

## Why Was Nationalism European? Political Community in Asia and Europe 1400-1850

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### Nationalism: Seeking a Wider Context

How shall we compare pre-modern Europe and Asia? Responding to current shifts in global power (and thus perhaps illustrating the aphorism that all history is contemporary), historians in recent years have sought three correctives to the view that deep seated structural differences rendered European societies inherently more dynamic. Some have decided that European industrialization was a contingent, late elaboration of widespread Eurasian patterns. Others have made similar claims for European military advances. And yet others, myself included, have argued that European and Asian states followed similar integrative trajectories.

My current project grows from this third approach, but considers a question that focuses more narrowly on political culture: Between 1400 and 1830 how did societies across Eurasia conceive of political community? I see nationalism -- arguably the central ideology of the last two centuries -- as a peculiar elaboration of a more general phenomenon apparent in both Europe and Asia long before 1789. I thus seek to modify an historiography of nationalism whose overwhelming preoccupation with the modern West and post-colonial Asia entails, I believe, a fair degree of myopia.

By definition, modernist scholars of nationalism emphasize late 18th- and 19th-century rupture. Whereas earlier thought vested sovereignty in the person of the king, nationalism located it in an invisible "people" who were transformed from subjects into citizens; and whereas earlier societies were irreducibly hierarchical, nations posited legal equality and horizontal community. Pre-modern states absorbed territories with scant regard for local culture; but the nation was idealized as a culturally homogeneous population occupying an ancestral homeland. Pre-national loyalties were both religiously universal and local, but nations carved out a space between the universal and the local. Underlying these multiform transformations, scholars like Karl Deutsch, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, E.J. Hobsbawm, and John Breuilly insist, were social processes that appeared in Europe only in the late 18th- and more especially during the 19th-century: military conscription, national schooling, rapid occupational mobility; industrial communications, consumerism, and standardization.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge, MA, 1966); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, rev. ed, 1991); E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge, 1992); John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago, 2nd ed., 1993); idem, "Changes in the Political Uses of the Nation." in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer, eds., *Power and the Nation in European History*, (Cambridge, 2005), 69-101; Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003).

If, distilling the above views, we define the "nation" as a population whose members claim the following features -- political sovereignty, civic equality, a discrete independent territory, and a distinct secular culture -- I readily agree that such an animal did not exist before the late 18th century.

And yet if this constellation cohered only in the mid- or late 18th century, critical elements surely had a longer history. European medievalists have not hesitated to invoke "nation" and "nationhood" to describe pre-1450 concepts of regnal loyalty. To be sure, in their revisionist enthusiasm they usually fail to note the episodic, often elitist nature of medieval patriotism and its habitual subordination to dynastic and religious themes. Yet we can accept that in some contexts a kingdom's inhabitants saw themselves as a community of distinct custom and descent.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in 16th-17th century English and Dutch thought, scholars have identified discursive features which, while not yet truly secular or egalitarian, anticipated yet more clearly nationalism's insistent yoking of state and local culture. Philip Gorski, for example, has pointed to Dutch beliefs that the world consisted of distinctive peoples and that there was an organic unity between "state," "people," and "nation." By 1650 these terms, he argued, had acquired much of their modern meaning.<sup>3</sup>

To this discursive inventory I would add a centuries-long tendency, also anticipating nationalist practice, to invoke cultural traits as a badge of political allegiance. Visible as early as the 12th century in both Eastern and Western Europe, such traits could be secular, involving language, dress, cuisine, folksongs, and so forth, or they could invoke a privileged relation to the deity. Far from being incompatible, Christian commitment and claims to ethnic superiority often were mutually reinforcing.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than dwell exclusively on post-1750 rupture, seminal though it was, is it not useful therefore to see nationalism as a peculiarly ambitious, non-hierarchical version of an older phenomenon that might be termed "political ethnicity"? Ethnicity I define as a set of distinctive cultural traits and symbols shared by a named population. Such traits become "political" when one or more elements are used to proclaim membership in a state-centered collectivity eager to secure resources for its members.

Continuity looms yet larger if we consider social dynamics. The emphasis on urban industrial mobilization in Deutsch, Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Breuilly

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Reynolds, "The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community," in Scales and Zimmer, *Power and the Nation*, 54-66; idem, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900-1300* (Oxford, 1997); Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* (Oxford, 1996); Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson, and Alan Murray, eds., *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leeds, 1995); Azar Gat, *Nations* (Cambridge, 2013); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood* (Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Philip Gorski, "The Mosaic Moment," *The American Journal of Sociology* 105, 5 (2000): 1428-1468. For similar views see Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), ch. 1; Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood* (Chicago, 1992); Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge, 1996); Linda Gregerson, "Native Tongues," *Zentrum zur Erforschung der Fruhen Neuzeit* (June 1995): 18-38

<sup>4</sup> See Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2003, 2009), vol. 1, ch. 2.

explains how recognizably nationalist doctrines, once formulated, spread after 1850, but fails to explain how such doctrines arose in the pre-industrial 16th, 17th, or 18th century. Nor does Anderson's oft-cited emphasis on print media as a spur to vernacular standardization, hence national consciousness, suffice. The truth is that in many West European realms culture/ethnicity was being standardized and politicized through saints' cults, royal patronage, new market systems, oral and written channels at least 300 years before the first printing press. Moreover, while referring *en passant* to "print-capitalism," Anderson fails to embed printing itself in broader early modern processes of commercial intensification. By increasing the range and speed with which people and ideas circulated, commodification not only enhanced the accessibility of printed materials. With growing force after 1500, it also drove peasants to the market, widened exposure to supra-local information both oral and printed, and pulled local communities into more extended knowledge networks. Finally, a combination of rising literacy -- itself a function not merely of print, but of market integration -- and pre-industrial urbanization helped shift political authority from the crown to educated public opinion, that is, the "nation." The halting gradual nature of these change helps to explain why, although printing itself was in place by the late 1400s, true nationalism did not develop for another three centuries.

In the same way that nationalism and pre-1750 political solidarities may be seen as sub-categories of political ethnicity, should we not conclude that 19th-century industrial communications offered a remarkably powerful version of integrative processes underway since the late medieval era? So far as I know, despite its obvious logic, no scholar has made this claim for centuries-long processual -- as opposed to intellectual -- continuity. Karl Deutsch's classic *Nationalism and Social Communication* remains a 19th-century orphan.

But if our understanding of political ethnicity suffers from temporal segmentation, it suffers even more obviously from geographic restriction. Such discussions of nationalist antecedents as we have focus almost entirely on Europe, to the utter neglect of Asia. In part, this neglect reflects the priority historians have given to economic comparisons between Europe and Asia, and in part the fact that vast imperial size and persistent domination by Inner Asian nomads rendered India, China, and Southwest Asia unpromising sites for vertical solidarity. Elsewhere I have discussed the impediments that tiny Inner Asian conquest elites posed to political ethnicity or proto-nationalism in what I term the "exposed zone" of Eurasia. There was, however, a second category of Asian polities that had rather more in common with Europe and, along with Europe, comprised what I term Eurasia's "protected zone," protected, that is, by geography against Inner Asian nomads. Principally this meant Western and Northern Europe, Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia. In these areas smaller political units, freedom from Inner Asian conquest, and a correspondingly modest cultural gap between rulers and subjects favored a stronger sense of inclusion.<sup>5</sup>

The striking point is that although the protected rimlands, ranged around Eurasia's farthest extremities, had minimal contact with one another, political ethnicities throughout this zone showed basic similarities in chronology,

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<sup>5</sup> See discussion of exposed and protected zones in Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 2.

dynamics, and symbolic function. What we now call Burma, Siam, Vietnam, Japan, France, Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, Russia, and so forth all became coherent cultural domains only between 1400 and 1800, and with particular force after 1650. In each case ethnic, linguistic, and religious usages associated with central elites spread down the social scale and horizontally across the landscape. Especially along the frontiers, such features became emblems of political affiliation.

In these ways between 1400 and 1850 political ethnicity in the rimlands of Asia and Europe prefigured in varying degrees those symbolic claims to unity and that progressive incorporation which became central to 19th-century European nationalism. But why should kindred dynamics have operated in regions that had no contact with one another? How could communal solidarity coexist with social hierarchy? How was religious universalism reconciled with cultural particularism? And why ultimately did Western Europe alone among protected zone states produce nations as defined above?

The intertwined goals of this essay, then, are three-fold: First, to identify in Europe continuities and cleavages between early modern and modern (i.e. post-1750) ideologies. Second, to chart and explain between 1400 and 1850 the politicization of ethnicity in parts of both Europe and Asia. Third, to explain how, despite comparable chronologies and dynamics, substantive understandings of political community in some West European and some East Asian realms grew farther apart. Obviously, there was no "typical" European or Asian society. Here I focus on two case studies, the British Isles and Burma, which I have chosen because I read old Burmese, because at the start of our period both kingdoms were of comparable size, population, and regional importance; and because their trajectories were remarkably similar. But this is merely an entree to a broader study that will include, along with Burma and Britain, France, China, Vietnam, and Japan. The degree to which Britain and Burma represented wider regional patterns therefore remains to be seen. My work on Britain, in particular, is still at a very early stage and I welcome critical feedback.

A final caveat: In so far as they failed to anticipate European-style nationalism, I'm not suggesting that Asian societies were guilty of some sort of long-term historic failure -- hardly a beguiling thesis now that China seems set to inherit the 21st century. Western Europe did not embody the only form of political modernity because the defining feature of the early modern state, I would argue, was not popular sovereignty, but administrative capacity and local penetration. These elements were by no means restricted to Europe.<sup>6</sup> My argument is less invidious: I seek merely to show how between 1400 and 1850 two polities on the far reaches of Eurasia developed different views of community at the same time as they responded to similar pressures in analogous, but hitherto unrecognized, ways.

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<sup>6</sup> A view put forth independently in Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, "Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England," in Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, eds., *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester, UK, 2007), 17; and in Lieberman *Strange Parallels*, vol. 2.

### The Dynamics of Ethnic Politicization

Let's begin, then, by considering Burmese-British resemblances. In both realms political ethnicity between c. 1400 and 1850 cohered through the synergy of five factors: a) economic expansion to the political benefit of emergent cores; b) more rapid cultural circulation that also privileged central districts; c) movements of social and political pacification, which strengthened in-group solidarity; d) rising interstate warfare, which bolstered out-group exclusion; e) state efforts to define and police cultural boundaries.

Notwithstanding ever more glaring discrepancies in monetization and urbanization, both Britain and Burma enjoyed long-term increases in population and output. Between 1450 and 1800 the population of England, Wales, and Scotland roughly tripled to 9.7 million, while that of Burma may have doubled to 4 million. Burma as well as Britain benefited from Smithian specialization and at least limited progress at the margins of technology. In Europe and Southeast Asia alike, albeit more dramatically in Europe after 1550, maritime trade spurred commodification by introducing New World silver, novel crops, and consumer goods, and by fostering exports, boosting wage rates, and concentrating urban demand.<sup>7</sup>

Such growth tended to multiply in cumulative fashion the political authority of densely populated districts, primarily the fertile fields of southeastern England and the Irrawaddy basin, over less favored areas, namely northern and western England, Scotland, Ireland, and a vast upland zone surrounding the Irrawaddy lowlands.<sup>8</sup> Even if the center and the periphery had grown at the same pace, the core's initial economic superiority ensured a constantly increasing absolute advantage. But in fact, given the concentration of foreign trade, population, and patronage in each core, growth rates in the center tended to exceed those in outer zones, with obvious military and political implications. Not only the scale, but the nature of each political economy changed. Both Britain and Burma saw sustained movements from subsistence to market production, and from service obligations and land grants to cash taxes and cash remuneration. Over the long term such changes dramatically enhanced revenue extraction and central control of appointed officials and

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<sup>7</sup> On broad demographic and economic trends, Gervase Rosser, "The Quality of Life," in Ralph Griffiths, ed., *The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 2003), 31-57; J.A. Sharpe, "Economy and Society," in Patrick Collinson, ed., *The Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 2002), 17-44; J.A. Sharpe, "The Economic and Social Context," in Jenny Wormald, ed., *The Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 2008), 151-81; Martin Daunton, "The Wealth of the Nation," in Paul Langford, ed., *The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2002), 141-180; E.A. Wrigley, *Poverty, Progress, and Population* (Cambridge, 2004); Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge, 2009); Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England* (Cambridge, 1996); Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, *Atlas of World Population History* (New York, 1980), 41-49; Victor Lieberman, "Secular Trends in Burmese Economic History, c. 1350-1830," *Modern Asian Studies* 25, 1 (1991): 1-31; idem, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 1, ch. 2; Michael Aung-Thwin, *Irrigation in the Heartland of Burma* (DeKalb, IL, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> By the same logic, however, lowland Scotland enjoyed a growing advantage over the Highlands, eastern over western Ireland, and Shan valleys over higher-elevation districts in what is now northern and northeastern Burma.

hereditary notables. Yet in both realms the rising importance of mobile wealth often made provincial elites themselves eager to strengthen the crown's capacity to regulate trade, standardize litigation, redistribute revenues, and maintain social order.<sup>9</sup> In Burma by helping the crown monopolize European and Muslim firearms, maritime trade provided a further vital aid to centralization.

At the same time as commerce swelled central resources, it accelerated the circulation of cultural artifacts to the benefit once again of core districts. Here then was a second spur to political and, ultimately, ethnic integration. In frontier areas of Ireland, Wales, and Lower Burma, English and Burmese settlers expelled, marginalized, and assimilated alien populations. Cultural standardization also advanced, albeit less violently, in long-settled districts, where seasonal migrants, peddlers, entertainers, and peasant producers helped diffuse town customs to the countryside. At a higher social level and over longer distances, the royal court, elite schools, and social connections drew to each capital a stream of provincial notables who, on returning home, introduced central religious practices, fashions, dialects, and ethnic markers. Thus even as elite and plebeian cultures remained in varying degrees distinct, in both Britain and Burma practices among provincial and capital elites converged. Moreover, in the 18th and 19th centuries an unprecedentedly vigorous consumer culture began to erode vertical social distinctions in Britain and, to a lesser extent, coastal Southeast Asia.

Of critical importance to cultural diffusion in both Britain and Burma was enhanced literacy. Incentives to literacy were multiple. Governments demanded more local record-keepers. Religious reform bred a hunger for textual authority. Literacy promised social mobility. Economic growth provided the wherewithal for schools and teachers, lent reading greater practical value, and opened paths along which written materials could migrate. Major vernacular-language works appeared some 300 years earlier in England than in Burma, but in both

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<sup>9</sup> For overviews of English/British political evolution, see *inter alia* Richard Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000-1500* (Cambridge, 2nd ed., 1996); Griffiths, *Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*; Collinson, *Sixteenth Century*; Wormald, *Seventeenth Century*; Langford, *Eighteenth Century*; Colin Matthew, ed., *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2000); Michael Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England c. 1550-1700* (Cambridge, 2000); Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch* (Oxford, 1985); Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550-1640* (New York, 2002); Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England 1485-1714* (Malden, MA, 2009); Lake and Pincus, *Politics of the Public Sphere*; Brian Levack, *The Formation of the British State* (Oxford, 1987); Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, 2009); Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer, eds., *Uniting the Kingdom?* (London, 1995); Jo Guldi, *Roads to Power* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power* (Cambridge, MA, 1988); Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed* (London, 1996); Linda Colley, *Britons* (New Haven, rev. ed., 2009); Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People* (Oxford, 1998); J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1660-1832* (Cambridge, 2nd ed., 2000); Michael Bentley, *Politics Without Democracy 1815-1914* (Oxford, 2nd ed., 1996). On Burmese state formation, Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 1, ch. 2; idem, *Burmese Administrative Cycles* (Princeton, 1984); Michael Aung-Thwin, *The Mists of Ramanna* (Honolulu, 2005); idem, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma* (Honolulu, 1985); idem and Maitrii Aung-Thwin, *A History of Myanmar since Ancient Times* (London, 2012); William Koenig, *The Burmese Polity 1752-1819* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1990).

realms the 16th and 17th centuries saw a notable expansion in vernacular writing (at the expense of Latin, French, or Pali) for commercial, religious, scholarly, and literary purposes. Remarkably, although printing was more rapid and efficient than manuscript production, by 1800 widespread monastic education in Burma supported male literacy rates higher than in England. In both realms sermons and public readings widened substantially the ranks of illiterates exposed to written information.<sup>10</sup>

Along with economic-cum-political centralization and cultural circulation, a third spur to ethnic unity, broadly synchronized between Britain and Burma, was a reduction in intra-communal violence. Most obviously, this was a function of political pacification, which, as I have suggested, benefited from commercial shifts. Steven Pinker has linked pacification to trade more indirectly by suggesting that stronger market ties joined modest improvements in living standards to expand the circle of reciprocity, to magnify the value of human life, and to reduce domestic homicides and mayhem. In England this reduction is documented from the early 1500s.<sup>11</sup> Formalizing and sanctifying such changes were textually-based movements of religious reform, which benefited from rising literacy and commerce but which also expressed a self-sufficient internal logic. By promoting self-discipline and community obligation, from the early 1500s both the Protestant Reformation and Sinhalese-based Theravada purification helped to align personal salvation with public welfare, to fuse religious obligation with communal loyalty, and thus in the long run (strident English sectarianism notwithstanding) to strengthen ethnic cohesion. In physical terms, religious reform created infrastructures -- schools, churches, Buddhist monasteries, models of family organization -- that compensated for the yet limited reach of officialdom. In political terms, these same shifts strengthened the chief ethnicity by nurturing claims to superiority over "backward" minorities within (e.g., the Irish and Burmese hill peoples) and neighboring peoples without. This then was a double exclusion. But, ironically, insofar as minority elites sometimes internalized central pretensions, reform increased the potential for inter-ethnic cooperation.<sup>12</sup> In Britain, but not Burma, religion fused

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<sup>10</sup> On long-term cultural integration, including literacy, in the British Isles, see the volumes edited by Griffiths, Collinson, Wormald, Langford, and Matthew in n. 9 *supra*, plus David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order* (Cambridge, 1980); David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 1989); Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2003); John Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English* (Oxford, 2008); John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (Chicago, 1997), pt. VI; Albert Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language* (London, 6th ed., 2013); Victor Edward Durkacz, *The Decline of the Celtic Languages* (Edinburgh, 2013); John Patrick Montano, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland* (Cambridge, 2011); S.J. Connolly, *Divided Kingdom* (Oxford, 2008), esp. chs. 7, 8; Colley, *Britons*; Corrigan and Sayer, *Great Arch*. On cultural trends in Burma, see sources in n. 9 *supra* and Victor Lieberman, "Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma", *Modern Asian Studies* 12, 3 (1978): 455-82.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (New York, 2011), 60-63.

<sup>12</sup> Philip Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution* (Chicago, 2003); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York, 2005); Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Nigel Smith, *A Collection of Ranter Writings* (London, 2014); Anthony Marx, *Faith in Nation* (Cambridge, 2005); Braddick, *State Formation*, pt. IV; and n. 10 *supra*.

with quasi-secular movements of personal cultivation: from the late 15th through the late 17th century with elite humanism and gentry civility, and during the 18th century with a more broadly based current that Peter Borsay terms the "culture of improvement."<sup>13</sup>

As polities, benefiting from economic and cultural integration, expanded their territories, warfare grew more sustained and administratively taxing. Warfare, our fourth dynamic, reinforced the homogenizing effect of religious/cultural reform by strengthening the state and by sharpening in-group/out-group boundaries through ethnic stereotypes and tales of communal danger and salvation. As early as the 14th and 15th centuries, although Plantagenet goals were dynastic rather than national, their French and Scottish campaigns bred periodic expressions of anti-French fervor. Yet more obviously, during the grueling Anglo-French wars of 1689 to 1815, self-congratulatory contrasts between Protestant truth and popish "superstition, servitude, and poverty" helped English, Welsh, and Scots (but not the Catholic Irish) forge a novel overarching British identity. Likewise in the Irrawaddy basin and surrounding areas, where the scale and frequency of warfare increased notably between 1550 and 1810, Burmese of all ranks opposed their "sturdy masculinity" to the "effeteness" and "religious infidelity" of their foes, some of whom fell victim to racial massacres.

Finally, as interstate competition valorized regnal cohesion and as state capacities expanded, each state sought to define and to police cultural norms. In keeping with their soteriological *raison d'être*, both Christian and Buddhist regimes sought to suppress religiously suspect minorities, to purify texts, and to enforce orthodox observance. To these religious homogenizing programs must be added efforts to unify lay status hierarchies; to define artistic, architectural, and literary standards; and to spread the language of the capital to provincial courts. Less intentionally, by defining themselves as arbiters of taste and by appealing to a combination of snobbery and ambition, Ava (the Burmese capital) and London afforded provincial elites an incentive to engage in what might be termed self-Burmanization and self-Anglicization. The critical element in both official and locally spontaneous transformations was an exemplary center that could define and epitomize cultural excellence<sup>14</sup>

In the British Isles, as in western mainland Southeast Asia, the period 900-1320 saw an initial extension of central culture.<sup>15</sup> After an era of devolution, integration in both realms resumed in the late 15th century and accelerated from 1600 to 1850. Why these dynamics should have been synchronized not only between the British Isles and Southeast Asia, but across

<sup>13</sup> Peter Borsay, "The Culture of Improvement," in Langford, *Eighteenth Century*. See too Philip Morgan, "Ranks of Society," in Griffiths, *Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*; Greg Walker, "The Renaissance in Britain," in Collinson, *Sixteenth Century*; Sharpe, "Economy and Society"; Braddick, *State Formation*, 337-47, 422-32; Sharpe, "Economic and Social Context"; Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 169-72.

<sup>14</sup> See n. 10 *supra*.

<sup>15</sup> Aung-Thwin, Pagan; R.R. Davies, *The First English Empire* (Oxford, 2000). But on the transformation in this period of English culture itself, see Hugh Thomas, *The English & the Normans* (Oxford, 2003).



much of Eurasia is a problem I have sought to address at some length elsewhere. Suffice it to say that coordination reflected the interplay of hemispheric climate, epidemics, the spread of European-style firearms, and expanding global trade, including New World bullion flows.<sup>16</sup>

### *The Progress of Ethnic Consolidation and Politicization*

In response to these forces, in Britain and Burma from 1400 to 1850 political ethnicity underwent three broad transformations. First, ethnicity in each core grew more horizontally and vertically coherent, while core ethnicity expanded to new districts. Second, in outlying zones that retained distinct ethnicities, the cultural practices of the center nonetheless acquired greater cachet. Third, ethnicity grew more overtly political and figured more prominently in official discourse. I'll sketch these changes for each realm.

Western mainland Southeast Asia in the 15th century was split between tribal peoples in the mountains surrounding the Irrawaddy basin, Shans in sparsely settled mountain valleys north and east of the basin, Burmese and minor ethnic groups in the northern basin itself (Upper Burma), and Mons in the southern basin (Lower Burma). Each group in turn was divided by dialect, custom, and political affiliation. Whereas in the 13th century the northern empire of Pagan had enjoyed a nominal regional authority, by 1450 the region supported some 13 rival kingdoms.<sup>17</sup>

With accelerating force between 1500 and 1825, however, the map was utterly recast. Under a succession of Burmese dynasties the entire region came under one suzerainty and the population of the basin became overwhelmingly Burmese. In Upper Burma -- the historic home of Burmese-speakers, the most populous sector of the western mainland, and thus the traditional center of political gravity -- Burmese-speakers coalesced to assume a more unified, militant, expressly Buddhist identity. After c. 1530 a re-energized Burmese-led state expanded to subdue both upland and lowland minorities, among whom the Mons of Lower Burma experienced the most intense pressure. In what might be termed rolling genocide, the Burmese destroyed Mon civilization through colonization, massacres, expulsions, and inducements to assimilation. By 1825 perhaps 80 percent of people in Lower Burma -- where as late as 1560 it was said that "Mons were as numerous as hairs on a bullock, but we Burmese as few as the horns"<sup>18</sup> -- used Burmese as their primary tongue, sported Burmese hairstyles and tattoos, and identified as "Burmese." To adopt these traits was to proclaim publicly one's loyalty to the Burmese-led state in the interior. Meanwhile north and east of the Irrawaddy basin Shan tributaries, without

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<sup>16</sup> Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 2; Lieberman, "Charter State Collapse in Southeast Asia, c. 1250-1400, As a Problem in Regional and World History," *The American Historical Review* 116, 4 (2011): 937-63; Lieberman and Brendan Buckley, "The Impact of Climate on Southeast Asia, c. 950-1820: New Findings," *Modern Asian Studies*, 46, 5 (2012): 1049-1096.

<sup>17</sup> Discussion of Burma follows relevant source in nn. 9, 10 *supra*.

<sup>18</sup> *Han-tha-wadi hsin-byu-shin ayei-daw-bon* (Rangoon, 1918), 8.

abandoning their distinctive Shan ethnicity, also incorporated Burmese themes in elite religion, art, music, literature, and court organization, while serving as a conduit for the transmission of select lowland motifs to hill tribes. Thus by 1825 a Burmese-dominated cultural and political ecumene had cohered across the entire western mainland.<sup>19</sup>

Burmese military success bred an ill-disguised xenophobia directed first against Mons and then against peoples outside the basin. By the late 1700s even common cultivators boasted that in vanquishing armies from Siam, Manipur, Arakan, and China (sic), the Burmese had proven themselves the strongest "people" (*lu-myo*) on earth. Burmese power derived from a variety of factors, including superior agrarian technique with its attendant demographic advantages, growing Burmese-language literacy, stronger commercial links within the basin and between the basin and surrounding highlands, and the wider circulation of Burmese monks, pilgrims, traders, students, and texts. Although Mon ethnicity had been in retreat since the 1530s, it was only between 1680 and 1820, with the rapid advance of both the domestic economy and maritime trade, that Burmese momentum became unstoppable.

In 1820 the empire was still conceived as a union of distinctive ethnicities united by Theravada allegiance and by loyalty to a ruler whose obligation to promote True Doctrine was expressly universal. In principle, ethnic Burmese remained but one constituent in a poly-ethnic domain. But in practice to a degree inconceivable in 1400, those who identified as Burmese dominated the entire western mainland. And they effectively particularized Buddhism by claiming that their observances were more faithful to original doctrine than those of any fraternal or neighboring people.

In the mid-1400s the British Isles were less fragmented than western mainland Southeast Asia, but not dramatically so. Uncannily reminiscent of Pagan, whose collapse in the early 1300s had ushered in two centuries of disorder, the so-called first English empire also retreated between c. 1320 and 1485.<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding the decline of French among Norman-descended elites and the emergence of a Middle English as a serviceable vernacular, the latter language displayed a wide variety of scribal and presumably dialectical forms. The three outer regions -- Wales, Scotland (which remained fully independent, dominating its own periphery), and Ireland (which had become increasingly independent) -- supported distinctive Celtic tongues and social forms alongside extensive zones of English-based language and culture.

But from the late 15th or early 16th century, at the same time as Upper Burma revived, southeastern England renewed its political and cultural authority over the rest of the Isles in a movement that would gain dramatically in scope and strength into the 19th century. In a word, the English landed nobility surrendered claims to political autonomy, and literate strata in northern and western England accepted a southeastern linguistic/cultural template. In varying degrees those same motifs transformed gentry and urban life in Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, all of which between 1536 and 1801 were formally

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<sup>19</sup> Lieberman, "Ethnic Politics"; idem, *Burmese Administrative Cycles*, chs. 4-5; idem, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 2, ch. 2; Koenig, *Burmese Polity*.

<sup>20</sup> Note 15 *supra*. Discussion of the British Isles follows relevant sources in n. 9, 10 *supra*.

incorporated into an ever more powerful London-centered polity.<sup>21</sup> In eastern and northern Ireland starting in the 16th century, English or Anglo-Scottish culture expanded at the expense of Gaelic in a movement of colonization no less ambitious than the Burmese assault on Mon civilization.

Religious rupture proved more seminal than in Burma. By transforming one of the most Catholic countries of Europe into an expressly anti-Catholic realm, the Reformation heightened England's unique sense of mission. At the same time shared Protestant hostility to Catholic France allowed England and Scotland to transcend their traditional enmity and cemented English ties to Wales and to Anglo-Irish elements in Ireland -- even as the Protestant-Catholic split poisoned relations with Ireland's Gaelic majority.

Reinforcing religious-military spurs to British integration were economic forces, starting with England's profitable "new drapery" exports in the 16th and 17th centuries, followed in the 18th century by rising agrarian productivity and a surge in colonial trade, and in the first half of the 19th century by the early industrial revolution. As Britain's commercial, financial and cultural heart, as home to the printing industry, and as hub of a growing road network, London remained the arbiter of taste whose judgments radiated across the Isles. Smaller cities generated their own newspapers and periodicals, but they were largely dependent on London.

London (and Oxbridge) pressure on provincial traditions nurtured both a more uniform elite culture and an increasingly coherent English patriotism. However, after 1700 similar pressures joined constitutional change, the economic lure of overseas empire, and Protestant Francophobia to enfold Wales, Scotland, and the Anglo-Irish within a relatively new pan-British identity. If the Kingdom of Great Britain, formed in 1707 through the union of England-Wales with Scotland, had weaker precedents than the Burmese empire, the ensuing tension between an overarching, but relatively shallow imperial consciousness and more emotionally accessible, still evolving, still potent regional ethnicities was familiar.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In 1535-1542 Wales was incorporated in the Kingdom of England. In 1541 Ireland was declared a Kingdom that was joined to the Kingdom of England in a personal union of crowns. Likewise, from 1603 the same monarch ruled simultaneously as king of Scotland and king of England, but in 1707 Scotland and England merged in institutional terms to form the Kingdom of Great Britain. Finally in 1801 the Kingdom of Great Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland joined to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland with a single Parliament. Already in 1720, however, the Declaratory Act had sidelined the Irish Parliament and defined Ireland as a dependent kingdom to be ruled by the British Parliament.

<sup>22</sup> See previous note. On the progress and emotional/cultural implications of British union, see Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified* (Oxford, 2000); Colley, *Britons*; Levack, *Formation of British State*; Connolly, *Divided Kingdom*; Geraint Jenkins, *The Foundation of Modern Wales 1642-1780* (Oxford, 1987); Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past* (Cambridge, 1993); *idem*, *British Identities Before Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1999); Grant and Stringer, *Uniting the Kingdom*; Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts, eds., *British Consciousness and Identity* (Cambridge, 1998); Steven Ellis and Sarah Barber, eds., *Conquest and Union* (London, 1995); Tony Clayton and Ian McBride, eds., *Protestantism and National Identity* (Cambridge, 1998); Marx, *Faith in Nation*; Steven Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism* (Cambridge, 1996).

Nationalism Emerges in the British Isles

In sum, parallel dynamics drove cultural integration in the British Isles and mainland Southeast Asia. Moreover in the early centuries, at a reasonable level of abstraction, similar assumptions animated both polities. Sovereignty resided solely in the ruler, whose authority derived from cosmic law (God or karma) and dynastic right, and to whom loyalty was personal. Insofar as the crown's ultimate *raison d'être* was soteriological, its embrace of secular cultural remained qualified and ambivalent. Sanctioned by the cosmos, inequality and hierarchy were inherently moral because they were integral to social order. Thus, a Burmese king warned in 1694, unless his subjects remained divided into grades of noble, medium, and base, anarchy would ensue.<sup>23</sup> Likewise Tudor and Stuart writers likened social estates to parts of the body (the king the head, peasants the feet), each obliged to perform its assigned role so the organism as a whole could function. Not horizontal community, but a common subordination joined these vertical ranks, each in theory secure in its particularity. As subjects rather than citizens, all but the highest stratum lacked agency in the affairs of the kingdom.

Yet while these perspectives continued in Burma until the colonial era, Britain in the 16th and 17th centuries began to introduce critical modifications. Tudor monarchs succeeded in reducing noble and church authority by collaborating more extensively with a central assembly, Parliament, which provided a vehicle for elite expression. Building on late medieval notions of the "commonweal" and acting in the name of the political community -- defined as those propertied interests represented in Parliament -- the legislature thus compressed the distance between state and society and developed an ideology that was English, Protestant, and eventually anti-absolutist. This ideology proved sufficiently coherent to execute Charles I, but insufficient to yield a stable alternative to monarchy during the interregnum of 1649-1660.<sup>24</sup> The Glorious Revolution of 1688 addressed this weakness by redefining the polity as a balanced combination of royal and parliamentary power. During the 18th and more especially the 19th centuries, people came to accept that the balance could be altered by broadening the electorate and by enhancing further the power of Parliament at the expense of the crown. In Paul Langford's formulation, the 18th century made government parliamentary, while the 19th century made it democratic.<sup>25</sup> Anti-Catholicism remained central to English and then British patriotism and thus an insurmountable barrier to Catholic Irish identification with the British national project. But elsewhere, especially in

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<sup>23</sup> Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycle*, 174-75.

<sup>24</sup> Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 84-87; David Rollison, *A Commonwealth of the People* (Cambridge, 2010), esp. chs. 6-9; Kishlansky, *Monarchy Transformed*, 187-212; Tim Harris, *Rebellion* (Oxford, 2014); Sean Kelsey, *Inventing a Republic* (Stanford, 1997); David Wooton, ed., *Divine Right and Democracy* (Indianapolis, rpt. 2003); Jonathan Scott, *England's Troubles* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, 683. See too Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People* (1988); J.C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty* (Cambridge, 1994); Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People* (Cambridge, 1998).

England and Wales, Protestant pluralism, the Protestant emphasis on individual conscience, and a burgeoning consumer culture conspired to privatize religion and to dilute the tie between crown and communal sanctification.

In short, by the early 19th century many of those features that Britain had shared with Burma in 1500 -- exclusive royal sovereignty, rigid hierarchy, popular passivity, the crown's soteriological mission and monopoly on truth -- had been modified or rejected altogether. Likewise an end to English territorial claims in France and efforts to imbue Britain with a more coherent political personality produced a closer fit between culture and territory. By 1850, notwithstanding unresolved, often unaddressed tensions between British and sub-British identities, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland had generated a recognizable form of modern nationalism as defined in my opening discussion.

To recall, then, this essay's titular question: Why was nationalism (and by extension, democracy) ultimately West European? In part, surely, because of distinct legal and religious systems. Since these systems were in place in England (whose political culture came to dominate Britain) by the 16th, in some cases the 13th, century, alone they can hardly explain the rise of nationalism. But, I would argue, they were a precondition for subjects to become citizens and for the state to embrace an identity centered on a territorially discrete secular culture.

Consider first England's socio-legal heritage. Without invoking clichés of Oriental despotism, we can acknowledge that from an early date English (and indeed Scottish) law granted individuals and collective bodies a degree of institutional security; no such guarantees were to be found in Southeast Asia. Whereas in Burma ministerial prebends and private lands remained subject to royal confiscation, English feudal law promised protection against arbitrary seizure and fines. Originally restricted to the king's principal vassals, these rights were extended to the generality of property holders. English common law sanctioned juries independent of executive control. The institutional privileges of corporate bodies -- towns, universities, Parliament -- were enshrined in law and tradition, including, most critically, the right of Parliament to approve taxes.<sup>26</sup> Deeply rooted assumptions about the rights of social estates, gentlemen in particular, vis-a-vis the crown inspired the Pilgrimage of Grace as early as 1536,<sup>27</sup> and led 17th-century Parliaments, citing the "laws and liberties" of the land, to dethrone two kings. To these ideas of representation and protected privilege, which would come to shelter a public sphere, Burma offered no parallel.<sup>28</sup>

Another peculiar medieval legacy was Latin Christendom's distinction between the universal church and territorially confined kingdoms. Early medieval kingdoms had tended to Caesaropapism, which was inherently

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<sup>26</sup> Jack Goldstone, *Why Europe?* (Boston, 2009), ch. 6; Lake and Pincus, *Politics of the Public Sphere* 34, 36; Ricardo Duchesne, *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* (Leiden, 2012), esp. chs. 7, 8; Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), pt. II.

<sup>27</sup> Ethan Shagan, "The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Public Sphere?" in Lake and Pincus, *Politics of the Public Sphere*.

<sup>28</sup> Kishlansky, *Monarchy Transformed*, 279, 284-86.

universalist. As Christ's deputy, each ruler exercised religious functions that extended to many, in theory perhaps all, peoples. But by awarding the church a monopoly on universal religious authority, the Papal Revolution of the 11th/12th centuries obliged each state to identify more closely with a particular territory and people.<sup>29</sup> In abandoning universal claims, European polities (with the debatable exception of the Holy Roman Empire) thus diverged from Theravada - as well as Orthodox Christian, Confucian, Ottoman, and Mughal -- states. Burma, recall, never developed a theoretical apparatus or conceptual language to articulate or justify ethnic supremacy. Even as he decimated Mon communities in the 1750s, the Burmese ruler Alaung-hpaya proclaimed himself not king of the Burmese, but Embryo Buddha, King of Righteousness, and World Ruler.<sup>30</sup>

The Reformation, I have suggested, reinforced English distinctiveness. By severing ties to Rome, by translating the Bible into the vernacular, and by proclaiming themselves the new Israel, English zealots pioneered anti-Catholic patriotism and what might be termed missionary nationalism. Yet, ironically, because the Civil Wars showed the toxicity of sectarian enthusiasm and because the Church of England found itself forced to cohabit with dissenters and Catholic recusants, in the long term the Reformation had the entirely unintended effect of encouraging a degree of tolerance and state withdrawal from matters of conscience. Recoiling against religious strife, many Britons sought to privatize religion and remove it as a source of contestation. In its place came a growing emphasis on secular culture and commerce as forces for harmony, and on the nation-state as an instrument of domestic peace. At the same time, by promoting private Bible study, in effect by universalizing the clergy, the Reformation joined rising literacy and consumerism to weaken corporate identities in favor of individual agency, which aided the shift from subjecthood to citizenship. By the mid-1700s, without forsaking Christian belief, many, perhaps most, educated Britons had come to regard the nation as the fundamental arena for human activity and national concord as the only guarantee of stability in a post-theodictic world. Again, none of these developments had a recognizable Burmese, indeed Asian, parallel.<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately, however, discursive shifts of this sort are inexplicable without also considering physical and economic contexts. Take geography. In the early 16th century the British and Burmese realms were of comparable size and both enjoyed an organic cohesion from the grouping of thinly populated upland zones around a prosperous lowland core. But Britain's island geography was far more conducive to imagining and controlling discrete spaces than the vast highlands that march unbroken from the Irrawaddy basin into the Himalayas.

In turn, the difficulty of trans-montane trade, the tiny size of Burma's urban market, and above all, Burma's position off the main Indian Ocean trade

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<sup>29</sup> Berman, *Law and Revolution*, pt. I; Joseph Strayer, *Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, 1970), 20-23.

<sup>30</sup> Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles*, ch. 5; Hkin Hkin Sein, ed., *Alaung-min-taya-gyi amein-daw-mya* (Rangoon, 1964).

<sup>31</sup> Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*; Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*; Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World* (New York, 2000).

routes meant that by 1500 Burma already was less commercialized than Britain. Thereafter, as Britain came to dominate the vast Atlantic trading system along with key sectors of Asian and European trade, and as British manufacturing, agriculture, marketing, and transport experienced major structural shifts, the gap widened dramatically. Best estimates are that the Burmese economy grew some 70% between 1600 and 1800, but that British national income rose 500% in the 18th century alone.<sup>32</sup> Whereas in Burma in 1800 at most 15% of the population were urban of whom a substantial proportion still grew much of their own food, in England as early as 1700 up to 40% may have lived in towns,<sup>33</sup> and subsistence agriculture was confined to marginal areas. At the start of our period both Britain and Burma were peripheral to their wider regional economies, but Britain by 1800 had become the most dynamic sector of the world's most innovative economy, that of Western Europe.<sup>34</sup> As much as any factor, economic intensification explains the strength of English and British nationalism between 1600 and 1850. The direct and indirect contributions were several.

Commercial rivalry spurred war, which in turn revolutionized the state, transformed the relation between England and adjacent areas, and catalyzed patriotism. From 1654 to 1815 England/Britain was at war one year in two, and when it was not fighting, it was preparing for war. On balance, the colonies and the trade privileges that flowed from successful imperial ventures aided the economy by relieving ecological stress, accelerating capital formation, enriching the urban middle class, and raising wages (which may have favored the introduction of labor-saving technologies).<sup>35</sup> But in reciprocal fashion commercial intensification provided the technologies and the radical increase in taxation, deficit financing (through the Bank of England), and public administration that were critical to Britain's overseas triumphs. What Michael Braddick and John Brewer term the British fiscal/military state arose to harness the nation's burgeoning wealth for war, first for the civil wars of the 1640s and then for epic contests with France.<sup>36</sup> From 1680 to 1815 the share of national income flowing to the state rose from 4% to 20%, which, along with the

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<sup>32</sup> Lieberman, "Secular Trends"; Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*, vol. 1 (New Haven, 1988), 14; Michael Duffy, "Contested Empires, 1756-1815," in Langford, *Eighteenth Century*, 239.

<sup>33</sup> Koenig, *Burmese Polity*, appendices 1 and 2; Lake and Pincus, *Politics of the Public Sphere*, 11, citing C.G.A. Clay and John Langton. But Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 493 merely says that "more than one quarter" in England and Wales lived in towns in 1801.

<sup>34</sup> Allen, *British Industrial Revolution*; idem, "Agricultural Productivity and Rural Incomes in England and the Yangtze Delta, c. 1620-c. 1820," *Economic History Review* 62 (2009): 525-50; Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy* (New Haven, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> On the vexed historiography of war's economic impact, see Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence* (Princeton, 2000), chs. 4-6; Mokyr, *Enlightened Economy*, ch. 8; H.V. Bowen, *War and British Society, 1688-1815* (Cambridge, 1998), ch. 5; Allen, *British Industrial Revolution*; and sources in Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 2, p. 572 n. 195.

<sup>36</sup> Braddick, *State Formation*, pt. III; Brewer, *Sinews of Power*.

expanding economy itself, permitted a three-fold increase in fiscal, army, and navy personnel from 1680 to 1780 alone. As the state machinery became more specialized, patrimonialism yielded to bureaucratic norms.<sup>37</sup> And because parliament had to consent to taxes, the crown's chronic need for military finance in the 18th century underlay the rise of parliamentary supremacy.<sup>38</sup> In short, by allowing the bureaucracy and Parliament to displace the royal court as the locus of power, commercial-military synergies utterly recast the institutions of the emergent nation. Indirectly at least, this same dynamic transformed political geography. Between 1536 and 1801 a desire to enhance England's international position and fear of Spanish or French interference contributed to the incorporation of Wales, Ireland, and Scotland into the English-led union and to the suppression of revolts in Ireland and Scotland.<sup>39</sup> Most critical, I already indicated, warfare fostered national loyalty by juxtaposing national virtue to alien evil. We see this in the closing phase of the Hundred Years War and after the celebrated defeat of the Spanish armada. But the life-and-death struggle to 1815, first against French "popery" and absolutism and then against French radicalism and "tyranny," a struggle demanding sacrifice from all sectors, encouraged unprecedentedly inclusive concepts of citizenship that blended Protestant virtue, British liberties, empire, and shared island-hood.<sup>40</sup>

Burma offers parallels to most of these developments, but always less sustained and intense. If the British government in 1815 secured 20% of GDP, its Burmese counterpart, still reliant on patrimonial networks and lacking a system of banks or credit, probably never secured over 5% of an economy that must have been no more than 10% as large as Britain's. Opportunities for administrative centralization were correspondingly modest. By extension, military operations and popular mobilization were less sustained.

Besides animating warfare, commerce nurtured English and then British patriotism by disseminating culture and empowering new social groups. Already in the 14th and 15th centuries we see the spread of a pan-English, even an island-wide, culture of gentility.<sup>41</sup> But from the early 1600s market integration, urbanization, and printing substantially magnified the influence of London manners and accents on the propertied elites of northern England, lowland Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Migrations, cross-border friendships, marriages,

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<sup>37</sup> Martin Daunton, "The Wealth of the Nation," in Langford, *Eighteenth Century*, 162; Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 29, 67, and ch. 3 *passim*.

<sup>38</sup> Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*; 702-710; David Hayton, "Contested Kingdoms," in Langford, *Eighteenth Century*, 39-40.

<sup>39</sup> Philip Bradshaw, "Seventeenth-Century Wales," in Bradshaw and Roberts, *British Consciousness*, 227-28; Hiram Morgan, "British Policies Before the British State," in Brendan Bradshaw and John Morrill, eds., *The British Problem, c. 1534-1707* (New York, 1996), 66-88; Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 85, 146-49, 318-22; Levack, *Formation of British State*; Hayton, "Contested Kingdoms," 42-43, 54-55; Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland: A History* (Cambridge, 2010), 132- 37, 211-35.

<sup>40</sup> See n. 22 *supra*, plus Duffy, "Contested Empires," 218-19; Wilson, *Sense of the People*, ch. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Morgan, "Ranks of Society," 84-85



and schooling had a similar horizontal impact, and not merely at the elite level.<sup>42</sup> In vertical terms too, the growing size, wealth, and self-confidence of new and intermediate strata aided cultural diffusion while broadening the base of politics. During the late 16th and 17th centuries yeoman farmers were among the chief beneficiaries from rising productivity and food prices. In the 18th century mushrooming colonial trade and urbanization converted what had been an aristocratic society into a plutocracy in its upper reaches, while nurturing in its middle sector an array of often novel employments in trade, transport, merchandising, and the professions. Between 1700 and 1770, Kathleen Wilson estimates, the so-called "middling strata" doubled to 40% of the English and Welsh population.<sup>43</sup>

Even as the middle strata maintained a strict separation between themselves and the propertyless 60%, their influence grew. We see this in the proliferation of schools offering practical training, in rising literacy, and in the urban-based explosion of printed materials.<sup>44</sup> We see it in a consumer culture which, by providing imitations of aristocratic fashion, encouraged social fluidity, class indeterminacy, and individual autonomy.<sup>45</sup> And we see it in the arts and literature, where middle-class values, without mounting a frontal challenge to aristocratic norms, began to dominate.<sup>46</sup> But above all we see it in politics. Having taken root during the post-Reformation era, from the late 17th century a public sphere that subjected ideas to open-ended critique grew ever more socially inclusive, institutionally sophisticated, and intellectually voracious.<sup>47</sup> By the late 1700s urban-based, middle-class demands for economic, parliamentary, and moral reform had begun to set the national agenda.<sup>48</sup> The physical foundation of this new politics was a politicized press joined to an

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<sup>42</sup> This integrative trend persisted alongside, and in some contexts may have stimulated, provincial identities. See Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, chs. 12-15; Colley, *Britons*, esp. ch. 4; Clare McManus, "'What is my Nation'", in Wormald, *Seventeenth Century*; Porter, *Modern World*, chs. 2-4; Bob Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press* (London, 1996).

<sup>43</sup> Wilson, *Sense of the People*, 57. On long-term social changes and their political implications, Robert Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman* (Oxford, 1992); Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, ch. 3; J.A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England* (London, 2nd ed., 1997); Clark, *English Society*; Hindle, *State and Social Change*; Wilson, *Sense of the People*; Braddick, *State Formation*.

<sup>44</sup> Note 42 *supra* and Borsay, "Culture of Improvement."

<sup>45</sup> Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, J.H. Plumb, eds., *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (Bloomington, IN, 1985).

<sup>46</sup> Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*; Paul Langford, *Eighteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2000), ch.. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Lake and Pincus, *Politics of the Public Sphere*; Harris, *Politics and the Press*; Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and English Society 1695-1855* (Harlow, UK, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, ch. 14; Wilson, *Sense of the People*; Duffy, "Contested Empires."

urban mycelium of clubs, debating societies, political associations, and coffee houses where national affairs were freely discussed. Controlling some of the most dynamic sectors of the economy, businessmen, shopkeepers, professionals, and artisans now championed a participatory model of citizenship that let individuals appropriate and redefine patriotism. In the 1830s spokesmen for the industrial working class broadened this approach.<sup>49</sup>

As noted, Burma also saw rising literacy and cultural circulation, which were critical to imperial cohesion. But whereas social categories in Britain grew more fluid and diffuse, in Burma after 1760 the new Kon-baung dynasty succeeded in strengthening hereditary distinctions. Whereas in Britain subjects became citizens, in Burma sovereignty remained exclusively royal. Stylized royal promises on ascending the throne to honor Buddhist morality, encapsulated in the Ten Royal Laws, had no monitoring or enforcement mechanism. Substantial numbers of religious texts, royal histories, poetic compositions, and legal works circulated in manuscript. But I find no aspirant social groups straining to expand their influence, no urban sites open to public discussion, no commentary critical of royal institutions. The consistent ambition of courtiers, literati, and commoners alike was not to assert collective or individual rights vis-a-vis the throne, but to find a patron whose authority derived from the throne and who could protect and support his clients. Liberty, standing alone without a patron, equated to exposure and vulnerability -- which Burmese found about as appealing as we would find walking naked in public. Burmese used new commercial wealth to win the favor of patrons and to buy happy reincarnations through religious donations. If Theravada practices grew more textually-oriented, the traditional focus only intensified on winning good karma for the after-life, which was itself a form of patronage-seeking.<sup>50</sup>

To be sure, in Britain, too, salvationist religion remained vital, as shown by the fortunes of missionary nationalism and the Church of England, including its Methodist offshoot. In contrast to secular tendencies in France, in England the Enlightenment developed largely within Protestantism. But, as we saw, Protestantism and commerce favored individual expression, which translated not only into citizen empowerment, but, as Dror Wahrman has shown, into quite fresh, socially fluid understandings of personal identity.<sup>51</sup> In a broader sense, consumerism, overseas discoveries, new concepts of geological time, the Copernican and Newtonian revolutions, a peculiarly British empiricism, weariness with religious strife, deism -- all these forces joined not to secularize society so much as to compress religious claims and to undermine the authority

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<sup>49</sup> Wilson, *Sense of the People*, 67, 54-73; Joanna Innes, "Governing Diverse Societies," in Langford, *Eighteenth Century*; Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 505-12; Porter, *Modern World*, ch. 2; Barker, *Newspapers, Politics*; Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*; Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*; Harris, *Politics and the Press*; Owen Ashton, Robert Fryson, Stephen Roberts, eds., *The Chartist Legacy* (Nr. Woodbridge, UK, 1999).

<sup>50</sup> Michael Aung-Thwin, "The 'Classical' in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, 1 (1995): 75-91; Koenig, *Burmese Polity*, ch. 3; Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. 1, ch. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* (New Haven, 2004). Cf. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

of religious texts and classical wisdom to a degree quite unknown in Southeast Asia and indeed Asia generally. In response to these insistent social and intellectual challenges, Protestant scripturalism was refashioned into a more rational, private, and tolerant faith, with a more optimistic view of man's lot and a post-Calvinist emphasis on cosmic benevolence, material progress, and the pursuit of happiness in this world.<sup>52</sup> To paraphrase Brad Gregory, Britons decided to eschew theology in order to go shopping.<sup>53</sup> Popular opinion focused on Parliament, which along with monarchy embodied the nation, as the guarantor of domestic peace, overseas empire, and rising general prosperity. Thus in Britain patriotism, that is to say nationalism, filled much of the space opened by the expansion of commerce and the transformation of religion.

In conclusion, nationalism should be seen as a hypertrophic, discursively peculiar elaboration of more general cultural patterns that transformed not only Britain, but Burma -- and, I suspect, most of rimland Eurasia. One cannot dismiss the emphasis on discontinuity with which I opened. But, if Britain was at all representative, without examining the gestation of ethno-political identities in Europe in the centuries before 1800, we cannot understand the ease with which nationalist ideologies spread across the continent in the 19th century. Nor, I suspect, can we understand the alacrity with which many Asian societies embraced nationalism in the 20th century -- or the idiosyncratic interpretations those societies imposed on the new European import.

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<sup>52</sup> Porter, *Modern World*; David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, 1990); David Hempton, "Enlightenment and Faith," in Langford, *Eighteenth Century*; Clark, *English Society*, ch 4.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory, *Unintended Revolution*, 243.