

Nationalist Entrepreneurs and Territorial Disputes in Northeast Asia

Sustaining Public Interest

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Chapter 1

The Nationalist Industrial Complex (NIC) and discourses

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1 The Nationalist Industrial Complex (NIC) and discourses

There is a fascinating anecdote about Wu Yunchu, the individual who successfully displaced Japan's footing on Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) in the Chinese market. Wu was designated as a 'mínzú zībēnjiā (民族資本家)' or 'patriotic national capitalist' as he set his sights on a clear oppositional target (Japan) in spurring on the nationalist commodification of MSG, which incidentally was first discovered and marketed by the Japanese company, *Ajinomoto*. One could say that Wu's efforts were so successful that it has fed into the famous/infamous inclination to associate Chinese takeout rather than Japanese cuisine with MSG. For context, Wu Yunchu's endeavor actually happened to coincide with the time that China was undergoing its 'National Products Movement' that increasingly recognized the value of commerce in repelling external influences and the duty to 'purify' or 'cleanse' its domestic market of such foreign goods (Gerth 2003, 333–54). Hence, as documented by Gerth (2003, 336),

Wu's success and the proliferation of his company's commodities were immediately enshrined as a major victory of the movement and of China as a whole. Indeed, the nationalistic import of Wu's story is so strong that even Chinese Communist leaders recognized the contribution of capitalists such as Wu to nation-building in China. After 1949, Wu was classified as a "patriotic businessman" (愛國實業家) and therefore part of China's democratic capitalist" (民族資本主義) development. On October 1, 1950, the first anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, Premier Zhou Enlai himself referred to Wu as the "MSG king" (味精大王).

The epithets, 'patriotic national capitalist' or 'patriotic businessman,' closely mirror the argument from the introduction about how nationalist entrepreneurs—market activities of small-sized merchants that partake in the production of goods and services that popularize the name of a contentious territory—contribute to the maintenance of public resonance for territoriality. A central quality or point of distinction for commodification here is the peer-to-peer market diffusion of nationalism in contrast to the political top-down elite manipulation of nationalism or bottom-up efforts that tend to be purely socio-cultural or political with no market embeddedness. As a testament to the swaying power of the market and the porous boundaries between politics and economics, one could easily fast forward from

Wu's times to the twenty-first century and come across examples of commodities that are explicitly imbued with political sentiment, e.g. 'Donald Ignorant IPA beer' (Saunders and Holland 2018).

Yet, Wu's success was not his alone. Meaning, his achievement is incomplete through an autonomous lens. For instance, the vegetarian and Buddhist communities had a role in helping the perception of MSG as a concoction that could elevate the taste of food while remaining free from animal products (Shuman 2024). It is helpful then to conceptualize a larger spatiality of a Nationalist Industrial Complex or NIC that reveals these domestic connections. As such, this chapter will first sketch the archetypical NIC for territorial sovereignty in Northeast Asia, which will bring together the literature on territorial disputes in the region. Since the aim of illustrating the NIC is to better contextualize the nationalist entrepreneurs and describe the activities embedded in the market, the rest of the chapter will provide an analysis of the literature on commodification and commodification with nationalism. The hope is that one will cascade nicely into the other by providing a definition of commodification that establishes its supra-market *social* qualities, then supplying both the definition and approach to nationalism that not only incorporates the physical reality of a market but also treats nationalism as if it were a contingent and contextual *practice*.

The NIC and situating nationalist entrepreneurs

A common descriptor for Northeast Asia from a geopolitical standpoint has been to describe the region as being mired in tensions, which are in turn, frequently attributed to the conceptually woolly term of 'history,' whether this means general resentment over prior colonization (by mainly Japan against others) or efforts that resemble historical revisionism such as glossing over parts of history in school textbooks. Sure enough, it is powerful to attribute sour relations to history given its extremely intuitive nature, and very few would contest that the past has absolutely no bearing on the present (or the future). Moreover, history is all-consuming in that it presents a whole-of-society approach through its emphasis on 'collective' memory and recognizes the importance of perceptions—to borrow Connor's words, "Identity does not draw its sustenance from facts but from perceptions; not from chronological/factual history but from sentient/felt history" (Connor 2004, 45). Still, the closer one zooms into 'history,' the more things look out of focus. I mention this because not only are territorial disputes often identified as one piece of this 'tension' in Northeast Asia but also because there is a similar replication of which actors (if at all) are commonly centered in the analysis. In fact, 'history' as an intuitive receptacle has tended to perpetuate the underspecification of agency.

For instance, perhaps the closest the literature on history has come to identifying a concrete mechanism for its transmission is *formal history education*, implicitly or explicitly placing *governments* at its epicenter (Shin and Sneider 2011). True enough, there are frequent disputes over the reaffirmation of ownership over contentious territory in school textbooks. Yet, (1) the analysis often covers the contents of the historical textbooks or the contours of the larger 'patriotic education'

(Sneider 2013; Inuzuka 2013)¹ rather than their effectiveness or reception by the actual publics, which in effect, takes the resonance of historical education for granted, and (2) it is unclear at what point within the education process that the transition from top-down official nationalism to popular nationalism occurs. There is the additional problem that textbooks are age- and place-specific: the probability that someone outside of school or academia over the age of 30 will actively seek out these textbooks is not high. In 2006, Japan became the first country to have more than 20 percent of its population at age 65 or older, with South Korea not far behind in demographics, officially becoming an ‘aged’ (rather than ‘aging’) society in 2017 with the elderly (65 and over) accounting for more than 14 percent of its total population (Lee 2018). If the school-age population is shrinking and schools are closing due to low enrollment, a reliance on textbooks to instill the minds of the public seems self-defeating.

On territorial disputes, specifically, there has been a steady stream of scholarly work on the topic with the turn of the century; it is possible to categorize the evolution in ‘waves,’ with the first wave (1960s–1980s) tending to be either (a) more descriptive in laying out the ‘*what*’ in terms of describing how territorial disputes shape inter-state relations in general (Eto 1980; Lee 1962/63; Lee 1976)—we see the most robust work for the Northern Territories during this time period (Berton 1986; Kimura 1991; Njoroge 1985; Shigeo 1970)—or (b) from the angle of international law to examine the legal validity of the territorial claims (the ‘*who owns what*’) (Chiu and Park 1975; Kim 1977; Li 1975; Nakauchi 1979). In both instances, there has been an underlying state-centricity in the narrative owing to the goal of outlining foreign policy enacted by governments, or the designation of territory in the eyes of international law to be the prerogative of states. In contrast, the second wave (1990s) was dominated by research that sought to trace the origins of the disputes (the ‘*why*’), ranging from sources such as material resources to concerns of domestic politics (Downs and Saunders 1999; Guoxing 1998). While there was still a preference to remain at the level of proper nouns, the increasing effort to unpack the black box of states meant a greater incorporation of local officials (rather than simply central governments), as well as the people’s responses to the state in ways of civic activism by students and protestors alike. Finally, the third wave (2000s onwards) has shown itself to be much more eclectic,² containing methodologically pluralist and theoretically informed work (Gries, Steiger, and Wang 2016; Koo 2009; Ling and Nakamura 2019; Zhai 2019), especially those that expand the multiplicity of actors. One common pattern has been to better understand the role of *identity* vis-à-vis territoriality³ and to explore the *media* either as a methodological platform for analysis (Burcu 2022; Wang 2017) or to gain insights into online mass expression (e.g. digital nationalism) (Dixon 2014; Murai and Suzuki 2014). Figure 1.1 then roughly maps the representative actors that have been identified thus far as populating the space of the NIC for territorial disputes in Northeast Asia.

Two elements stand out from Figure 1.1, which further reinforces the contribution of nationalist entrepreneurs. On the general whole, the NIC is populated by *political* actors, with not much room for economic activity. The predominant way

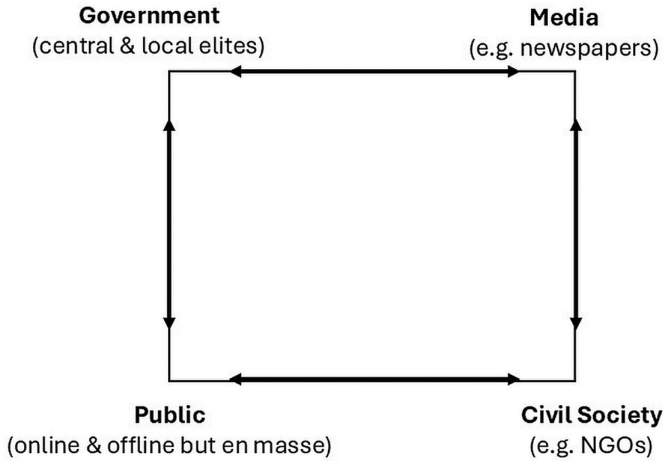


Figure 1.1 Mapping the pre-existing representative actors into an NIC

that economics has entered the discussion is through the potential collateral damage that political tensions over territorial disputes could have in economic spheres of activity (Li and Liu 2019) [sometimes the arrow is reversed, to examine if economics can mitigate political frictions (Blanchard 2009)], which suggests that the actors remained unchanged; if anything, this perpetuates the state-centricity by redirecting the attention to the inter-state level headed by governments. On top of this lack of commercial activity, the way that the public is conceived is as a monolith. It is extremely rare for individual citizens to be called out by name within the territorial disputes literature, with the exception of demonstrators who have been at the center of notable provocations, e.g. the individual Hong Kong activists who tried to land on the Diaoyu Islands back in 1998.

So while this book is situated in the third wave of Northeast Asian territorial discourse that seeks to further test the boundaries of eclecticism, it differs by revealing the activities of private citizens and applying a disciplinary transplant of commodification to a notoriously political/secured issue of territorial disputes. Before expanding on the concept of commodification proper, there are two particular works from the third wave that stand out given their points of convergence with the approach here. The first is Bukh (2020). Bukh actually refers to non-governmental actors that fight for territorial sovereignty protection as ‘national identity entrepreneurs’ and traces their work and campaign across four cases: the Northern Territories, Takeshima, Dokdo, and (the Taiwanese efforts along) Diaoyu Islands. These ‘national identity entrepreneurs’ arguably “fill the void when the state is perceived as having failed” (Bukh 2020, 19), and they become most visible on disputed territory that happens to exhibit relatively low material value (which makes it fertile ground for discursive construction and shaping of narratives). While this book’s overall approach is closely reminiscent of Bukh’s tact of

emphasizing agency and the everyday,⁴ it seems that ‘national identity entrepreneurs’ here resemble the conceptual framework of Finnemore and Sikkink’s ‘norm entrepreneurs’ in the sense that entrepreneurship here is a kind of stewardship/initiative that is not embedded in the commercial market per se but in an ideational one. In contrast, the nationalist entrepreneurs in this particular story evoke their immediate definitional element of running a business.

The second scholarly work from the third wave is Brandon Palmer and Laura Whitefleet-Smith’s research on Dokdo. In a way, their argument reinforces the umbrella thread of ‘history’ as driving tensions, isolating elements such as “Korea’s ethnic nationalism and collective memory” and “unrepentant nature of the Japanese state in regard to past imperialist aggression [as perceived by the Koreans]” (Palmer and Whitefleet-Smith 2016, 26) as manifesting in hostility over territorial sovereignty. Yet, they go on to explicitly identify and detail the specifics of how both governments and private citizens have been able to integrate territorial sovereignty into daily life; they too list some of the ways that commodification has occurred:

The commoditization of Tokto is particularly prevalent among businesses selling stationery. In the heart of Myōngdong, a popular shopping area in Seoul, the authors found a knick-knack shop that sold Tokto-inspired spoons, notebooks, socks, hats, and shirts—all featuring pictures of Tokto or the slogan “Tokto is our Land” written in Korean... Tokto is also commercialized extensively by seafood restaurants on storefront signs, menus, and business names. The streets surrounding Hong’ik University in Seoul offer a microcosm of the rest of Korean cities. One mom-and-pop restaurant displays a cartoonish squid with “Tokto” (독도) plastered on its body. Another restaurant, which sells raw fish, uses an image of the islets on its sign and has panoramic photos of Tokto hanging on the interior walls. Some restaurants, such as one in the Park Hyatt in Pusan, boast Tokto shrimp on the menu... Many businesses on Ullūng utilize “Tokto” as a part of their name... Billboards with advertisements for Tokto and stores selling Tokto souvenirs are everywhere. Stores on the island sell Tokto bandanas, T-shirts (both adult and infant sizes), pens, postcards, pins, fans, and plates.

(Palmer and Whitefleet-Smith 2016, 21–22)

This is a relatively rare instance of documentation of commodification in the English language, and something that I explore in greater scope in later chapters. Even though there are no explicit references to the utility of commodification, the authors’ argument that “Tokto functions as a golden goose that unifies the Korean citizenry because Tokto has become an integral part of Korean anti-Japanese nationalism” (Palmer and Whitefleet-Smith 2016, 26) as witnessed by the many ways that a political contention over territory has become a cultural phenomenon seems to align with the notion that street-level efforts like commodification of nationalism ultimately aid, not hurt, public resonance on contested territory.

To summarize, in categorizing the literature on territorial disputes and Northeast Asia into roughly three waves, the commodification of nationalism framework represents an extension of the third wave of scholars who have sought to better reveal the agency behind tensions and emphasized the work of private citizens in that process. By adding the economic component of a marketplace as an extra-political sphere for theoretical inspiration, this book brings in commodification of nationalism to frame the market not simply as a metaphor for ideas about nationalism but a literal platform for economic exchange. Moreover, the focus on nationalist entrepreneurs will perhaps nudge the discourse further toward a fourth wave, creating greater fluidity in discussing horizontal peer-to-peer effects and escaping from some of the rigidity of top-down (governmental) versus bottom-up (citizenry) activities pertaining to territorial disputes.

Introducing commodification

At its core, commodification refers to the process that transforms goods and services into objects for exchange with the purpose of profit. Among many configurations, I find the definition by Radin (1987, 1859) to be the most comprehensive yet clear:

Broadly construed, commodification includes not only actual buying and selling, but also market rhetoric, the practice of thinking about interactions as if they were sale transactions, and market methodology, the use of monetary cost-benefit analysis to judge these interactions.

The reason for the preference of using commodification over say, ‘monetization’ despite the intuitive similarities is that the latter has a strong connotation of the ability to generate *revenue*. Since the approach here is not to dwell on the lucrative fruits of nationalism but rather, the ways in which it becomes (re-)produced within a marketplace, commodification seemed like the more appropriate term. The same logic applies for why opt for commodification over ‘commercialization,’ though this comes with the added rationale that the latter seems to viscerally conjure images of sizeable corporate entities and large-scale industrialization rather than individual localized entrepreneurs.

As a concept, commodification has been quite contentious in stirring up debate: for instance, on whether commodification is an ‘organic’ or ‘socially constructed’ process,⁵ and its potentially grim prospects for what it means for values that drive human relations as evident in accounts of “dehumanized and commodified funeral services” (Han 2016).⁶ There are some who have come to the defense of commodification, going so far as to advocate for an expansion of the market rather than a contraction (Brennan and Jaworski 2015), but others who are much less celebratory.⁷ In the contemporary world, the logic of commodification has been undeniably all-consuming, which has fortified the long-standing consensus that out of the three conventional means of supplying goods and services—‘market,’ ‘state,’ and ‘community’—it is purportedly the ‘market’ that is overwhelming all

others (Williams 2005, 13): in short, “[that] the commodified realm is expanding and the non-commodified realm shrinking has become something of an irrefutable fact” (Williams 2005, 17). This is probably why Marx and his views of economic exchange are so often inserted into debates about commodification. For (a heavily production-occupied) Marx, individuals were concerned with consumption in so far as their desire for goods translated into ‘commodity fetishism’—wherein people start to treat commodities to have some intrinsic value as residing in the material objects themselves rather than in the invisible human labor expended for actual production: “The social relation is consummated in the relation of a thing, of money, to itself. Instead of the actual transformation of money into capital, we see here only form without content” (Marx 1981, 516). Hence, the market tends to *conceal*, not *liberate*, social relationships. The impersonality of market capitalism and the disembeddedness of social relationships is also reflected in works by Karl Polanyi.⁸ Since modern capitalism and its tenets of free market forces and the economic organization of society rely on commodification to survive, we see similarly ‘sinister’ observations concerning capitalism (aka the ‘capitalist crisis’) as we do for commodification: “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” (Jameson 2003, 76) or so the sentiment goes.

A debate regarding the normative desirability of commodification, however, could be misleading as it tends to treat the concept as predominantly economic in content. This book empathizes more with the strand of thinking that refuses to disaggregate the market from the social. There is nothing ‘inevitable’ about the process of commodification, and unlike ‘hypothetical idealized markets,’ “real world markets are often domains of rich and complex social relationships,” where “the extent to which commodification actually occurs is shaped by societal norms and public policies” (Folbre and Nelson 2000, 133–34). This sentiment is fortified by the reality that commodification is not owned by the field of economics, regardless of the literal contents of its definition. Having been dissected along different disciplinary vantage points spanning anthropology, sociology, history, and economics, there has been an idea with long traction: that objects can become imbued with sentiment beyond the rational calculations of the market economy. One example of this quality of sociability is the nostalgia or ‘Ostalgie’ for the past that had swept the Eastern bloc in the late 1990s:

Soviet Army fur hats were sold at Checkpoint Charlie. Trabants, those stripped down plastic cars developed in the GDR [German Democratic Republic or ‘East Germany’] as a people’s car, once treasured by their owners, later despised, were now lovingly refurbished as ‘vintage’. Board games on the GDR everyday became popular in Germany; GDR brands were retro fashion. Museums of everyday life appeared in the GDR and the former Soviet Union, where they were usually called ‘Staraja kvartira’; there were restaurants, too, decorated with Soviet kitsch and featuring menus enclosed in old Soviet cardboard files (pakki).

(Fitzpatrick 2012, 466)

Although there may be some initial homage paid to the ideas of Marx, the analyses also typically go much beyond the parameters set out by Marx. After all, the ‘social’ is fundamentally *reduced* (or *debased*), not *enhanced*, in Marx’s (2012) oeuvre of commodity exchange and circulation: commodities acquire value, but that value is one that creates an existence on par with exchange values that ultimately transforms a relationship that connects *people*, to one that connects *things* (and hence, the references to ‘alienation’). A couple decades succeeding Marx, there was increasing theorizing about industrial capitalism and its unprecedented implications for the relationship between ‘economy’ and ‘society.’ Citing Polanyi (2001) again, he had posited the advent of a ‘market economy-cum-market society’: two formerly disparate spaces of the economy and society merging into a singular self-regulating ‘market economy’ (governed by mechanisms of supply and demand) wherein production and distribution were no longer organized by non-economic institutions (e.g. kinship, community) or norms (e.g. religious, communal). And so, even in the field of economics, there has been greater attention paid to ‘*social economics*’ (also referred to as ‘economic sociology’), which among other things has as one of its tenets to recognize the “inescapable social nature of economic action and phenomena” (Carvalho and Rodrigues 2008, 308). As summarized by Carvalho and Rodrigues (2008, 308):

Bringing the ‘social’ within the ‘economic’ means, first of all, that some degree of autonomy of the social vis-à-vis the economic must be recognized, so that it is not possible to express all the domains of social life in the language of the categories associated with the market discourse. Furthermore, and following Polanyi’s insights, economic action and phenomena are themselves embedded in society, and any endeavours to disembed them, both in theory and in social practice, are ultimately self-defeating.

Echoing these sentiments, Williams and Zelizer (2005, 368–69) claim that

economic sociology shows that we need to steer away from the question of “to commodify or not to commodify,” and appreciate instead that people strive to define the moral life in a wide variety of social contexts that involve both economic dimensions and socioemotional relationships.

It is important to recognize just how socially embedded commodification is, in order to then appreciate how the term tends to often travel beyond its market-based definition. It is specifically this social quality that allows for the argument that commodification could have the effect of personalizing politics, normalizing nationalism, and producing entrenched stakeholders in territorial sovereignty protection.

Situating commodification in nationalism

Speaking of traveling concepts, commodification has also appeared in discourses on nationalism. In fact, there are roughly three ways that commodification has entered discussions on nationalism, which also provides a kind of genealogy for my

own setup: the *nationalism-as-practice* thread, the *materiality* turn, and research at the intersection of *nationalism and the economy*.

Nationalism as practice

Defining nationalism is a fraught task. There have been several thorny debates in the discourse, ranging from the genesis of nationalism, the genealogy of nations, and the sequence between nations and nationalism,⁹ to name just a few. Realistically, the research agenda here is once removed from these discussions, as the analysis has to account for another variable—public interest—as opposed to staying within a singular conceptual zip code. Hence, because the final goal here is not definitional precision or a definitive account of what nationalism is, I start with a relatively minimalist definition of nationalism; this happens to track with the fact that nationalism is the most *territorial* of all other political ‘isms’ (e.g. liberalism) given its emphasis on defining the nation as a collective within a set of circumscribed borders. According to Barrington (1997, 714), nationalism is “the pursuit—through argument or other activity—of a set of rights for the self-defined members of the nation, including at a minimum, territorial autonomy or sovereignty.”¹⁰ In essence, this entails the *congruence between the political unit of the ‘state’ with the cultural unit of the ‘nation.’*

In addition, the emphasis falls just as much on ‘pursuit’ and ‘activity’ as on territorial autonomy or sovereignty, which leads me to the *nationalism-as-practice* thread.¹¹ The central focus on how nationalism surrounding territorial sovereignty gets commodified into products and services by local entrepreneurs most closely resembles the approach of treating nationhood as a claim rather than a fact so that “we might say that a nation is in the first instance a category of practice, not a category of analysis” (Brubaker 2004, 116). A representative scholar here is Rogers Brubaker; in his words:

Nationalism can and should be understood without invoking “nations” as substantial entities. Instead of focusing on nations as real groups, we should focus on nationhood and nationness, on “nation” as practical category, institutionalized form, and contingent event...To understand nationalism, we have to understand the practical uses of the category “nation,” the ways it can come to structure perception, to inform thought and experience, to organise discourse and political action.

(Brubaker 1996, 7)

In short, rather than ask “what is a nation?” Brubaker has advocated for a shift to “how does the category ‘nation’ work?” (Brubaker 2004, 116). In order to do so, nationalism is viewed as a practice that is contingent and contextual than an attribute of fixed groups and identities. Along those very lines, my approach to describe a continual reproduction of the nation through practices of commodification mirrors those sentiments. Similarly, a pair who has effectively argued for a focus on the everyday practitioners of nationhood is Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008), who have

identified four different ways in which nationhood is produced and reproduced in everyday life:

‘talking the nation’: the discursive construction of the nation through routine talk in interaction... ‘choosing the nation’: nationhood as it is implicated in the decisions ordinary people make... ‘performing the nation’: the production of national sensibilities through the ritual enactment of symbols... ‘consuming the nation’: the constitution and expression of national difference through everyday consumption habits.

(Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, 537–38)

There is no doubt that the nationalism-as-practice discourse has done a great service for our overall understanding of the contingent process of nationalism and its reproduction, and for reinforcing the reality that elites do not hold a monopoly over nationalist narrative—that there is almost always some negotiation that takes place between the elites and the public, sometimes even deflection or subversion on the part of the latter (Edensor 2002, 2006). Ultimately, “the central dynamic of nationalism as practice is a *dialectic* [emphasis added]” (Mylonas and Tudor 2021, 120), between the political elites, on the one hand, and non-state actors, on the other. That the public does not represent passive vessels of nationalist reproduction has to be an important part of explaining nationalist resonance, and a critical part of my own understanding of nationalism. Yet, the agency does not go far enough. The kind of role that the individuals play in the typical nationalism-as-practice discourse tends to be a thickly socio-cultural one so that the reproduction of nationalism is mostly a discursive one than in a tangible sense of actually producing commodities within a marketplace. While my approach owes a lot to the practice thread, the (socially embedded) commodification element makes that leap from viewing the public as practitioners to entrepreneurs of nationalism and thereby expands their self-assertive role to have real visible and material effect.

Materiality

The reference to visibility marks the transition to the discussion regarding materiality. By materiality, I have in mind studies that are concerned with “understanding objects, the ways individuals and groups interact with them, and the ways individuals and groups are constituted in and through the things they use” (Zubrzycki 2017, 4). The key takeaway here is that these works “seek to transcend the dualism between subjects and objects to show how social relations are built in and through the consumption of material culture” (Zubrzycki 2017, 5). It is not hard to see this logic at play through empirical examples. Take Vinalon (Vinylon), the synthetic fiber that earned the title of *chuch’e som* (cotton of self-reliance) (Kim 2012) in North Korea, and effectively raised the status of its inventor, chemist Ri Sŭnggi. In fact, that *chuch’e* (self-reliance) was an all-encompassing descriptor for not only the fabric itself but also the factory of production and the workers within highlights the fluidity in which things and people become integrated. Moreover, consider the

following statement by a North Korean defector within the context of Vinalon production: “We [North Koreans] have this expression—socialism during the day and capitalism at night. That is, politically and what is seen on surface is socialism but beneath the surface, everything people do is capitalistic” (Park and Pearson 2018). Short of complete contradiction, a kind of strong ambivalence exists as capitalist activity co-opts nationalism and displaces its hegemonic rationale of profit for pride; an object stands at the very center of this fascinating co-constitution of matter and meaning. While I myself spend most of the time discussing individuals than commodities per se, the larger framework of materiality is still poignant for its role in highlighting the tangibility of an ‘ism’ such as nationalism.

In fact, the field of anthropology was relatively quick to develop this idea regarding materiality. For instance, the work by Appadurai (1986, 2005) is worth mentioning, as he argues that commodities no longer merely represent markers of exchange value that are drained of any traces of human investment. Rather, Appadurai (2005, 1, 31) explains that “commodities, like persons, have social lives,” and that “consumption is eminently social, relational, and active rather than private, atomic, or passive.” By ascribing a dynamic quality to objects so that we may trace their movements in and out of various social contexts of exchange or “*regimes of value* in space and time” (Appadurai 2005, 4)—that is, follow their ‘social lives’—the objective was to dismantle the Marxian notion that objects move along a singular path of preordained commodification. Succinctly, “the commodity is not one kind of thing rather than another, but one *phase* in the life of some things [emphasis added]” (Appadurai 2005, 17). For instance, he describes how some objects such as heirlooms, antiques, or memorabilia may go through ‘diversion’ so that they may be removed from the path of commodity exchange (Appadurai 2005, 26) (they can, of course, later enter a commodity state if say, economic hardship forces a family to pawn the relics). This aligns quite well with the idea of goods in marketing studies, where goods are embedded thickly in culture, surpassing their utilitarian or commercial value, so that they are “constantly in transit” (McCracken 1986, 71) through the location of meaning starting with the culturally constituted world, to the consumer goods, eventually reaching the individual consumer.

It was probably only a matter of time that nationalism would too, fold in materiality. Why? The ‘nation’—nationalism’s referent—as either a political ideology or social imaginary is an extremely woolly concept that would ostensibly benefit from the realism of objects. In this regard, a text that stands out is the edited volume by Geneviève Zubrzycki called *National Matters*, which aims to “show the importance of matter in making the nation appear real, close, and important to subjects” (Zubrzycki 2017, 1). The volume spans diverse topics, but the most relevant chapter for my purposes is a study of nationalized commodities in postsocialist Hungary by Virág Molnár (2017). In it, Molnár (2017, 148) theorizes about cultural niche economies: specifically, on four sites where radical nationalism gets produced and reproduced: *book publishers, heritage tourism, national rock bands, and clothing brands*. Her emphasis on how both “producers and consumers see commodities as constitutive of national belonging and moral value,” and “political convictions intersect with specialized economic transactions and consumer objects” (Molnár

2017, 154) guides my own research on the intersection of social, economic, political, and material logics.

Still, works like Molnár's are not common. In fact, a bulk of the research on materiality and nationalism or nationhood tends to examine *consumption* practices of objects or symbols as opposed to the *production* side (Pérez 2018). To be exact, there seems to be no alignment of *objects* with *experiences*, so that it becomes possible to talk about the simultaneous experience of both consuming and producing nationhood, or to make that jump from *objects* to *commodities*. In order to analyze nationalist practice through commodities, we need to take seriously how politics and economics interact; this is where I turn to next.

Nationalism and economy

Once we accept that nationalism can be a practice and that materiality matters, the market becomes an ideal platform for new forms of human interaction rather than a mere site for pecuniary exchange: the market becomes a new space that facilitates political engagement, “a site of cognitive value,” that can be “good for thinking and acting in a meaningful way that renews social life” (Canclini 2001). For instance, some have examined the commodification of ethnic identity or *ethnopreneurialism* in the global marketplace and how commodification of culture means more than simply an alienation of its producers, but rather, an “open-ended dialectic in which, under the impress of the market, human subjects and cultural objects produce, reproduce, and refashion each other” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 28–29). In short, the market actually provides an opportune space for *extra-economic* activity. Objects can hold meaning beyond exchange value and transform both consumption and production from an isolated and independent activity to one that is social and interdependent. Although, even this strict compartmentalization of independent versus interdependent no longer matters as much with increasing cross-cultural research (Güliz and Belk 1996).

One of the first ways that nationalism became thoroughly intertwined with the economy was through the concept of *economic nationalism*: generally, invoking ideas about trade protectionism and autarky, and programs that basically secure the economic interests of individual nations. It is worth mentioning that while its earlier usage hinted at some antithetical relationship to economic liberalism, there has been increasing nuance that has debunked the thinking that policies might fall under economic nationalism simply because they deviate from economic liberalism (Helleiner 2002): by demonstrating the ways that national identity affects economic policy so that economic nationalism actually manifests itself through a variety of divergent policies, Abdelal (2005) illustrates how economic nationalism is not synonymous with mercantilism. Typically, research on economic nationalism has been top-down, with a strong focus on the apparatus of the state and its concomitant policy outputs, which among other things places this subset of the literature at clear odds with my own emphasis on reading up through the people.

Yet another top-heavy literature but one that closes the distance a bit between the market and the public is ‘commercial nationalism’: “the use of nationalism to

sell (or gain ratings) [by the media] and the use of commercial strategies by public sector entities to foster nationalism and national agendas” (Volcic and Andrejevic 2016, 2). This is founded on the recognition that globalization has “marketized state forms of governance” so that nationalism entails “corporate thinking (in the era of ‘the enterprise state’) and combines patriotic emotional ideas with marketing goals, integrating commercial and national appeals” (Volcic and Andrejevic 2016, 4). A prototypical example here is the practice of nation-branding and the use of the commercial sector to ‘sell’ the state—or in Volcic and Andrejevic’s (2016, 4) formulation, also ‘nationalizing the sell.’ Crudely, while this captures the integration of nationalism and commodification, the focus remains, for the most part, on the government (as synonymous with the state) and the offloading of market reconstitution of the nation to large institutionalized commercial entities such as media outlets and advertising companies. Again, my own focus shifts more toward the micro-processes initiated by individual or local entrepreneurs, with the locus of economic activity embedded in the public rather than the state.

There are also more bottom-up approaches to the nationalism-economy interface. A representative discourse here is the various discussions regarding *consumers* that coalesce under the umbrella heading of *consumer nationalism*, “a set of discourses and practices that attach national significance to consumer objects (goods, services)” (Castelló and Mihelj 2018, 563). These said discourses and practices involve what Castelló and Mihelj (2018, 563) refer to as “discursive means” that can take on “different communicative forms” ranging from “adverts, packaging, product design and direct social interaction,” along with tools such as explicit national symbols like flags or national landscapes. Hence, there is a strong link to both *consumer culture*, in viewing consumption as an instrument of both identification and differentiation (or belonging and exclusion), but also a tie to *political consumerism*, in treating consumer choices as influenced by political considerations like nationalist beliefs. While consumer nationalism echoes a key tenet of economic and commercial nationalism in viewing economic practice as a critical marker of statehood, at least in the case of contemporary consumer nationalism research, there seems to be an emphasis on individuals and the everyday replication of that expression of statehood.

To illustrate using a couple of examples, Özkan and Foster (2005) have examined the instance of ‘Cola Turka’—a soft drink reminiscent of Cola—that was released in Turkey in 2003.¹² They argue that Cola Turka is an instance of ‘neoliberal nationalism’ or “a mode of defining the nation in terms of its capacity to compete on a par with other modern nations in the global economy” (Özkan and Foster 2005). In so doing, they actually look more outward, so that Cola Turka is treated as an effort to solidify a ‘global Turkishness’ that pushes forth a global civic identity that also promises economic and cultural membership in a neoliberal cosmopolitan landscape (Özkan and Foster 2005). In fact, Turkey has been a particularly productive area for such research, with Kuryel’s (2015, 12) work examining the reproduction and performance of nationalist *images* in Turkey, and how these images “provide an especially productive ground to analyze the contested and negotiated dynamics of national identity production and community formation in everyday

life in contemporary Turkey.” Her discussion spans familiar commodities as that of flag-shaped necklace pendants or rings carrying images of Atatürk, but also ‘bio-images’ that become part and parcel of the human body, such as tattoos, and flags made out of blood (Kuryel 2015, 59–97). Others like Adaş (2003) have examined the producers behind the commodification, such as the Islamic entrepreneurs in Turkey and their negotiation of Islam with capitalism. Özyürek’s (2006) research is a critical companion to Kuryel’s as it points out that “an important factor that led to the commercialization and privatization of Atatürk imagery in the 1990s was the emergence of Islamic symbols in the public political market”¹³ (apparently, Islam’s appearance itself was aided through commodification of various symbols).

In sum, the literature on nationalism and the economy is pivotal for reinforcing the importance of economic activity and practice for some dimension of political identity, whether the main agent in question is a government entity, a corporate actor, or individual consumers. This recognition of permeability between economics and politics, and of the public and private realms is extremely valuable for my own approach to commodification of nationalism. In a way, this book extends the discourse by expanding the role of the consumer to have entrepreneurial agency in the material production of nationalism, explicitly folding in a dialectic relationship between government and non-governmental actors, and theorizing beyond the expression/consumption/practice of nationalism by inserting another variable, which in my case is public interest on territorial sovereignty.

Leverage of integrating commodification with nationalism

As illustrated so far, the theoretical foundation of this book borrows from many discussions that straddle multiple disciplines: economics, politics, business and marketing, anthropology, and history, to name a few. At its core, the value of integrating commodification with nationalism within the context of territorial sovereignty is a renewed capacity to reveal and frame *agency*—chiseling the state out of abstraction to identify *who does what and how* in the transmission of nationalist sentiment. In doing so, the book not only spotlights the role of the general public and everyday acts that contribute to the nationalist state agenda but also specifies exactly how we as the public matter. After all, nationalism ultimately rests on the voluntary choice of its members—not ascription. In that sense, the fact that commodification combines dual economic and political motives of profits and membership solidifies the appeal of nationalism. Most importantly, what could be called the masses here are not simply consumers but also active *producers* of nationalism as entrepreneurs that partake in the commodification effort. This contrasts with some of the discourses that I already mentioned that attach a singular identity to the public so that they are either producers or consumers, but not both.¹⁴ The ability for the public to simultaneously wear two hats in production and consumption of nationalism is significant as it bridges the traditional bifurcation of a top-down or bottom-up approach—one that is also evident in the literature on nationalism. Top-down approaches—with representative scholars like Gellner (2008) and Anderson (2006)—theorize that the state or its elites are at the center

of propagating nationalism so that the power moves from the core (state) to the periphery (society). Hence, mediums of nationalism tend to reside with the state, such as state-led education campaigns or propaganda. Alternatively, bottom-up modes—as embodied by Brubaker (2006) and Fox (2004, 2006, 2007)—emphasize the masses and the significance of everyday practices that consume nationalist symbols and cultures, such as music and the arts.

The inclination to permanently identify certain actors as producers and consumers perpetuates the idea that top-down approaches are predominantly political, while bottom-up is cultural. Moreover, cultural approaches including nationalist iconography, architecture, and art, are unfortunately often devoid of discussions about market forces. For those that do actually account for commodification—particularly from the view of ‘everyday’ or ‘street-level’ nationalism—there is an underspecification of the ties that bind the government with the life of the everyday citizenry that would correspond to the convergence of the state and the market (or politics and economics). In accounts like the ‘elite manipulation’ strand (Brown 2000; Gagnon Jr. 1994/95; Van Evera 1994) that only focus on nationalism sans commodification, the public is treated as mostly pawns in the state’s game.¹⁵ In this latter’s case, the rigidity of the division of labor between who does what in consuming and producing of nationalism flies in the face of commodification; it is *all* politics and no economics. We encounter a situation where each research agenda provides a full account of one actor or the other but not both at the same time, and hence, politics and economics rarely co-exist. In this regard, the commodification of nationalism not only clarifies the ‘who does what and how’ but also provides a clear fodder for thinking about whether the relationship between the government and the public is disjointed/antagonistic or complementary/symbiotic, as well as how the market cannot be conceived without the non-market political and social elements that shape and constrain it.

A part of why agency and the process of nationalist transmission have remained underspecified might be symptomatic of the uncontested belief that nationalism almost always *works*, which means that both the way and means in which nationalism reaches its audience are also taken for granted. Unfortunately, the discipline of political science and IR has probably been the worst offender of this, having relied on the largely unchallenged assumption that elites are able to earn the public’s favor by resorting to nationalist tactics and rhetoric. Are we to believe in a sort of ‘Immaculate Conception’ that once the words leave the mouths of such leaders in the form of ‘myth-making’ they magically carry an invisible potency that organically penetrates the right wavelengths of individuals so as to make them susceptible to political maneuvering?¹⁶ And through what mechanism do those ‘myths’ reach their intended audience? Are these channels actually effective? Without a clear specification as to how this happens, the argument itself becomes prone to more attacks on its fundamental rationale:

On the contrary...appeals to nationalism are actually a highly unreliable way for elites to attract popular support...Individuals with ethnic identities neither automatically nor routinely become nationalist at the command of ethnic

entrepreneurs. I find instead that it is possible for individuals to genuinely and intensely identify with a particular ethnicity but neither automatically support a nationalist program nor respond to nationalist elites' appeals for statehood or the subjugation of an ethnic other.

(Giuliano 2011, 25)

The fact that nationalism and its actual transmission remain under-theorized somewhat matches the elusive form that it often takes. This book would argue that commodification can certainly counteract some of these challenges that nationalism poses. Specifically, one of the benefits of integrating commodification with nationalism is that it spotlights the fundamental role of agency; an important corollary to the idea that agency matters is the need to not assume public interest in territoriality. If there is *someone* that is sustaining the resonance, there is also a reason to think that interest is not monotonic throughout time. To borrow Özkirimli (2003, 350) here, “there is nothing inevitable in people’s responses to nationalist agitations. Resonance should not be assumed or taken for granted, it should be problematized.” Put succinctly, *there is nothing organic about public interest in contested territory*. This is the premise motivating the contents of the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 There have been others who have focused on civil society organizations as well as artists, e.g. Chun (2016) or Lewis (2016).
- 2 In this third wave, some have even approached the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute through the foci of “desires, drives, and cultural fantasies” in unpacking the nationalism through Lacanian psychoanalysis (Szeto 2009, 176).
- 3 An exemplary case here is the work by Nina C. Krickel-Choi and Ching-Chang Chen (2023, 3). They use Ontological Security Studies or OSS to argue that “the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands took on a different meaning for the ROC [Republic of China], from an area for resource exploitation to a symbol of ROK autonomous selfhood, as it made use of the emerging dispute to reassert its statehood vis-a-vis the PRC.” In short, they see the Straits relations as being pivotal to understanding why PRC-Japan conflict has become so entrenched.
- 4 Bukh also makes the point that until the early 2000s, neither the Korean nor the Japanese government really engaged in propaganda on Dokdo/Takeshima; hence, greater rationale for honing in on private citizens and their efforts (this simultaneously reinforces the earlier idea about tensions being relatively new).
- 5 For an outline of this debate, see Comelieu (2002, 21–23).
- 6 There is also growing interest in the general trend toward commodification of the ‘death industry,’ particularly in countries with high aging populations and low fertility rates such as Japan.
- 7 Comelieu (2002, 45) has claimed that “wherever market rationality acquires dominance, it transform *social relations in their entirety*. Resting as it does upon private appropriation and competition, it entails individualist rivalry far more than mutual support as the basis for relations among the members of a society. It thus has a destructive impact on the social fabric itself.”
- 8 As Polanyi (1935, 375) states, the social relations between people in market capitalism are “hidden behind the exchange of goods; it is impersonal; it expresses itself in the objective guise of the exchange value of commodities; it is objective, thing-like.”

- 9 For a good overview of the different theories of nationalism, see Özkirimli (2000). For a glimpse of some of the key debates in the modern period, see the entire issue of *Nations and Nationalism* 2(3) (1996): 357–481. For important modern foundational texts, see the multiple publications on nationalism by Benedict Anderson, John Breuilly, Rogers Brubaker, Craig Calhoun, Earnest Clifford Geertz, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, John Hutchinson, Elie Kedourie, Edward Shils, and Anthony Smith.
- 10 All nationalisms, therefore, share two features: “(1) they define, at least roughly, the territorial boundaries that the nation has a right to control and (2) they define the membership boundaries of the population that makes up the nation—the group that deserves this territorial control and that is entitled to the supreme loyalty of other members of the collective” (Barrington 1997, 714).
- 11 For a good introduction, see Goode (2020).
- 12 For an interesting look at the global ‘soft drink commodyscape,’ see Foster (2002, 151–74).
- 13 Özyürek (2006, 97–98) mentions an interesting example that captures this tension: “Thus, the popular Bismillahirrahmanirrahim (in the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful) stickers that existed as car decorations to protect the automobile or remind the drivers to cite God’s name before starting the engine, transitioned into new stickers in the 1990s which read ‘Peace is in Islam’ (‘Huzur Islamdadir’) and were located in the rear window rather than the front panel, and thus directed toward people outside the car, rather than those inside.”
- 14 A good example here is the fascinating book on food and nationalism by Ichijo and Ranta (2015), which is compartmentalized such that the ‘unofficial/bottom-up’ segment is structurally distinct from the ‘official/top-down’ section.
- 15 There are findings that have even problematized the orthodoxy concerning elite manipulation of nationalism. For instance, Giuliano (2011, 25) has found that “On the contrary...appeals to nationalism are actually a highly unreliable way for elites to attract popular support...Individuals with ethnic identities neither automatically nor routinely become nationalist at the command of ethnic entrepreneurs.”
- 16 For more on this framework of ‘Immaculate Conception,’ see Bang (2017).

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