"Chain Reaction:" The Politics of *Ressentiment* in China and Taiwan

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I. Introduction

Few observers of politics in Taiwan can fail to notice a prevailing sentiment that has dominated Taiwanese politics for some time—namely, *ressentiment*.[204] Not only do people of different political opinions or partisan preferences resent each other, but Taiwanese society as a whole is also quite resentful to the overall international environments in general—and to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in particular—that have been rather unfriendly, sometimes hostile, to Taiwan as a collective community. For those who live in Taiwan, it is almost redundant here to provide illustrations of such a sentiment, as one can easily find flooding examples of resentful discourses in public spheres such as mainstream newspapers and popular TV talk shows. While pro-Independence nation-builders tend to found their basis on *ressentiment* by stirring up repugnant feelings against China, their opponents often turn this *ressentiment* inward by casting outright hatred and disgusts at their political enemies.

Ressentiment, moreover, is not merely seen on one side of the Taiwan Strait. Across the Strait, we have also been witnessing a rising tide of popular, nationalistic sentiments in China that has been characterized as "new nationalism." It is considered "new" in that "old" nationalism was a response to Western imperialisms that threatened China's survival, whereas "new" nationalism takes place at a time when China is rising on the world stage as a strong power that, in turn, makes others feel somehow "threatened." The "new nationalism" in China, regardless of different versions, has a few common features: xenophobia and hatred towards foreigners, anti-West (especially anti-American) exclusionism, self-pity and self-righteousness, and the denial of existing international order. If we are to use one word to capture them all, then *ressentiment* can be said to be the best catchword.

My juxtaposition of the two bitter sentiments is by no means arbitrary, nor is their coeval occurrence a mere coincidence. As a matter of fact, the two nationalisms that *ressentiment* has fostered on both sides have been closely connected in origin and highly intertwined throughout their developments. If Chinese nationalism in the 1990s can be characterized as "new," then the same can be said true to the Taiwanese side. Both are "new" in the sense that they rise from the post-Cold War era and have a few

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[204] Following a Nietzschean-Schelerian tradition, I use the French word *ressentiment* rather than its English counterpart "resentment" because the former bears richer connotations that will greatly help to deepen our understandings of such kind of emotion. I shall discuss this in a later section.

features distinctive from their precursors, but they, too, are not so "new" in that they both have deep historical roots that can be traced back to at least the 19th century.

The co-emergence of these two "new" nationalisms poses an ironic contrast to the once prevailing globalization discourses. From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, scholars and commentators alike were swarming to predict "the decline of the nation-state" or the end of nations and nationalism due to the impacts of globalization. Nowadays, few sober analysts would believe that the haunting phantom of nation-state and nationalism would leave us alone in the foreseeable future. However, in the two cases of Taiwan and China, a puzzle remains: where do such strong feelings of *ressentiment* come from, especially in the so-called postmodern, post-colonial and global age which celebrates multiculturalism, hybridity and diversity? Put another way, why should people become so anguish about their nations at a time when different cultural values are asserted and when equal rights of different peoples and nations are supposedly respected rather than trashed?

The aim of this paper is to analyze and compare the bitter *ressentiment* commonly observed in these two nationalisms in terms of their causes and results. As Zheng Yongnian has perceptively pointed out, just as Taiwanese nationalism is rooted in "Taiwanese grief," so nationalism in China has its "Chinese grief" (Zheng 2001: 35). It remains unclear to us, however, where and how such negative feelings – be they called "grief" or "*ressentiment*" – come from, and to which direction they might lead. Elsewhere I have provided an analysis of *ressentiment* in Taiwan (Wang 2004c); in this paper, I shall take a step further to take into account *ressentiment* in *both* China and Taiwan. Drawing on theoretical insights from the much-neglected works of German thinker Max Scheler, I shall show how *ressentiment* on both sides takes shape in an interlocking situation that I characterize as "chain reaction."

The above being said, it should be made clear from the outset that my aim is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of the two nationalisms in question. No one could deny that, however "new" they are, nationalisms in contemporary Taiwan and China are successive rather than eruptive products of their precursors in the preceding eras. To investigate their continuations from different historical legacies is certainly important for us to understand their genealogies, but I shall leave this task to other researchers, as we have seen no shortage of such kind of scholarship in the past few years. Moreover, "internal politics" in the domestic domain is also important for our understanding of the development of two nationalisms, and again, we have seen many excellent studies in this regard in recent years. Here I shall simply confine my scope of analysis to *ressentiment* with regard to its international/global dimension, which has contributed greatly to the formation of these nationalisms but has gone mostly unnoticed in previous studies.

In the following, I shall first outline Max Scheler's phenomenological and sociological analysis of *ressentiment*. Next, I shall move on to the Chinese and the Taiwanese case, respectively, to show how *ressentiment* in these two places has been

taking shape and what their consequences might be. In the concluding section, I shall provide a preliminary critique of the modern international order from a Schelerian perspective.

II. *Ressentiment* and Value Shifts: A Nietzschean-Schelerian Analysis

Speaking of *ressentiment* nowadays, one tends to associate it with Friedrich Nietzsche, who introduces this concept to the philosophical world in his *Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche 1967). However, it is another original German thinker, Max Scheler, who equips the concept with full analytical power. To be sure, Scheler's interests in *ressentiment* is deeply embedded in his unique phenomenological philosophy that prioritizes emotion over reason, and his analysis of *ressentiment* lies in the core of his critique of modernity. While this is not a place to provide a comprehensive discussion of Scheler's broad-ranging – sometimes ambiguous and perplexing – theory, I shall briefly discuss his critique of modernity by drawing on his insightful but much neglected essay on *ressentiment*.[205]

Following Nietzsche, Scheler finds at the core of modern society the problem of values. As with Nietzsche, Scheler regards *ressentiment* as the major cause of this value problem, but unlike Nietzsche, who opens up the important theme without probing deeper, Scheler takes a step further to investigate *ressentiment* from a phenomenological and sociological perspective, and he reaches a rather different conclusion that refutes Nietzsche's. To Nietzsche, the advance of the modern age signifies the decadence of the human kind, and he attributes such a decadence to the Christian morality, the morality of herds or slaves, of which the root can be traced to *ressentiment* of the weak. Scheler agrees with Nietzsche only to the extent that *ressentiment* is the psychological locomotive of value shifts observed in modern society, but he criticizes Nietzsche for conflating humanitarian love with Christian love, and he takes a step further to demonstrate how *ressentiment* has led to value shifts that societies in our modern age are suffering from.

To begin with, Scheler takes a phenomenological approach to the study of *ressentiment*. To this end, Scheler intentionally uses the French word *ressentiment*, for he thinks there are two elements in "the natural meaning of the French word" to which we can find no equivalent in German. On the one hand, *ressentiment* is the "repeated experiencing and reliving of a particular emotional response reaction against someone else." The "continual reliving of the emotion sinks it more deeply into the center of the personality, but concomitantly removes it from the person's zone of action and expression." On the other, the French word *ressentiment* signifies the negative quality of this particular kind of emotion in that it contains a movement of hostility.

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[205] There have been rising interests in Scheler's theory in both Western and Chinese scholarships since the past decade, as one can find more and more references to Scheler's works. See, for instance, Frings (1996, 2001), Liu Xiaofeng (1994).

Ressentiment in itself, Scheler adds, "does not contain a specific hostile intention, but it nourishes any number of such intentions." (Scheler 1998:25).
Scheler gives a rather succinct summary of what he thinks about *ressentiment*:

> *Ressentiment* is a self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite causes and consequences. It is a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such, are normal components of human nature. Their repression leads to the constant tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgments. The emotions and affects primarily concerned are revenge, hatred, malice, envy, the impulse to detract, and spite. (p. 29)

Scheler identifies a number of sources of *ressentiment*: thirst for revenge, envy, jealousy and the competitive urge, but all these feelings will give rise to *ressentiment* only when they are accompanied by a sense of impotence. Those who are able to retaliate immediately will not have *ressentiment*, because their thirsts for revenge are quenched once the retaliation has been made. Only in those who are incapable of revenge, or who have to postpone their revenge due to situational constraints, will *ressentiment* take root. The same can be said true to envy, jealousy and the competitive urge. The mere existence of envy, jealousy and the competitive urge will not give rise to *ressentiment*; only when they are accompanied by a sense of impotence – incapable of obtaining the desired goods or of achieving the desired goals– will *ressentiment* occur.

After establishing the phenomenon he aims to investigate, Scheler then brings forth an important sociological proposition of *ressentiment*: the "psychological dynamite will spread with the discrepancy between the political, constitutional, or traditional status of a group and its factual power. It is the difference between these two factors which is decisive, not one of them alone." (1998:33). To be more specific, the two factors that Scheler talks about here include *theoretical comparability*, on the one hand, and the *discrepancy between the theoretical (expected) and factual (actualized)*, on the other. Let me elaborate on this point at further length.

In a caste society in which hierarchies are strictly obeyed, there is little chance for *ressentiment* to emerge. People of the lower class may envy those of the higher one, but they do not resent them in that the former realize that their status are incomparable and that there is little chance to change it. In a so-called "egalitarian" society, in contrast, *ressentiment* has a better chance to ferment because people are comparable to one another. Thus, Scheler comments:

> "*Ressentiment* must therefore be strongest in a society like ours, where approximately equal rights (political and otherwise) or formal social equality, publicly recognized, go hand in hand with wide factual

> differences in power, property, and education. While each has the "right" to compare himself with everyone else, he cannot do so in fact. Quite independently of the characters and experiences of individuals, a potent charge of *ressentiment* is here accumulated by the very *structure of society*" (1998:33, italics original).[206]

The consequence of *ressentiment* is self-poisoning that eventually leads to what Scheler calls "value-shift," "transvaluation," or "the falsification of the value tablets." (p.57) Such can happen, not only to individuals, but also to a collective. It can become a collective mentality of a certain social group, and its consequence can be overwhelming. To Scheler, the central problem of modern society lies precisely in a series of value shifts that are resultant from *ressentiment* of the rising bourgeoisie. Among these value shifts he singles out to criticize include modern humanitarian love, the value of things self-learned or self-acquired, the subjectivization of values, and the elevation of the value of utility above the value of life. While this is certainly not the place to provide a full elaboration of Scheler's critique of modern society, we shall learn more from his insights after we examine the *ressentiment* in China and Taiwan from the perspective just outlined above.

III. Nationalisms in Taiwan and China: *Ressentiment* Chained

Ressentiment can become a fuel of nationalism of a specific nation, which Liah Greenfeld (1992) has nicely argued in her comparative study of nationalism in five countries. Greenfeld shows how *ressentiment* among the intellectuals in Germany and Russia has led to the transvaluation that made people view their nations as topping all other nations. Although Greenfeld is quite right to bring *ressentiment* into the analysis of nationalism, however, her analysis has gone neither deep nor broad enough. When Nietzsche and Scheler speak of transvaluation, they presume a "correct" value system that has got somehow distorted or reversed. If viewing one's nation as topping other nations is a kind of transvaluation, does it imply that in a non-transvalued situation, these nations are indeed no better than, if not inferior to, other nations? In fact, nationalism of any nation has more or less emphasized the unique or even "superior" nature of their nation, and therefore German or Russian nationalism is of no exception. The real problem, it seems to me, lies in nationalism per se. In other words, nationalism in itself is a manifestation of transvaluation in the modern era.[207] I shall

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[206] The gendered usage of the term in this and other passages from Scheler's original text simply reflects the general socio-cultural background of his time. One needs not to make an exaggerating reading of it.

[207] Some may contend that nationalism has different kinds, and thus we have "good" and "bad" versions of nationalism. Ellie Kedourie (1960), for instance, is one of the typical exponents of such a view. Partha Chatterjee (1986) and Rogers Brubaker (1998) have both provided profound critiques of such a view from different perspective. This involves an overall evaluation of nationalism in general

return to this point towards the end of this essay. For the moment, let us examine the situations in China and Taiwan respectively.

The *ressentiment* in Taiwan and China both have deep historical roots and have accumulated for a long time. Their genealogies can be traced back to the nineteenth century when Western imperialism was dominating the world. Although there have been disagreements as to whether China is indeed a "nation" or whether "nation" is completely novel to Chinese history,[208] it remains quite clear to us that Chinese nationalism in its modern sense rose as a response to the threats from Western imperialism. Its basic tone is to save the nation from the crisis of survival (*jiuwang tucun*) by making the nation "rich and strong" (*fuqiang*). The new nationalism in the late 20th century succeeds this basic tone, but it is situated in a rather different context. As Zheng Yongnian (1999) has succinctly put it, "old nationalism," as a response to Western invasions, aimed to "catch up" with Western powers. In contrast, "new nationalism" takes place during the time when China is rising as a power on the global stage, and its main appeal is to pursue an "equal status" with other powers.

There has been a debate concerning whether the "new Chinese nationalism" is a result of mobilization from top down by the state, or it is a spontaneous response from Chinese people to the "insults" from the outside. The debate needs not concern us here, as it deserves further analysis in a separate study. Inasmuch as our investigation is concerned, suffice it to say that these two kinds of nationalisms –the official and the popular –have a common root in their genesis, and it will not be too wide off the mark to say that they are, by and large, mutually enhancing.[209]

The official expression of nationalism can be found in abundant words and deeds by Chinese officials, especially when it comes to the sensitive "Taiwan issue," which is deeply embedded in the entangled Sino-American– or rather, China-US-Japan –relations. For the popular version, we can take three famous, albeit controversial, bestsellers as example: *China Can Say No* [Zhonguo keyi shuobu] (Song et al. 1996), *Wars without Limits* [Chao xian zhan] (Qiao and Wang 2000), and *China's Way in the Shadow of Globalization* [Quanqiuhua yinyingxia di zhongguo zhi lu] (Fang et al. 1999). In all of these, we find very typical manifestations of *ressentiment*: on the one hand, there is an explicit impulse to revenge; on the other, we see a repression or deferment of the revenge, due either to impotence or to the

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that deserves a separate discussion. I shall not get into details here.

[208] For a taste of such discussions, one can refer to the edited volume of Unger (1996), particularly those pieces by James Townsend, Prsenjit Duara and Lucian W. Pye.

[209] There are certainly different views on this issue. Zhao Dingxin (2001), for instance, insists that the new nationalism in the 1990s, particularly that observed during the Belgrade bombing incident, is spontaneously organized by the people and is even threatening the legitimacy of the state. Some liberal intellectuals have also criticized the official version of nationalism by distinguishing their ideal of cultural nationalism from state's political one. However, insofar as they all share a common goal of achieving/defending "Chineseness," there exists complicity to a certain extent. With regard to the "Taiwan problem," their constant, staunch agreement at unification is almost unanimous.

impossibility to overcome the constraints in political reality. The issues thus involved vary widely, ranging from China's foreign policy, the application for hosting Olympic Games, the Belgrade bombing incident, to the "Taiwan question." Since our concern in this paper is mainly Taiwan-China relations, I shall confine my discussion to those related to the Taiwan issue.

In addition to the missile crisis in 1996, when the PRC exercised its military muscle to intimidate the Taiwanese state and voters, Chinese officials, along with a remarkable number of scholars and commentators in the mass media, have made numerous hostile, sometimes rather vicious comments on Taiwan's national politics. Among them, two scenarios best illustrate the *ressentiment*. The first one is the Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's vicious comments before Taiwan's presidential election in 2000. In an attempt to prevent the pro-Independence candidate from being elected, Zhu warned, with a vile visage, in a press conference: "Whoever is doing Taiwan Independence will surely come to no good end." When asked whether China would conduct military exercises as it did four years ago, Zhu replied, again, in a rather vicious manner: "There' re two days remaining; you just wait and see."

The second example is the insulting remarks by Sha Zukang, China's ambassador based in Geneva, on Taiwan's attempt to join the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2004. Taiwan made persistent efforts to join the WHA for an observant status, but the attempt was denied for the eighth consecutive time due to the objection from the PRC. When questioned by Taiwanese reporters whether the health of 2.3 million people in Taiwan mattered, Sha raised his voice to reproach the reporters: "Who cares about you folks?"

Both Zhu's and Sha's emotional remarks, along with their offensive gestures and arrogant airs, were broadcast time and again on TV in Taiwan, and both the incidents received wide coverage and fervent discussions in the media. There were widespread repugnant feelings against the PRC during these incidents. Some commentators remarked half-jokingly that the PRC was "the best campaigners for the DPP and Taiwan Independence," as it pushes people away from China and more towards a separated Taiwan. It indeed was, and I shall discuss this in a later section. For the moment, let us simply raise the question: where does such a strong feeling of hostility, even viciousness, come from? Some said that Zhu was merely "acting" before the camera, but Sha's spontaneous response was apparently not. And even if Zhu was indeed "acting," then whom is he acting for? What kind of psychological need was such an acting intended to fulfill, and what was the mentality that motivated such vicious expressions? Taiwanese people are supposedly their "compatriots" who they should try every means to win over, not the enemy they want to fight against, but why do Chinese officials, time and again, treat their Taiwanese "fellowmen" in such a hostile manner?

Some commentators in Taiwan use "hegemonic" or "upper-nation" mentality (*baquan xintai* or *shangguo xintai*) to explain this; some others attribute it to pure stubbornness

of Chinese officials. However, such a superficial explanation fails to capture the nature of Chinese "new nationalism," as hegemonic mentality or stubbornness is merely symptomatic of other causes that go deeper into psychological level and historical legacies. As a matter of fact, if we apply Scheler's method of phenomenological reduction, we will find that the outrageous statements by Zhu and Sha, among numerous others, are an outright expression of *ressentiment*. It is at this point that we find Scheler's analysis of *ressentiment* particularly relevant and illuminating.

Zhu and Sha's hostile statements and body language, which reflects a "wait-and-see" mentality, are very typical of *ressentiment* described by Scheler (cf. Scheler 1998:29-30). They are full of emotional drives to revenge but also accompanied by a repression of the vengeance, which, in turn, has a deep historical root. For one thing, Taiwan symbolizes the national trauma that China has been suffering since the 19th century. Taiwan was ceded to Japan after the defeat in the Sino-Japanese war, in which China was unexpectedly beaten up by their younger brother. China wishes that they had not lost Taiwan, or that they could have "taken it back" as soon as possible. As many Chinese officials and commentators have made it clear, after the "returning" of Hong Kong and Macau, the next on the nationalistic agenda of unification is Taiwan. The issue is further entangled with the PRC's relations with the US. To many Chinese, Taiwan has remained separate from China since 1949 owing primarily to the intervention of the US. Had there no protection from the US, it is believed that the PRC could have already "liberated" Taiwan.

Thus, the *ressentiment* towards the West is now deflected or transferred towards Taiwan. The logic basically follows two lines. First, those who support Taiwan Independence are getting in the way of China's national interests. They are naturally considered as China's national enemies. Second, an independent Taiwan can only be made possible under the precondition that there are interferences from other (Western) powers, particularly the US. In other words, Taiwan Independence is considered allied with Western imperialism, which, in turn, is the target that Chinese nationalism vows to combat.

It has to be noted that, although xenophobia and hatred, exclusionist discourses or practices did emerge from time to time in modern China, the two sociological preconditions of *ressentiment* did not really exist in the past. For one thing, the condition of "comparability" does not quite hold. There has been a widespread sentiment of inferiority. The main task of (old) nationalism, therefore, was to "catch up" with other advanced nations, best maximized in Mao's slogan "*chaoying ganmei*" (to surpass England and to catch up with America) during the Great Leap Forward period. The "open-door" policy by Deng Xiaoping explicitly admitted that China had to learn from the West, that China was yet to "catch up" with other nations after three decades of socialist experiments.

Thus the condition of comparability did not really come to existence until the 1990s

when China was catching up at an astonishing pace –astonishing not only to outsiders but also to Chinese people themselves. Even if such comparability had existed before the 1990s, it appears only sporadic and doubtable. But the situation has greatly changed since the 1990s when such comparability appeared to become sustainable and widely perceived. With its conspicuous economic boom and success, China regains its confidence in the global economic arena. The two sociological conditions of *ressentiment* – theoretical comparability and actual discrepancies emerge and become clear to the general public, who are now more and more open to outside information due to the spread of mass media and the internet.[210] The so-called "big nation mentality" (*daguo xintai*) has (re)emerged in the general public (Zheng 2001). After more than a century's efforts, the sleeping dragon finally wakes up, standing up with dignity as equals with other nations. The first goal of nationalism –making the nation rich (*fuguo*) – can be said to have been attained to a certain extent. It is at this conjuncture –when China decides to end its isolation by integrating itself into the world system, on the one hand, and when China is becoming a rising power with conspicuous economic booms, on the other – that people come to realize that the current international order is not in accordance with their national interests (Zheng 1999). *Ressentiment* arises as a result.

Nationalism in China, as with those in other cases, has different agents, and we tend to see different, sometimes conflicting interpretations of the same nationalism. It is therefore necessary to specify which kind of nationalism I am dealing with here. At the risk of oversimplifying it, I distinguish between three kinds of Chinese nationalism for the purpose of convenience: the official version of the state, the "popular" version of such bestsellers as "China Can Say No" and internet users (wangmin), and the "middle-ground" version by intellectuals and cultural elites who, albeit divided between different lines, are critical of the popular, radical nationalism but nonetheless admit themselves as "nationalists" of some sort. For instance, in an article criticizing radical nationalism, Xiao Gongqin, sometimes labeled as "New Left," comments: "An intellectual with no nationalistic sentiments does not deserve to be a Chinese" (Xiao 2004: 33). Writing from a liberal stance, Liu Junning states: "To such a latecomer as China, nationalism is not a question of "have" or "have-not," but that concerning "having more" or "having less." In other words, the exit of nationalism in China is not whether to have nationalism or not, but how much and what kind of nationalism we ought to have." (Liu 2004: 269)[211]

Ressentiment is not the only cause of new nationalism, but it does fuel up new

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[210] Here I am not suggesting that mass media and the internet have emerged as a "public sphere" in the Habermasian sense, nor do I assume that they are free of the control from the state. Quite the opposite, precisely due to the fact that both mass media and the internet are closely monitored and censored by the state, they become an ideal tool to spread nationalism, be it of the official or the popular kind.

[211] Another factor we should take into account is the "generation effect," which Peter H. Gries (2004) has discussed in his recent title on China's new nationalism.

nationalism by providing powerful psychological dynamite. The rising tide of nationalism in China makes the state take a harsher stance on the Taiwan issue. Not only does it issue numerous warnings against Taiwanese nationalism, but it has also been making more efforts to oust Taiwan from international society. The effects of such nationalism, however, go quite opposite to the expectation of its proponents: the harsher Chinese nationalism becomes, the more it pushes Taiwan away from its goal of unification. As Ernest Renan puts it, suffering is more powerful to mobilize nationalist sentiments than joy is: "Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than trimphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort" (Renan 1996:53). This is particularly true to the Taiwanese case. By making Taiwanese people "suffer together," China's new nationalism has in effect strengthened rather than weakened its Taiwanese counterpart. We shall now examine how *ressentiment* has been playing a role in the development of Taiwanese nationalism.

As I have pointed out previously, current nationalist politics in Taiwan has been characterized by undisguised *ressentiment*—*ressentiment* towards each other and towards the outside world.[212] The two sociological preconditions of *ressentiment* are also salient in Taiwan, but the scenario is quite different. Taiwan's *de facto* statehood makes a majority of people think that Taiwan is *theoretically comparable* to other sovereign nation-state in terms of rights and status. However, there exists a huge discrepancy to actualize such rights and status since it is rarely recognized by others as a state and it has been constantly excluded from international society. What is worse, although Taiwan is not *officially* recognized as a state, many outsiders simply "misrecognize" Taiwan as a state. Such a confusing and inconsistent situation, which I have characterized as a "neither-nor" status, makes the contrast between "theoretical comparability" and the discrepancies even more acute and absurd. The issues thus involved are of various kinds, ranging from the most macro, collective level such as membership in the United Nations or WHO/WHA, to the most micro, individual level such as passports and visas.[213]

The two sociological preconditions of *ressentiment* has existed for decades, but they had not receive enough attention from the wider public until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when democratization and ethnic mobilization undermines KMT's regime and the legitimacy of the ROC. Furthermore, as Taiwanese society is more open to the outside world during the new tide of globalization, the discrepancies between "theoretical comparability" and the actual situation become much more widely perceived. In such circumstances, *ressentiment* emerges as a result, and it is further fueled by increasing repressions from the PRC in recent years. In other words, it is a

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[212] See "*Ressentiment* in Modern Communities: Some Preliminary Reflections on Taiwan's Experience" (Wang 2004c). The discussion in this and the next few paragraphs has been carried out at further length in that essay.

[213] I have discussed these issues at further length in other places and I shall not repeat my argument here. See Wang (2004a, 2004b).

response to the intensifying new Chinese nationalism. In this sense Taiwanese nationalism in the 1990s can be said "new" in that, in the past, the major "Other" of Taiwanese nationalism is the so-called "Mainlanders" represented by the KMT, but now it is the Chinese represented by the PRC.[214]

The SARS crisis in 2003 provides us with vivid illustrations of the *ressentiment* in Taiwan. When the first case of SARS was reported, the entire Taiwanese society was overwhelmed by this previously unknown disease that was believed to be of external origin. Its spread was transnational and its containment called for international cooperation, but Taiwan was intentionally left out in these efforts and received little help from the outside for apparent political reasons. When Taiwan attempted to apply for observant membership in the WHA, however, the appeal was denied for the seventh consecutive years. The Chinese officials even made several harsh and caustic comments towards Taiwan during and outside the meeting. The reactions from the Taiwan side burnt into an uproar. Some people used emotional words such as "beast country" or "evil bandits" to characterize China. A high official in Taiwan commented: "Communists were too detestable." "We are pissed off." And not only state officials were pissed off; there was a widespread sense of injustice in public opinions. Advocates of Taiwan Independence took this chance to reiterate their convictions that China is an uncivilized hegemonic power that Taiwan should remain independent of, and that Taiwan should make all the more efforts to pursue a recognized statehood in international society.

The two nationalisms on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are therefore interlocking and mutually infecting. Their strengths intensify each other. The more nationalistic one side becomes, the stronger its counterpart grows. The fundamentalists on both sides are mobilizing their followers for tragic sacrifice at all costs. As can be expected, the possible results and their impacts can be profound and devastating. War, for instance, is a possibility that worries many. As I claim no specialty in international security and world politics, I shall leave this to analysts in this field. Here I shall simply confine my discussion to self-poisoning and value-shifts that Scheler points out.

The value shifts caused by self-poisoning of *ressentiment* lead to reiterations of wishful thinking and self-proclaimed truth on both sides. "Getting history wrong is part of being a nation." This insightful statement made by Ernest Renan more than a century ago remains very true to date. It is not our task to debunk the ideology of certain nationalism, as Ernest Gellner (1983) once remarks that its contents, full of apparent errors, hardly deserve serious scholarly scrutiny. However, it should not escape from our attention that the transvaluations this ideology entails may well lead to disastrous outcomes.

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[214] It should be noted that, by this statement, I do not intend to equate "Mainlanders" with the KMT, nor "Chinese" with "the PRC." This is an unfortunate mistake that advocates of Taiwanese nationalism often make. My analysis here is to point out this fact without accepting its truth-value.

The transvaluations on the Chinese side can be best seen in radical and militarist versions of nationalism. Radical nationalism as seen in books such as *China Can Say No* raises an outcry against the current international order and advocates the subversion of existing rules and value systems. The more aggressive militarism advanced in the book *Wars without Limits* even goes so far to propose war of an unethical kind that disregards any normative rules or ethical principles.[215] In contrast, nationalism in Taiwan is much less critical of the international order –in fact, they are more willing to comply rather than complain. Although people complain about "international injustice" from time to time, the *ressentiment* is directed more towards the obstructions from the PRC than towards the hypocritical nature of international society (see discussions in the next section).

There also appears to be a common feature that both sides share. I shall momentarily call it the "hollowing out" of meanings and values, which may eventually lead to a rather self-destructive outcome. As Xu Jilin (2004) has pointed out, nationalism in contemporary China has become "a gigantic but hollow symbol." It retains only an empty form with no content. Some western scholars have also pointed out that the current identity crisis in contemporary China is the problematic Chineseness –people knows less and less about what it means to be Chinese today. Moreover, popular nationalism is gradually undermining the foundations of state power and its legitimacy (Gries 2004). In Taiwan, nationalism is struggling for the "form" much more than for the "content." Here I am not suggesting that Taiwanese nationalism has "contents" but no "form" as opposed to its Chinese counterpart. Rather, what I am arguing is that it indulges itself too much in the struggle for "form" (a recognized status as a nation-state) and relatively little in *meaningful* content. The dominant ideology of Taiwanese nationalism, one that advocated by the state, is quite self-limiting based on distorted values.[216] It will probably do harm to nobody but itself. In this sense it is quite self-destructive. As a matter of fact, we have been witnessing an "involution" of politics in recent years.[217] By consuming their energies in endless partisan struggles that can be said to be no more than a storm in a teacup, people, and particularly politicians, become more and more near-sighted that they can hardly see things beyond near future.

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[215] The "unethical war" appears to be an oxymoron in that war is usually considered as the most brutal way to settle disputes, and hence is somewhat "unethical" in its very nature. However, even in war, there are ethics and moral principles to be followed. The authors of *Wars without Limits*, however, contend that these rules can be disregarded if they cannot contribute to achieving the goal (namely, winning the war).

[216] The recent controversies surrounding so-called "de-sinicization" policies–namely, to remove "Chineseness" from national culture and institutions–provide good illustrations of this.

[217] "State involution," originated from Clifford Geertz's "agricultural involution," is a concept advanced by historian Prasenjit Duarain his award-wining book on state-making in modern China. My use of "involution" here, however, is more akin to Geertz's original meaning, which implies "a process whereby a social or cultural pattern persists and fails to transform itself into a new pattern even after it has reached definitive form." See Duara (1988: 74-5).

IV. Towards a General Critique of Modernity and International (Dis)order: Searching for Alternatives

At the risk of oversimplifying the picture, let me summarize the above analysis schematically in Figure 1:

(Figure 1. about here)

As we can see, both "new nationalisms" in China and Taiwan are somehow derivatives of what is loosely called "international society." To China, new nationalism rises as a reaction against the existing international order that is deemed unfavorable to China. The rising nationalist sentiments push the Chinese state to take harsher measures regarding the Taiwan issue, which entail greater pressures to exclude Taiwan from international society. The major players in international society, as we all know it, are neither "nations" nor "peoples" but states, most of which implement the so-called "one-China policy" that acknowledges that there is only one China and Taiwan is part of China. On the Taiwan side, the more it is excluded from international society, the more *ressentiment* is nourished and accumulated, which, in turn, provides more psychological dynamites for the development of Taiwanese nationalism. But the reaction does not simply stop there. Since Taiwan signifies tremendous meanings to Chinese nationalism, and since Taiwan's independence, be it *de facto* or *de jure*, is only possible through the interference and/or recognition from international society, the increasing influence of Taiwanese nationalism is easily interpreted by the Chinese side as a conspiracy of Western powers (particularly the US) that runs against China's national interests. The result is a more stubborn stance on the Taiwan issue and a more determined resolution to repress Taiwan in international society. This, again, leads to more *ressentiment* and stronger nationalism on Taiwan's side. This is a kind of chain reaction that leads not only to an interlocking situation but more dangerously into a vicious cycle.

In the analysis above, we have seen that both Taiwan and China have strong *ressentiment* towards the outside world. Both feel that they are systematically mistreated and discriminated against in "international society." Whether their claims are true or not, one might wonder what is going on with the existing international order. It is thus worthwhile for us to explore some of the basic features of the order in international society. Again, since I claim no specialty in International Relations, my discussion here will not deal with current affairs in world politics. Rather, my aim, which is modest in attempt but bold in scope, is to expose some of the structural features that underlie the contemporary international order.

Although analysts of different theoretical perspectives may possess contending images of international society, studies in the discipline of International Relations share a common presumption, that is, state sovereignty based on the Westphalian order. A

contested notion that has been debunked and de-constructed in recent studies, Westphalian sovereignty remains nonetheless the rule of the game both in theory and in practice of world politics. In fact, international order conceptualized as constituted by individual sovereign states is at best, as Stephen Krasner bluntly puts it, "organized hypocrisy." As Krasner points out, "Outcomes in the international system are determined by rulers whose violation of, or adherence to, international principles or rules is based on calculations of material and ideational interests, not taken-for-granted practices derived from some overarching institutional structures or deeply embedded generative grammars." To make it short, "Organized hypocrisy is the normal state of affairs [in world politics]" (1999:9).

The term "organized hypocrisy" is illuminating in that it signifies the Janus-faced nature of the modern international (dis)order. On the one hand, the international order is organized, to some extent, around certain rules and principles, hence it is neither chaotic nor anarchical as conceptualized by Realism in IR. On the other hand, *pace* Idealism, these rules and principles are so fragile that they can be easily broken or ignored, so much so that their very existence can be said to be merely hypocrisy. The deceitful nature of such organized hypocrisy thus makes contemporary international society an ideal hotbed on which *ressentiment* can easily be nourished and flourish. In theory, nations are comparable to each other in that all nations are considered equal and that state sovereignty is respected. In reality, however, there exist huge discrepancies between nation-states in terms of power and status. In other words, if organized hypocrisy is the nature of the international order, then *ressentiment* can be said to be a built-in condition that, as we have shown, can easily result in self-poisoning and value shifts.

It is thus almost useless, if not foolish, to ask for fairness and justice in a society that is organized around hypocrisy. If we take such organized hypocrisy as granted and allow it to persist, then we have very little moral ground to talk about ideals such as freedom and equality, human rights and justice. We have even less ground to condemn large-scale violence such as ethnic cleansing, holocausts and total wars, since rules and principles are easily subject to violations by those who are capable of doing so. There are still rules and principles, but it is the audacious and the powerful that decides what rules to make and which principles to be, or to be not, followed. If this has been the reality in world politics, and if it will remain intact in the time to come, then why bother to blame some regimes for being "rouge states" and some others being "imperialists"? The moral weights behind these terms simply make this world more, but not less, hypocritical.

Indeed, if we apply Scheler's analysis to International Relations, we will find that *ressentiment* can be strongest, not in the age of imperialism in which military power is considered the key in deciding a nation's place in the international system, but in the age of globalization in which not only nations are considered (at least theoretically) equals to each other, but people of different nationalities also consider themselves as equal—hence mutually comparable—human beings. In other words, in the global age,

the aspirations for equal rights and status among nations and among people are growing higher than ever, but the possibility of their realization remains dim, if not dimmer, provided that the nature of international order remains unquestioned and intact. If this inference is correct, then it can be further inferred that *ressentiment* is peculiar neither to China nor to Taiwan. Its distribution is not local but global, and its manifestations take different forms such as terrorism and fundamentalisms of various sorts that we have been witnessing across the world.

What, then, can be the alternative? This is an overriding question that a short piece like the current one can hardly answer. However, since we have followed Scheler thus far, I suggest that we find some clues in his other works. Writing in 1927, Scheler characterizes the modern age as "the era of adjustment," of which the argument still stands quite valid —to say nothing of illuminating--in the 21st century. It is worthwhile to quote it at some length here:

> If we had to inscribe a name on the gate of the incipient era, a name which was to render the inclusive trend of this era, only one would seem appropriate to me, that of "*adjustment*;" adjustment of almost all characteristic and specifically *natural* traits, physical and psychic, which distinguish the social groups into which we can divide humanity, and, at the same time, a tremendous *increase* in *spiritual* individual, and relatively individual, e.g., national differences; adjustment of *racial* tensions; adjustment between mentalities, conceptions of self, world, and God, in the great *cultural groupings* especially in Asia and Europe; adjustment between the specifically *male* and *female* ways of thinking in their rule over human society; adjustment between *capitalism* and *socialism* and, thereby, of class arguments and class conditions and rights between *upper* and *lower classes*; adjustment in the share of political power of so-called *civilized, half civilized,* and *primitive peoples*; adjustment also between relatively primitive and highly civilized mentalities; relative adjustment between *youth* and *old age* in the evaluation of their mental attitudes; adjustment between *technical knowledge* and *cultural growth*, between physical and spiritual labor; adjustment between the spheres of *national economic* interest and the contributions which the *nations* make, in the realm of *spirit* and civilization, of humanity; finally, adjustment between one-sided *ideas about the nature of man* of which I have just named several types. (1958:102-3, italics original)

As a phenomenologist, Scheler once again points out for us what he sees as the core of the problem: a problematic concept of man. The "one-sided ideas about the nature of man," according to Scheler, include several types: the "*animal rationale*," " '*homo faber*' of the positivists, 'Dionysian man' of Nietzsche, man as a 'disease of life' of the new panromantic doctrines, 'superman,' '*homo sapiens*' of Linné, '*l'homme*

machine' of Lamettrie, man solely as 'power,' 'libido,' and 'economic' being, in Machiavelli, Freud, and Marx, fallen, God-created Adam —*all* these conceptions are much too narrow to encompass the *whole* of man" (Scheler 1958: 101-2, italics original). Insofar as our concerns are involved here, the current political order, be it national or international, as modeled on Machiavelli's and Hobbes's ideas of "political man" appears quite unsatisfying to Scheler as well.[218] What Scheler is up to is an ideal of "personal communities" based on a new conceptualization of "the whole person" (*Gesamptperson*). A discussion of these ideas lies far beyond the scope of this paper, but Scheler's deep concerns with feelings, emotions, values and moral order do point to a new direction according to which we could explore further.[219]

In his recent critique of the self-righteous American imperialism, Michael Mann exclaims: "I fear politicians when they come bearing morality!" (2003:8) I share a similar fear, but for a different community and in a reversed direction: I am fearful of the growing number of contemporary academicians who come bearing no concerns about values and morality. Scheler's analysis of *ressentiment*, along with his concerns about the moral order in modern society, may serve as a good point of departure, although there is still à long way to go to search for better, feasible alternatives.

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[218] For a discussion and critique, see his "Man in History" (Scheler 1958: 65-93).

[219] For further discussions about "person" and "man," one can refer to his *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism* (1973) and *Man's Place in Nature* (1961).

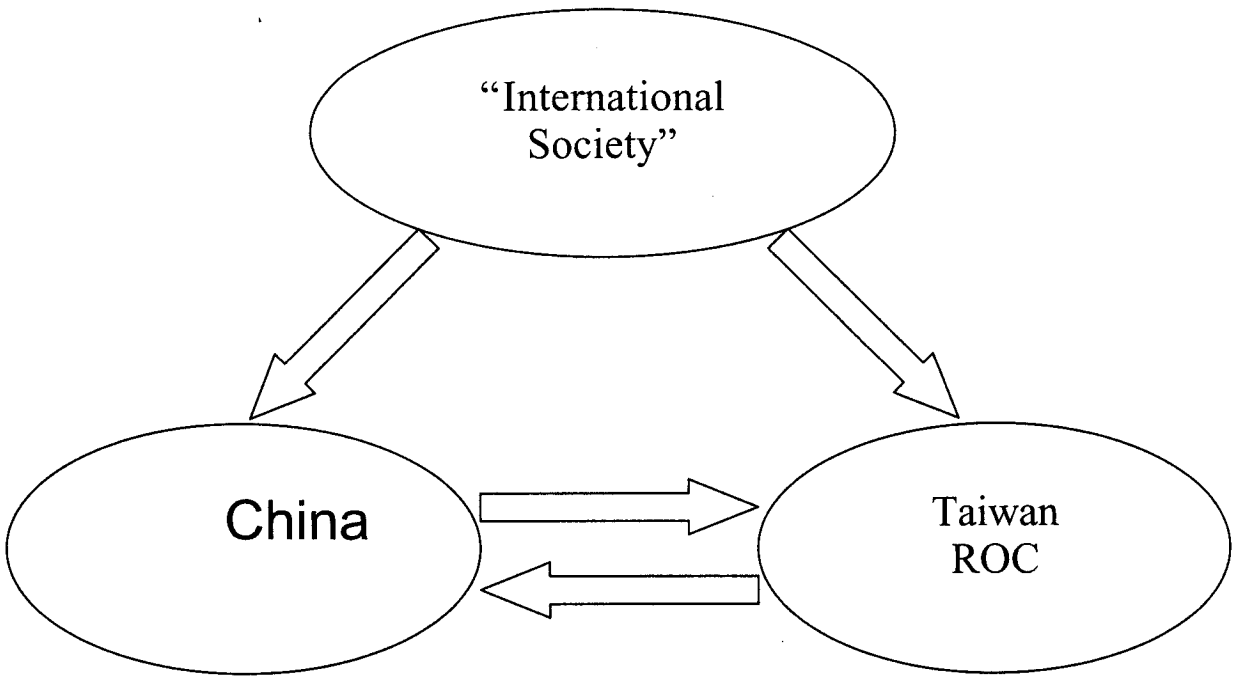

Figure 1: "Chain Reaction" of Nationalist Politics in China and Taiwan

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