

Diversity of 21st Century and Creation of National Image

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Introduction

National identity is both a political and intellectual creation that reflects the general psyche of a nation. This image or identity of a nation is not immune from changes in the society and always in the process of being remade and recreated. In this process what needs our greatest attention is not so much what kind of identity or national image that is but for whom it was created and whose purpose it serves. If we take a look at a war time identity of Japan, for example, what it means to be Japanese was influenced by the military regime for the sake of its pursuit of colonization agenda and was imposed on Japanese people through institutionalized education and propaganda. Many years passed after the war and with the burst of bubble economy the image of Japanese as cut-throat business warriors is also phasing out. This image undoubtedly served the needs of Japanese companies seeking expansion and economic success. In this essay I would like to observe the process of identity making at work in the world and study the factors involved. I would shed light on the current political situation in Australia and Europe to delineate how the political situation affects a national image and political decisions and propose a model of national identity needed for the ever changing face of the world.

Factors Contributing to Diverse Faces of a Nation

Entry into the era of global economy saw improved mobility of people and information. Along with the wealth brought by this process came the diversity in the composition of national populations around the world. The first factor contributing to this diversity is highly effective means of transportation that brought each country closer than ever and has made the exchange of people easier than ever. Also the need for skilled labors diversified the workforce of many countries. The second factor contributing to this trend is the dark side of the ongoing wave of global economy. The rise of global economy and “free trade”

has been criticized by some as being more favorable for the rich than for the poor. For example, the United States has raised the world's eye brows by withdrawing its support for Kyoto Protocol that was designed to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide that causes green house effect. This unilateral action by the world giant has given reason for environment protection groups to criticize the industrialized nations for seeking profits at the costs of developing nations. This kind of action by some industrialized nations lead to tensions around the world and threatens the political stability of many countries. Also instability caused by civil wars, ethnic infighting has led to hatred and distrust among people. People will be displaced and the number of asylum seekers will increase. To name a few, the ongoing conflicts in Middle East, recent tragedy in Afghanistan, ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia, and the increasing number of refugees from North Korea and tension between the two Koreas. Although all of the above cannot be attributed to the negative effect of global economy, increasing number of refugees is an issue that needs our attention that affects the faces of many nations.

Immigration and National Sentiments in Australia

Australia is one of many countries that have been accepting waves of immigrants and refugees. Australia's historical ties to Britain has brought great number of immigrants in the early history of immigration and the government itself has encouraged immigration from European nations, prompting criticism of so called white Australia policy. However, Australia's geographical proximity to Asia has increased the number of immigrants from Asian countries. Especially after the Vietnam War, the number of refugees and immigrants from Vietnam has greatly increased. So has the number of immigrants from other Asian countries such as China. Immigrants to Australia are strictly screened and immigration has contributed to the diversity of national population and greatly improved Australia's industry. Chinese immigrants have especially contributed to the growth of Australian economy and immigrants from other countries have diversified Australian culture.

However, recent immigration policy of Australian government is under severe scrutiny. Fresh in our memory is the refugee crisis near Christmas Island, when Australian government has rejected to accept 433 mostly Afghan refugees. “Illegal immigrants” picked up by Norwegian fleet have been confined to harsh camp in the desert or dumped on neighboring island countries with a promise of providing them with financial support as a return. In protest against this harsh condition, asylum seekers have attempted suicides, stitched their lips, and refused to eat.

International community has strongly condemned the action taken by the government headed by Prime Minister John Howard as cruel and inhumane. However, Prime Minister seems to be enjoying high popularity and in the wave of that gruesome incident in September, he has assumed the image of a war time hero and his approval rate is higher than ever.

What has happened to the nation that has proudly encouraged its image as a racially diverse multicultural nation? Government of Malcolm Fraser has encouraged immigration and promoted so called multiculturalism that called for tolerance of difference and political equality for all, creating identity based on tolerance.

The rise of anti-immigration sentiment has followed waves of illegal immigration and a rise in the number of crimes. These social unrest plus unemployment have aggravated the problem and people started looking for scapegoats. Easy targets of course are immigrants both legal and illegal. Populist politician such as Pauline Hanson has tapped into this fear and called for protection of “Australian way of life” that is being threatened by waves of immigration. Although One Nation Party that was founded by Hanson is now defunct, we should carefully observe what caused the rise of this simplistic politician who has proposed an end to multicultural Australia by abandoning immigration all together.

Australians in general are not right-winged extremist, they enjoy Chinese foods, travel abroad, what caused them to support Pauline Hanson is lack of

political decisions and mechanism to deal with immigrants. Immigration is on the rise, but no clear legal framework to deal with it. Crime rate rises, unemployment rises, so does antagonism toward outsiders. But politicians do not want to talk about making clear legal framework or talk about immigration frankly, lest they be regarded as racist. This silence about complex issues of immigration has given a rise to Hansonian people who used the fear and frustration among the nation to its political advantage. John Howard is doing exactly the same by giving no solution or tacking the hard issue and just catering to nationalistic sentiments without considering educating people about immigration. This has led to its current national image of xenophobic nation at the expense of long cherished multicultural image.

Xenophobia Around the World

Many countries in the world face similar situations, and industrialized nations especially are in needs of accepting immigrants to cope of its changing demographics to maintain its economy in light of decreasing number of young generation. However, many countries that have been historically homogenous are suddenly facing whole new challenges. Rising immigration and lack of political mechanism and lack of will to talk about it and take action is aggravating the problem. Rising crime rate has made immigrants scapegoats and 9-11 incident has pitted Muslim populations against non-Muslims. Alarming rise of swing to nationalism is exemplified by Le Pen's unexpected second place in the presidential run- off in France. Le Pen, who called Holocaust a "detail of history" rose to power by tapping into French peoples' dissatisfaction with political leadership that has snobbishly ignored issues like crime thus voting for Le Pen who called for restricted immigration as a solution. No wonder the assassinated politician from Holland, Pim Fortuyn won sympathy by so many people although the responses he proposed to the current situation in Europe was a bit ugly. He at least pointed out that problems with immigration exist. Seeking simplistic solution for the problems may appeal to people but ending immigration is not a

solution for cutting down on crimes or cutting the number of the unemployed. Reality is that immigration is needed and talking about it and debating it to devise political mechanism to deal with the issue is what is needed.

Civic Identity for the Changing World

We have so far seen some examples of creations of national faces and images. How should a country accommodate a new face needed for the world that is rapidly changing? With the increasing waves of global market economy, we can generalize that many countries will be better off than now, but also certain is the fact that a gap between nations that are will be riding these waves and those that will be left behind them. Economic disparity between the haves and the have-nots is likely to increase creating more tension in the world. As we have seen in the creation of national faces, those left behind would look for scapegoats to blame for the economic hardships. International economy should pay attention to rise of fundamentalism that could be caused by ignoring the frustration of people left behind waves of globalism. We should not simply seek unilateral advantage and ignore problems in less well off nations and name tensions rising out of it as clashes of civilization between freedom loving nations and oppressive states that don't allow for free economy. Market economy is not a solution for all the countries and market economy is not always a free economy for some nations. We need a global political mechanism to reduce to minimum the disparity that is expected and redistribute the wealth gained from the on going globalization. Lest the face of our global village be that of fundamentalists or extreme xenophobia or apathy, we should seek to establish inclusive civic identity that would seek benefits not only for a single nation but for all. That would be the key to reducing tensions and conflicts around the world.

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