Globalization and Nationalism

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I. Key Concepts Defined

Two and a half millennia ago, Confucius in his Analects (Lun Yü), expounding his theory of the “rectification of names” (chen ming), insisted upon clear definitions of terms and concepts as a precondition for meaningful research, writing, and dialogue.1) Seeking to discuss the relations between the phenomena of “globalization” and of “nationalism”, I shall thus start with an attempt of defining both of them:

From a historical and functional point of view, the term globalization denotes “a centuries-old many-dimensional process of worldwide range, characterized by intensifying and expanding contacts, exchanges, interdependence and inter-penetration between states, civilizations, economic enterprises and other non-state systems.” Globalization is thus seen the result of ongoing multi-causal processes and not as any condition fixed in time and space.

Nationalism, on the other hand, is comprehended as “an attitude of mind of persons and groups that attributes, among their values, the highest priority to the qualities, the well-being, success, power, and prestige of their own nation and to its citizens’ loyalty to it. Particularly in a nation’s relations with other nations and states, nationalism assumes the function of a social integration-ideology based on perceptions of a nation’s special identity and interests”.

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As amply demonstrated by history, nationalism, thus defined value-free as supra-partisan concern with the fate, success and welfare of a nation, can serve constructive as well as destructive purposes, it can reflect normal self-interest, identity and self-preservation as well as hubristic megalomania and aggressiveness.

The term nation is derived from the Latin word “natio”, meaning birth or origin. It thus points to the existential meaning of this term. A person born into this world, as a rule, has a “father-land” a “mother-tongue”, a citizenship, and a family, belonging to a certain neighborhood, region, and people. Growing up, most persons by experience and education become aware of their national origin, which means an awareness of belonging to a certain nation, molded by its history and culture and forming, in addition, an economic, political, and legal community.

Seeking to define what constitutes a nation, one may arrive at the following conclusion:

“Anation is a population, mostly on a given territory, perceiving itself (and being perceived by others) as a historically conditioned community of fate–distinctly different from other such communities, and integrated through the heritage of common cultural and other characteristics, historical experiences, and values, mostly also by common language, and the possession of its own state or by striving to be able to attain a state of its own or to obtain, at least, an optimum of self-determination or autonomy within a super-ordinate multi-national system.”

II. Imperialism, Nationalism and the Early Phase of Globalization

Globalization has been defined as an ongoing process of growing international