recalls being “haunted by the prospect of further full-scale war *between the socialist states*,” which is later on specifically linked to the twin “inventions” of revolution and nationalism in “revolutionary-socialist states” (1991: xi, 156; italics added), Zhao abbreviates the words and generalizes the context to arrive at the thesis which suits his purpose: that nationalism, being “organically bound to the modern state,” is “always associated with war and genocide” (1996: 30). Most importantly, while Anderson carefully begins with the nuanced statement that “If nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past” (1991: 11), Zhao ignores an entire chapter on “cultural roots” and claims that Anderson’s conception of nationality as a “cultural artefact” amounts to the claim that it is an invented “historical novelty” (1996: 29).

Such discursive reduction is, of course, familiar. The very insistence on seeing the emergence of nationalism as an historical accident presupposes, ironically, a conception of “homogeneous empty time” which denies the “simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present” (Anderson 1991: 24) and is part and parcel of the rationalizing modernist historicism Zhao is presumably critiquing.. This is a crucial point. If it means anything that the association of modernist temporality with “homogeneous empty time” is taken from Walter Benjamin, then any attempt to go beyond this abstract temporality, this cornerstone of the modern nation-state, has to take into account that, for Benjamin, the fissure in such temporality is to be sought, not in further abstraction into the pure play of differences or the rationality of historical explanation, but by a conception of the instantaneous now as pregnant with temporality, for which “novelty and eternity” would not be distinguished, for time is subject here to “a form of remembrance (*Eingedenken*) which would not be merely backward-looking, but would contain within

itself the seeds of a new futurity” (Osborne 1995: 142)

The implications for the “democratic nation” is obvious. In Laclau and Mouffe’s formulation, radical democracy presupposes “the recognition of the specificity the antagonisms constituted on the basis of different subject positions” (1985: 166). This autonomy, moreover, has to be justified by a “plurality of subjects” which, defying “the category of ‘subject’ as a unified and unifying essence” (181), are engaged in “continuous negotiations that give rise to new hybrid identities and temporary blocs” (Smith 1998: 32). Such coexistence of autonomy and alterity would not be possible without a temporality that allows incremental changes of the subject by acknowledging both repetition (continuity with the past) and novelty (developing into the future). By demonizing or essentializing any form of nationalism, one betrays this principle of hybrid subject positions and fails to honor past variations (which Anderson takes so much pains to elaborate) and to allow future possibilities. Again, assigning all “cultural artefacts” to pure ideological fabrication precludes an important element of radical democracy, the ability to “think our own insertion into historicity, the fact that we are constructed as subjects through a series of already existing discourses, and that it is through this tradition which forms us that the world is given to us and all political action made possible” (Mouffe 1988: 39).

Otto Bauer is also aware of the double temporality of the nation. He defines the nation as a community split between two conflicting processes:

Every natural community is governed by the tendency of progressive differentiation. . . . As in ancient times the Celts, Teutons and Slavs arose from a common ancestral stock, so the Germanic people necessarily split up into a number of independent peoples, and these too were immediately subject to the process of differentiation, in turn dividing over the centuries into various branches completely different from one another. His-

tory, however, shows that this process of differentiation was countered by an opposite process of unification. Thus the Germans of today are a nation in a quite different sense from in the Middle Ages. . . . The unification of the tribes into a people cannot be conceived in terms of the natural facts of heredity, which can only explain the division of one people into segments, and never the creation of a nation from different tribes; this unification can only be conceived in terms of the effective influences of common culture. (1996: 42f)

Bauer's peculiar insight lies in recognizing a sphere of heredity, and hence not merely of heredity but of "nature" in general, which can admittedly only be grasped through symbolic mediation but which still constitutes a separate temporality, a substrate of cultural significance where the persistent presence of the past, through sheer separateness, would open up "homogeneous empty time" for the random intrusions of *Eingedenken*.

Bowman argues that xenophobic nationalist fervor works by tapping into psychic formations installed by the infant's earliest entry into the symbolic, the violence of which is mirrored by, and provides fuel for, the violent scenarios with which the "antagonism of the nation's other" is represented (1997: 141). The implication of this psychoanalytic account is, of course, that such pathological nationalism can be "cured" only by recognizing the split between the symbolic/imaginary and the real, and giving the latter a proper place, not by repressing or disavowing it but by allowing it to return to the subject in sublimated form, not as the unproblematic continuation of (fantasized) reality but as the destabilizing underside of the present, as alterity from the past. Precisely such "supplementarity" in the (national) subject is pointed to both by the coexistence of autonomy and alterity in Laclau and Mouffe's conception of radical democracy and by the double temporality proposed by Bauer's theory of the nation.

Such sublimation is a form of mimeticism: the pitfalls of nationalism is to be

avoided not by bringing about the death of the unitary subject, but by copying that death (the "death of the death of the subject") and introducing alterity into the mimetic subject, allowing the unitary subject to cancel itself in a sort of pluralist universalization, of post-modern transcendence. In later works Laclau moves beyond the mere pluralization of subject positions and argues for a transformed subject: "If democracy is possible, it is because the universal has no necessary body and no necessary content; different groups, instead, compete between themselves to temporarily give to their particularisms a function of universal representation" (Laclau 1996: 35; see also Laclau and Zac 1994). And yet, as Taussig asks, "Could it be that with disembodiment, presence expands?" (1997: 3) The magic of the state, indeed, is most powerful when "sign and substance, the state and the people" fuse (40). But mimesis being always imperfect (disembodied) copying, such fusion cannot be complete without becoming self-delusion. At the same time, it would be even more delusional to imagine that such magic will simply vanish into thin air when the progress of rationality sweeps away the dark myths of the "unitary subject." Walter Benjamin's appeal to *nachträglichkeit* enables us to distinguish immanence as conformance from the existent from transfiguration as pursuit of the true (Kaufmann 1997). My proposal is that, by retaining the possibility of a transcending, though not unitary, subject, one makes possible an analytic knowledge of this *nachträglichkeit*, this double temporality. The possibility of catastrophe, of course, always accompanies such disembodied subjectivity, but it is precisely the point of Benjamin's Messianism that, where there is possible catastrophe, there is also hope.

#### 四、計畫成果自評

本計畫最初的問題是從趙剛的論文引發出來的，其中最主要的重點就是：民主民族如何調和普世性與特殊性？計畫進行

過程檢討了部份民族主義、文化研究、心理分析理論，最後的成果簡單說就是把上述的問題進一步轉移到一個比較具體的層次上：主體如何面對本身雙重時間的分裂？這樣的轉移有助於我們進一步就文化意義來討論歷史、時間、自我意識等因素，釐清民主民族的觀念架構。雖然這樣的複雜問題不是任何學理的討論所能完全解決，但是本計畫的成果至少能幫助我們回到最簡單的社會單位—個體意識或無意識—的層次，從而把焦點轉移到具有物質性而易於檢證的文化活動（藝術、文學、意識形態、符號建構等等）而不僅止於由上而下的，一再重覆各種規訓化、理想化的政治規劃。

本計畫的結論是：我們不可以受限於現代與後現代的對立，而是應該在現代集中主體與後現代分散主體分離而不對立的基點上重建一個後現代化的超越主體。這樣的超越主體在非理性的真實層保留特殊性，而在公共化的符號層向普世性開放，尊重主體的執戀（Ernst Bloch 所謂「尊嚴」所在），引用其衝擊體制的力量而同時透過理性與非理性的抽離安頓來維持符號統制的流動性，避免個體執戀壓倒理性，走向社會的野蠻化。

為避免流於空談，本計畫的研究伴隨具體文學作品的解讀而進行，在完整報告中將包括宋澤萊長篇小說《血色蝙蝠降臨的城市》與朱天心中篇小說 古都 的分析。此報告將在美國中國比較文學學會 1999 年年會中發表。

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