

Chapter 2

Explaining State-Led Nationalist Movements: Individual Choice and State Mobilization

Few would deny that a nationalist movement can only demonstrate its force when it acquires a mass following. Nevertheless, relatively limited attempts have been made to explain why the masses participate in a nationalist movement. Many students of nationalism view the masses as passive actors, waiting to be awakened by the elites. The masses are resources available to political elites: whether the former would be invited to a nationalist movement, to a large extent, depends on the strategic considerations of the latter. For example, the opposition appeals to cultural identity and seeks support from groups hitherto excluded from political participation, when the opposition is too weak to challenge the state (Breuilly 1982).

This chapter first discusses the existing literature on nationalism and nationalist movements. Existing theories highlight the role played by elites in nationalist movements and focus on their political and economic purposes, whereas the rationality of the mass participants remains unexplored. Students of nationalism usually attribute mass participation in nationalist movements to emotions. In contrast to the prevalent practice, I argue that a mass-based instrumentalist explanation for nationalist movements is both necessary and possible.

In the second section (Sect. 2.2), I lay out my theoretical framework. After giving my assumptions on individual preferences (see Sect. 2.2.1), I propose an explanation for individual participation (see Sect. 2.2.3). I contend that two factors—perception of foreign threats and domestic institutions—affect the choice that individuals make when they face nationalist mobilization by the state. Next, I develop an explanation for state mobilization and examine how the two factors affect state elites, their decision to mobilize the masses, and the social resistance they encounter (see Sect. 2.2.4). I then bring the two components together and argue that state mobilization is most likely to succeed when the public perceives a strong and imminent foreign threat and domestic institutions are pro-majority (see Sect. 2.2.5). Section 2.3 examines two competing accounts for mass participation in nationalist movements, one of which emphasizes the role played by cultural symbols in rousing people to nationalist participation and other ethnic animosities. More case-specific alternative explanations proposed by historians and China experts will be discussed in the following chapters.

2.1 Situating the Theory

2.1.1 *Rational Elites, Emotional Masses*

Focusing on elites as the most significant agents is a prevalent practice among students of nationalist movements.¹ The standard stories found in the existing literature emphasize that intellectuals or political elites play a pivotal role in delineating the idea of the nation (see Kautsky 1962; Gellner 1965; Nairn 1977; Greenfeld 1992; Kedourie 1961; Anderson 2006; Fitzgerald 1996; Guo 2004). After independence is achieved, statesmen appeal to nationalism to increase ethnic integration and accelerate nation-building (Kedourie 1961; Halpern 1963; Mauzy 2006). In the process of democratic transition, nationalism is also deployed by political entrepreneurs to bolster their legitimacy, propel themselves into political office, and enable them to hang on to power (Snyder 2000; Gagnon 2004; Clark 2006; Hardin 1995).

Some scholars have noted the prevalent elitism in the study of nationalism and its pitfalls. Smith (1998), for instance, doubts whether elites can make use of ethnohistory in such an instrumental way depicted by many modernist theorists. Smith, a self-identified ethno-symbolist, emphasizes that elites are constrained by preexisting mass culture. Nationalist intellectuals “had to adhere to the cultural parameters of the traditions of the people, politicizing their sense of ethnic community, and reinterpreting those traditions as deep cultural resources for a political struggle for national self-determination” (Smith 2001).

However, not all modernists ignore the constraints that mass culture imposes on elites. Nairn (1977), for instance, contends that:

People is all they (the bourgeoisie) have got: this is the essence of the under-development dilemma itself. Consequently, the national or would-be national middle class is always compelled to “turn to the people” ... For what are the implications of turning to the people, in this sense? First of all, speaking their language ... Secondly, taking a kindlier view of their general “culture” ... Thirdly—and most decisively...coming to terms with the enormous and still irreconcilable diversity of popular and peasant life.²

Modernists emphasize that the spread of the idea of the nation is only possible in the modern world. The argument that elites can create collective identities out of the air simply does not hold.

What Smith fails to see is that there is striking inconsistency in the elite-centric analysis of nationalist movements. This line of argument makes different assumptions about the nationalist behavior of elites and ordinary people. On the one hand, it assumes that elites are rational actors who seek to advance their personal, material interests through nationalist mobilization. On the other hand, it overlooks the material interests of the mass participants in nationalist movements. For instance,

¹The term “elites” here refers to intellectuals, highly educated professionals, national leaders, political entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, big merchants, and so on.

²Nairn uses “the middle class” and “the bourgeoisie” interchangeably.

although Nairn claims to “decide upon a materialist rather than an ‘idealist’ explanation” of nationalism (1977), he believes that to mobilize the people, what the bourgeoisies need to do is to speak the language of the people and respect the latter’s culture.

More importantly, empirical evidence seems to challenge the contention that elites are rational, while the mass participants are emotional. Peter Hanák, for instance, studies public opinion in the Habsburg Empire by investigating a large body of letters between soldiers and their families confiscated during WWI in Vienna and Budapest. Hanák finds that nationalist letters were mostly from the bourgeoisie or intelligentsia, rather than from the lower classes (cited by Hobsbawm 1990).

At the root of elitism is the belief that ordinary participants in nationalist movements lack a clear perception of their own interests. They are passionate and emotional. Their behavior is anything but a result of cost-and-benefit calculation. Consequently, they tend to be deceived by political entrepreneurs. It is not clear, however, why rationality disappears when the focus of the research shifts from the elites to the masses. Levy (1989), for instance, casts doubt on the diversionary war theory and asks: “[w]hy do elites give priority to their domestic political interests, whereas others (the mass public) give priority to the national interest and are so easily seduced by symbolic psychological scapegoating?”

Neither modernists nor ethno-symbolists pay attention to the socioeconomic demands made by the masses. Indeed, as Smith points out, elites face constraints in mobilizing the masses, hence a mass-based analysis is imperative. However, the constraints the masses impose on elites are not just cultural or linguistic ones. People will not lend support to elites and participate in nationalist movements simply because elites show respect to their culture and tradition. Common culture, language, and ancestors might contribute to the success of nationalist mobilization, but they do not constitute sufficient conditions for the materialization of mass nationalist movements.

This study suggests that to understand how mass nationalist movements take place and develop, it is necessary to shift the focus of the study away from the elites to the mass participants. However, unlike Smith’s proposition, the mass-based analysis I intend to undertake is not a cultural one. I maintain that whether the elite can meet the socioeconomic demands of the masses affects the outcomes of mobilization.

What propels ordinary people to participate in nationalist movements? Existing theories provide two possible explanations. First, primordialists attribute participation to the dictates that spring from blood, language, social customs (Geertz 1963), or genes. Pierre van den Berghe (1995), for instance, holds that nationalist behavior can only be understood in an evolutionary framework that gives equal weight to genes and environment. For him, human beings are “biologically programmed” to be nepotistic and to favor kin groups. Such behavior increases our “inclusive fitness.” People sacrifice themselves for their fellow nationals because by

doing this they maximize their genetic pool. In such an account, there is no place for individual choice. Geertz (1963) also maintains that:

These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves ... attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural—some would say spiritual—affinity than from social interaction.

Primordialists argue that nationalist leaders arouse nationalism “not through appeals to reason but through appeals to the emotions” (Connor 1994). “The nonrational core of nation has been reached and triggered through” national symbols, nationalist poetry, music, and familial metaphors (Connor 1994). Just like primordialists, ethno-symbolists also hold that ethnohistory plays an important role in exciting people and rousing them to collective action (Smith 2001).

The primordialist argument says little about the conditions under which mass nationalist movements emerge. If primordial attachments are deep and persistent, what accounts for the rise of collective action at certain points of time? Why are some political entrepreneurs more successful than others in mobilizing nationalist movements, even if they have equal access to cultural resources? These questions suggest that there are elements in nationalist movements that need to be explained from a different perspective.

The second explanation for mass participation is that nationalism is a secular substitution for religion. Like religion, nationalism not only provides ordinary people with a sense of immortality (Anderson 2006; Apter 1963), but also lends them hope. Kedourie (1961), for example, contends that nationalism is a kind of “secular millennialism.” It is employed by elites in the new states to persuade the masses to make the necessary sacrifices in the process of modernization. This argument is different from the primordialists’ argument in the sense that it does not reject rationality outright. As Apter (1963) rightly points out, there is a distinction between political religion and church religion: the former promises material things, the latter intangible rewards. In this sense, political religion has “built into it a particular kind of rationality as well—the rationality of economic life.” Nationalism, as a “secular millennialism,” enables political entrepreneurs to persuade the masses to make short-term sacrifices in exchange for long-term gains.

However, it is questionable how easy it is for political elites to exchange future rewards for present support. Empirical study shows that in the process of nationalist mobilization, political elites often encounter the problem of credibility. Popkin’s (1988) study of the Vietnamese revolution shows that political entrepreneurs could not mobilize the peasants with nationalist rhetoric. Many Vietnamese peasants were more concerned about their own material conditions and considered the resistance war as the affair of the government and the army. To build up their credibility, the mobilizers had to provide peasants with immediate payoffs.

In agreement with Popkin, I further contend that political elites can solve the credibility problem by establishing distributional institutions that favor the interests of the target groups of nationalist mobilization. This is because institutions are relatively durable, and institutional change is overwhelmingly incremental (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; North 1990). Institutions of today are likely to

determine how benefits will be distributed tomorrow. Therefore, political elites can make their promise of future payoffs more credible to the masses by carrying out pro-majority institutional reform (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006).

Neither the primordialist nor the secular religion argument explores the rationality of the participants in nationalist movements. Consequently, they tend to exaggerate the ease with which political entrepreneurs can mobilize mass nationalist movements. Political elites cannot mobilize the masses simply by appealing to common culture or through empty promises. Examining the rationality behind nationalist participation enables us to better understand the constraints facing political entrepreneurs.

2.1.2 Is a Mass-Based Instrumentalist Explanation Possible?

It is not clear why the instrumentalist approach, which has been adopted by so many scholars to explain the nationalist behavior of elites and proved to be so fruitful, cannot be applied to explain the nationalist behavior of the ordinary participants. Many theorists reject the instrumentalist explanation because of the passions people demonstrate in nationalist movements. Kecmanovic (2005) argues that “rational choice theory cannot explain the passion with which individuals stick to nationalist views and beliefs.” Smith (2001) maintains that “the resort to the ethnic past, however tenuous, can inspire in ‘the people’ a desire and will to self-sacrifice for co-nationals which few ideologies can match.” Connor (1994) quotes Chateaubriand who said that “Men don’t allow themselves to be killed for their interests; they allow themselves to be killed for their passions,” and further contends that “people do not voluntarily die for things that are rational.” Stern (1995) points out that rational choice theory cannot explain why people serve in a wartime army.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, I suggest that we should not rush to the conclusion that a mass-based instrumentalist explanation is impossible. This line of argument lacks a careful assessment of the costs and benefits that nationalist behavior involves. Participation in nationalist movements does not always require sacrifice by way of death. Instead, participation can be conceived as a broader category. There are various forms of “participation,” and not all nationalist behavior involves high risks. Individuals can lend support to a nationalist cause by joining the army and fighting for the nation. They can also participate in nationalist movements by contributing labor, reducing consumption, paying more taxes, purchasing government bonds, and giving consent to other government policies.

Furthermore, whether the choice made by an actor is rational, to a large extent, depends on what alternative choices the actor has. Tong (1988) suggests that though the official sanctions were severe, people chose to be outlaws because the alternative was starvation. During the Sino-Japanese War, the mopping-up campaigns carried out by the Japanese in north China posed a constant and severe threat to the peasants and forced the latter to “conclude that their only hope lay in resistance, and

the Communists were widely regarded as the most competent organizers of resistance” (Johnson 1962).

Those who claim that nationalist behavior cannot be explained by material self-interests need to support their theory with an analysis of the costs and benefits that nationalist participation involves, and demonstrate that individuals participate in nationalist movements even if expected costs exceed expected benefits. Indeed, nationalist participation might be risky. Yet, people are always engaged in risky occupations. Investing and taking up mortgages and other sorts of loans all incur risks. As Hechter (2000) points out, risk-taking is not irrational. One cannot reject instrumentalist explanations for nationalism in general. Instead, more detailed knowledge about the contextual conditions is required (Bates et al. 1998).

2.1.3 Self-interests and Group Interests

Some students of nationalism have made attempts to explain nationalist participation from a rational choice perspective (Breton 1995; Taylor 1988; Hechter 2000). Hardin (1995), for instance, attempts to answer the question of why people participate in ethnic violent conflicts. He suggests that one ethnic group receives benefits from suppressing another ethnic group’s interests, and that individuals’ self-interests are matched with group interests.

Yet, it is not clear why participants would think they can benefit individually when their ethnic group gains at the expense of some other group. Even if there is congruence between self-interests and group interests, collective action would not necessarily result (Olson 1965). To solve this problem, Hardin (1995) appeals to norms and individual epistemological limitations. This explanation, however, compromises the goal of understanding collective action “with little more than the kinds of self-interest motivations”—the objective that Hardin sets for himself at the outset of his book.

Unlike Hardin, I argue that individuals, as rational actors, care not only about whether nationalist movements would advance group interests, but also how the benefits that nationalist movements bring about are distributed within the nation. Domestic institutions that determine what rights and obligations individuals have are an important mechanism through which individual interests are connected to group interests.

More importantly, institutions are not neutral. Frequently, they privilege certain social groups over others. This explains why some social groups are more willing to participate in state-led nationalist movements than others. For instance, in eighteenth century Britain, the middle class benefited from imperial expansion and thus were a vocal constituency for the imperial policy (Snyder 2000). In Germany before WWI, the middle class was also the backbone of popular nationalist movement. In contrast, disadvantaged by domestic institutions, workers were aloof from nationalist movements and labeled as the “enemies of the Reich” (Snyder 2000).

There is another issue that the existing mass-based instrumentalist theories tend to ignore: the contradiction between the means of nationalist mobilization and the end of mobilization. The means of mobilization refers to the provision of selective incentives. In a group as large as a national state, collective action will not occur unless participants receive selective incentives from the mobilizers (Olson 1965). However, the end of nationalist mobilization is to increase human and material resources under state control in a relatively short time period. The provision of selective incentives will constitute a drain on state-controlled material resources. Consequently, state elites will be left with fewer resources with which they can pursue their strategic goals.

Despite the tensions between the end of nationalist mobilization and the means of mobilization, some state elites achieved success in nationalist mobilization. What accounts for such an outcome? I maintain that in the cases of successful nationalist mobilization, state elites are able to persuade the masses to make short-term sacrifices for long-term gains. Individuals care less about immediate economic payoffs when they seek state protection or when domestic institutions favor their interests.

2.2 Explaining Mass Nationalist Movements

2.2.1 *Assumptions*

I assume that individuals act as if they are advancing material self-interests. I do not intend to reject the importance of emotions and altruistic preferences. I am aware that the assumption I make is a radical simplification of reality. For instance, Margolis (1982) contends that individuals have dual utilities: on the one hand, they want to ensure their self-interests; on the other hand, they also care about social goods. Nevertheless, I maintain that the material self-interest assumption is a useful analytical tool. Given that many theorists have explored the emotional dimension of nationalist behavior, we might be able to learn more about mass nationalist movements if an alternative perspective is adopted. A theory built on the basis of this assumption may be able to explain phenomena that primordialism or ethno-symbolism cannot explain.

The rationality assumption has three components: first, all actors are purposive and goal-oriented; second, actors have consistent preferences, which implies that these preferences are ordered and transitive; third, actors seek utility maximization (MacDonald 2003). The rationality assumption itself contains no substantive content about the preferences of actors. Actors may have either material or normative interests. The assumption of utility maximization does not imply that individuals necessarily maximize self-interests. Instead, individuals can have altruistic and ethnic preferences (Monroe 1991; Rabushka and Shepsle 1972).

However, I emphasize that attributing nationalist behavior to altruistic or ethnic preferences incurs the risk of reducing the theory to a tautology. On the contrary, the

material self-interest assumption serves as a self-imposed limit. Additionally, ethnic preferences are not given by nature. For instance, in his study of the Chinese revolution, Bianco (1971) suggests that during the Sino-Japanese war, Chinese peasants in many places actually knew little about the war. He presents a vivid example: in 1941, when townspeople of Luoyang—the capital of Henan province—fled the bombed city to the mountains, peasants were heading for the city temples to burn incense and pray for rain. Bianco writes that peasants did not know the invaders until they “saw the Japanese soldiers’ rifles on the horizon.” In such a social context, the CCP, however, managed to mobilize a peasant nationalist movement (Johnson 1962). This suggests that ethnic identification and preferences are often an effect, rather than a cause, of successful nationalist mobilization.

I do not intend to argue that material, self-interests are given by nature. As Coronil (1995) critiques:

While rational choice theory rejects a notion of collective primordial attachments understood as deriving from “natural” rather than cultural dispositions, it ends up embracing a notion of self-interest grounded in natural, not cultural “givens.”

I acknowledge that self-regarding, material interests can be derived from social interaction. In many cases, it is the mobilization by elites that makes participants realize their own interests and thus enables participants to act together. Nevertheless, I contend that for state elites, it is much easier to wake up participants to their self-regarding material interests than make them develop altruistic preferences toward the group. The Communists might be able to stir up peasant hatreds toward the landlords, indoctrinating peasants with communist beliefs and the benefits that land redistribution could bring about. It is, however, much more difficult for the Communists to persuade peasants to sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of national interests. Even if individuals have ethnic preferences, political entrepreneurs are more likely to succeed when they are able to ensure that emotional needs and material interests of the participants are satisfied at the same time.

2.2.2 Why Does Nationalism Matter?

Before I proceed further, it is important to answer a question: if state elites can mobilize the masses simply by distributing selective incentives among citizens, why do they even bother to appeal to nationalist arguments? Theories which attribute nationalist behavior to economic interests of individuals tend to nullify the effects of nationalism. I contend that nationalism acquires value for political entrepreneurs because it performs important functions: it serves as the focal point of mass movements.

First, the idea of nation specifies criteria for membership and demarcates the enemy. As Chai (2001) suggests, within a large group, individuals have no acquaintance with one another. The costs of organizing will be prohibitively high unless there is a relatively simple set of criteria for group membership. Politicizing

ethnicity and using nation as the criteria for membership have advantages. Such criteria are simple. Participants can identify fellow nationals from their appearance and the language they speak.

Second, using nation as the criteria allows a broad coalition to form. To pursue their strategic goals, state elites attempt to mobilize as much human and material resources as possible. A nation, in Connor's (1994) words, is "the largest group that can command a person's loyalty." Nationalist ideology enables state elites to command citizens' loyalty.

Third, political elites *expect* nationalism to reduce the costs of mobilization. Nationalism encourages self-sacrifice and nurtures the spirit of altruism. It is possible that individuals align their preferences toward the nation and fellow nationals over time and become more willing to contribute to nationalist movements even if they do not receive any material payoffs. As Hardin (1995) contends, "people who would not have put themselves at risk at early stages take great risks at later stages, when they are more subject to group commitments."

The fact that individuals might acquire altruistic preferences over time does not contradict the instrumentalist explanation that this book adopts. I do not rule out that the preferences of participants might change as nationalist movements proceed. Chai (2001), for instance, endogenizes altruistic preferences formation, arguing that group altruism formed within individuals as a result of past cooperation:

[S]ince monitoring cannot be perfect, there will always be a nonzero probability that free-riding behavior might have paid off ... the development of altruistic preferences toward community members can serve as a kind of expected regret-reduction device because it allows individuals to reduce possible doubts that they may have over their cooperative actions.

I agree with Chai that continuous cooperation may generate altruistic preferences. However, as Chai demonstrates, the decision to cooperate is prior to the formation of altruistic preferences. I suggest that before we examine how identification propels individuals to run risks of personal harm for group benefits, it is important to explain how cooperation materializes at the outset.

2.2.3 Explaining Participation: What Motivates Individuals to Participate?

The theoretical framework I intend to propose has two components. The first component explores the microfoundation of nationalist movements and explains why individuals would participate in nationalist movements. It specifies the effects of two explanatory variables—threat perceptions and domestic institutions—on individual choice. The second component examines these two variables' effects on the state mobilization (see Sect. 2.2.4). I then bring the two components together. This section elaborates on the first component.

Just as other forms of mass movements, mass nationalist movements involve collective action problems. Indeed, nationalism encourages individuals to make sacrifice for group interests. Yet, for collective action to take place in a group as large as a nation, the provision of positive and negative incentives is necessary (Olson 1965). Positive incentives include protection of physical security, immediate economic payoffs, and future economic payoffs. Negative incentives refer to punishment imposed by the state.

2.2.3.1 Protection

Inspired by the fiscal contract model employed by some scholars to explain tax compliance (Bräutigam 2008; Levi 1989),³ I argue that individuals contribute to state-led nationalist movements because they expect the state to deliver services, such as protection and welfare services. The presence of a strong and imminent foreign threat creates the pressing demands for state protection among the populace. Consequently, participants in nationalist movements would expect fewer rewards by way of immediate economic payoffs, provided that the state delivers effective protection. However, if the state fails to deliver protection to citizens, individuals would not lend support to state-led nationalist movements. In Stein's (1980) words, for external conflicts to increase internal cohesion, members of collectivity must see the group as being able to deal with the external threat.

Many believe that external conflicts will generate the spirit of altruism and increase in-group cohesion. However, as many sociologists have pointed out, for external conflicts to work, group members must believe that the threat affects the entire collectivity. If only a subset of the group is threatened, cohesion may not increase (Coser 1956; Stein 1980). Self-regarding interests are at play. Equally important, although conventional wisdom holds that state protection is public goods, it is entirely possible that protection becomes selective incentives provided by the state. For instance, after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the KMT government assisted private factory owners and skilled workers to migrate to the interior, leaving the general population behind (see Chap. 4).

2.2.3.2 Immediate Economic Payoffs

When their physical security is not under threat, individuals may also participate in nationalist movements. They, however, expect the state to provide some economic payoffs as a compensation for the contributions they make to the nationalist cause.

³In Bräutigam's words, "fiscal contract models frames taxation as a collective action problem: rulers wish to maximize revenue, taxpayers wish to minimize payments. These two preferences lead rulers to offer something (representation, accountability, services) in an exchange based on reciprocity."

2.2.3.3 Future Economic Payoffs

Individuals who participate in nationalist movements can also be motivated by future economic payoffs. However, whether individuals would trade off short-term gains for long-term rewards depends on their relative position in domestic institutions.

This is because domestic institutions determine how resources will be distributed within the nation *in the future*. Ordinary people, who have no capacity to reform existing institutions, are more likely to expect existing institutions to persist. They, therefore, assess their future payoffs on the basis of existing institutions. Those who are favored by the existing institutions are more likely to believe that they will benefit from a nationalist movement once it succeeds. For them, the promise of future payoffs from the state elites is more credible (on the role of institutions in solving the problem of credibility, see Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). As a consequence, these individuals are more inclined to make short-term sacrifices and to lend support to nationalist movements. On the contrary, those who are disadvantaged by existing institutions are less likely to believe that they will benefit in the future and thus demand more immediate economic payoffs. At the aggregate level, the majority of the population is more willing to make short-term sacrifices when domestic institutions favor the interests of the poor majority.

Factors motivating individuals to participate in nationalist movements affect the outcome of mobilization. If individuals contribute to nationalist movements in exchange for state protection and future economic payoffs, the state is able to accumulate resources. Nationalist mobilization is more likely to succeed. In contrast, if individuals expect immediate economic payoffs, the costs of mobilization will increase. The state is left with fewer resources that can be devoted to other strategic plans.

The incentive effects that foreign threats and pro-majority institutions exert on individuals tend to wear out over time. Successful nationalist mobilization enables the state to accumulate human and material resources in a relatively short time period. High-level mobilization usually does not last. On the one hand, the sustainability of mobilization is a function of foreign threats. The stronger the threat, the longer mobilization will last. On the other hand, whether high-level mobilization can continue depends on whether state elites can carry on successive pro-majority political and economic reforms and provide more institutional incentives to the masses. Moreover, if mobilization lasts for a longer time, rational individuals would expect state elites to honor part of their promises, distributing some immediate economic payoffs. Pro-majority institutions enable state elites to suppress socioeconomic demands of the masses temporarily, but not forever.

2.2.4 Explaining Mobilization

The two explanatory variables not only exert effects on participants, but also on the state elites and their mobilization. The perception of a strong foreign threat spurs

the state elites to mobilize their nations (Tilly 1997; Hui 2005; Hall 1985; Downing 1992; Mann 1986; Ertman 1997). Nevertheless, countering foreign threats is not the only reason that motivates state elites to turn to the people. State elites may also mobilize the masses behind other strategic plans, such as speeding up industrialization.

Domestic institutions determine the social resistance faced by state elites when they implement nationalist mobilization (Migdal 1988; Ertman 1997). Given that the ultimate objective of state-led mobilization is to increase human and material resources under state control, mobilization is often accompanied by an increase in state extraction. Nevertheless, we must distinguish short-term extractive policies from more durable extractive institutions (for the distinction between pro-majority policies and institutions, see Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). For instance, the state is likely to raise the agricultural tax in wartime. State elites can use the war as a justification for extractive policies and encourage the populace to make short-term sacrifices. Pro-majority institutions, such as private land ownership and equal distribution of land, reassure the masses that extractive policies are temporary. On the contrary, if state elites choose to nationalize the land and establish pro-state institutions, peasants are more likely to believe that excessive state extraction will last. The disincentive effects of pro-state institutions are much stronger than pro-state policies. Simply put, it would be easier for state elites to carry out mobilization and increase state extraction in pro-majority institutional settings than pro-state or pro-minority institutional settings.

Compared with pro-state institutions, pro-minority institutions are even more inimical to state-led mobilization. Indeed, pro-state institutions may alienate the masses and harm producer enthusiasm. However, such institutional arrangements enhance the state's extractive capability. For instance, during the Great Leap Forward, the people's commune guaranteed that state procurement took precedence in the distribution of harvest (see Chap. 6). As a result, state tax revenues continued to increase when agricultural production fell drastically. The state was able to accumulate resources through excessive extraction. Pro-minority institutions, however, empower the social elites at the expense of the state and the masses. On the one hand, the privileged rich minority often wields its power to appropriate state resources and resist government policies that go against its interests. On the other hand, pro-minority institutions affect the time horizon of the poor majority. Disadvantaged by the institutions, the poor majority is less willing to trade-off short-term gains for long-term gains. The masses expect more immediate economic payoffs from the state. Additionally, as Levi (1989, 1998) argues, citizen consent is contingent upon the perceived fairness. The knowledge that the rich minority enjoys privileges and evades taxes and conscription affects the poor majority's compliance with government policy.

Unlike pro-state and pro-minority institutions, pro-majority institutions minimize the social resistance. State elites are able to convince the majority of the population that current hardship is temporary, and that participants will receive future economic payoffs once the nationalist cause succeeds. Meanwhile, the social elites are

deprived of an autonomous source of power, and thus become less capable of resisting government policy.

In addition, the establishment of pro-majority institutions is often accompanied by the dispossession of the rich minority. For state elites, the dispossession of the rich minority generates “revolutionary surplus” (Popkin 1988).⁴ For instance, in the early 1930s, property confiscation and forced donation, exceeding land tax revenue, became the most important revenue source of the Central Soviet Area (Huang 2011). During the Sino-Japanese War, the CCP often led hungry peasants to seize landlords’ grain. But not all resources confiscated from the landlords were distributed among the peasants. In some areas, the CCP set aside “public lands” to ensure that the Communist government and the Red Army could support themselves (Wou 1994). Conventional wisdom holds that nationalism increases domestic solidarity, provided that there are no obvious ethnic cleavages. As a matter of fact, mass nationalist movements often emerge from domestic, more specifically, interclass brutality.

As argued above, high-level mobilization does not last long, and the sustainability of mobilization partially depends on whether state elites can carry out successive pro-majority reforms and distribute institutional benefits to the masses. It is also worthwhile to consider the preexisting social contexts. In a society characterized by significant inequality, even a moderate pro-majority institutional reform tends to generate great incentive effects. However, the paradox is that in such a society, moderate pro-majority reforms are more likely to fail, since the rich and powerful social elites are more capable of wielding their power to resist pro-majority reform. Consequently, to ensure the success of the institutional reform, state elites often find that they are forced to pursue a more radical line of reform and destroy the power base of the rich minority thoroughly. During the Korean War, faced by resistance from the landlords, the CCP radicalized the land reform (see Chap. 5).

Before I proceed further, it is necessary to make an excursion to point out that the existing literature tends to underestimate the agency of the state in shaping domestic institutions and in restructuring society. For instance, Migdal (1988) suggests that state leaders in many countries face impenetrable barriers to state predominance—the resistance posed by local strongmen. In contrast, I argue that nationalist mobilization succeeds not because local resistance does not exist, but because state elites manage to counter the resistance and demolish traditional networks of authority. The state plays an important role in shaping domestic political and economic institutions.

Indeed, the state might be constrained by the preexisting institutions. Yet, the state sometimes makes its own enemies. Illustratively, before the CCP left Jiangxi, it had carried out land reform in some areas of the province, which significantly weakened the power base of the landlords (see Chap. 3). The KMT government

⁴Popkin demonstrates that the Vietnamese Communists subsidized the construction of water storage and irrigation facilities in villages, which contributed to the long-run increase in productivity. This policy produced not only immediate benefits for the peasants, but also surplus that could be used to wage the revolution. I suggest that apart from enlarging the pie, the other way through which revolutionary surplus is generated is to redistribute the pie.

should have been able to install or, more precisely, maintain the pro-majority institutions established by the CCP. However, the KMT government chose to restore pro-minority institutions by adopting a policy of “returning the land to the original owners” (Averill 1981). Pro-minority institutions empowered the landlords, who wielded their power to resist state mobilization and appropriated state resources.

2.2.5 *Bringing the Two Components Together*

Successful mobilization is most likely to happen when the public perceives a strong and imminent foreign threat and when domestic institutions are pro-majority. If one condition is absent, nationalist mobilization is likely to achieve a limited success. In the absence of both, nationalist mobilization is likely to end up with a complete failure (see Table 2.1).

2.2.5.1 Strong Threat Perceptions, Pro-majority Institutions, and Successful Mobilization

When the public perceives a strong foreign threat, its demand for state protection rises. In search of state protection, individuals become more willing to give their consent to the government and participate in state-led nationalist movements. They ask for fewer immediate economic payoffs, as long as the state can guarantee their physical security. Their participation leads to the enhancement of state control over human resources. The state elites can project the foreign enemy as the root cause of current hardship and suppress people’s welfare demands.

Pro-majority institutions also facilitate mobilization. Favored by domestic institutions, the majority of the population is more likely to believe that they will receive rewards once the nationalist movement succeeds. Although state extraction increases under mobilization, people deem current hardship temporary. In addition, in a pro-majority institutional setting, social elites (such as the landlords) are less capable of resisting government policy and appropriating state resources. In sum, when the public perceives a strong foreign threat and domestic institutions are pro-majority, the immediate costs of mobilization are reduced. Nationalist mobilization is most likely to succeed.

Table 2.1 Threat perceptions, domestic institutions, and outcome of mobilization

	Pro-majority institutions	Pro-minority/pro-state institutions
Strong threat perceptions	Mobilization succeeds	Limited success
Weak threat perceptions	Limited success	Mobilization fails

2.2.5.2 Strong Threat Perceptions, Pro-minority/Pro-state Institutions, and the Limited Success of Mobilization

Unlike the previous case, though the perception of foreign threats lowers the immediate costs of the mobilization, pro-minority/pro-state institutions make mobilization costly. Disadvantaged by domestic institutions, people are less likely to find the promise of future economic payoffs by the state elites credible. Under the pro-state institutional settings, people are likely to think that excessive state extraction will last. Just as pro-state institutions, pro-minority institutions alienate the majority of the population. In addition, pro-minority institutions empower a few social elites at the expense of the state and the masses. The social elites wield their power to appropriate state resources and resist government mobilization. For instance, the rich may be able to buy their way out when they are called upon to serve in the military. Due to the lack of fairness, the masses are less willing to comply with government policy. The immediate costs of nationalist mobilization rise. As a result, nationalist mobilization is more likely to end up with limited success.

2.2.5.3 Weak Threat Perceptions, Pro-majority Institutions, and the Limited Success of Mobilization

In the absence of a strong foreign threat, state elites may also mobilize the masses to accomplish other strategic goals. Since there is no pressing demand for state protection among the people, individuals would expect the state to deliver other services, such as improving the welfare system. The costs of nationalist mobilization rise. Nevertheless, due to the pro-majority institutions, state elites are more capable of mobilizing the masses by promising them future economic payoffs. Moreover, pro-majority institutions also weaken the power base of social elites and thus their capabilities of resisting government policies. In pro-majority institutional settings, the rich minority is deprived of economic and political privileges. As domestic fairness improves, the masses become more willing to give consent to the government and endure temporary hardship. Under these conditions, nationalist mobilization is likely to achieve limited success.

2.2.5.4 Weak Threat Perceptions, Pro-minority/Pro-state Institutions, and Failed Mobilization

In the absence of a strong foreign threat and pro-majority institutions, the masses would only participate in nationalist movements when they receive immediate economic payoffs. Pro-minority institutions empower social elites. Local strongmen make policy implementation at the grassroots level more difficult. For state elites, the costs of nationalist mobilization would be prohibitively high. Nationalist

Table 2.2 Independent variables and their effects

	Effects on individuals	Effects on the state	Effects on the outcome of mobilization
Threat perceptions	Perceiving a strong foreign threat, individuals participate in nationalist movements in search of state protection	Perceiving a strong foreign threat, state elites turn to the masses and carry out nationalist mobilization	The public's threat perceptions lower the immediate costs of mobilization and facilitate state mobilization
	In the absence of a strong foreign threat, individuals would require the state to provide economic payoffs	In the absence of a strong foreign threat, state elites may mobilize the masses behind other strategic plans	In the absence of a strong foreign threat, the immediate costs of mobilization rise
Domestic institutions	Pro-majority institutions encourage the masses to make short-term sacrifices in exchange for future economic payoffs	In pro-majority institutional settings, societal resistance faced by the state reduces	Pro-majority institutions lower the immediate costs of mobilization and facilitate state mobilization
	Pro-minority/pro-state institutions alienate the masses. The masses would require more immediate economic payoffs	Pro-state institutions incur resistance from the masses Pro-minority institutions incur resistance from the masses and empower social elites at the expense of the state	

mobilization is most likely to fail. Table 2.2 summarizes the effects of two explanatory variables.

2.3 Alternative Explanations

As demonstrated above, this research contributes to the debate on what motivates nationalist behavior, material self-interests or emotions (Connor 1994; Kecmanovic 2005; Breton 1995). I do not deny that emotive nationalism of the masses facilitates state mobilization. Rather, I suggest that existing theories overlook the rationality of the mass participants in nationalist movement, and thus tend to underestimate the ease with which state elites rouse the masses to collective action. In this section, I examine two major alternative explanations for nationalist participation, both of which are built on the emotive nationalism assumption. One highlights the role of cultural symbols in encouraging people to participate in nationalist movements; the other attaches more importance to ethnic animosities. These two explanations will be tested

in the following chapters. In the chapters on case studies, I will further engage case-specific explanations proposed by different historians and China experts.

2.3.1 Cultural Symbols

For ethno-symbolists, national symbols or other cultural factors rouse people to collective action (Smith 2001; Connor 1994). The ethno-symbolist thesis is vague in the sense that it does not specify what kind of cultural symbols lead to successful mobilization. On the one hand, to mobilize the entire society, state elites have to deploy cultural symbols that are attractive to the broadest possible constituency. Such symbols are most likely to be drawn from the national culture. For instance, Gellner (1983) suggests that as industrialization progresses, wild cultures would be replaced by a high culture. On the other hand, there is a chasm between the high national culture and the low local cultures. It is worth asking why a person who has never experienced the high culture would find these symbols adopted by state elites appealing. According to Anderson (2006), “print capitalism” is an important channel through which people have a taste of national culture. Nations, as imagined communities, became possible because of “print capitalism.”

Although these theories offer accounts for the emergence of nationalism and nationalist movements, a series of questions remain unanswered. For instance, why would mass nationalist movements take place in preindustrial societies? Why would illiterate peasants imagine themselves as members of a nation and lend support to the nationalist cause? In this sense, ethno-symbolism does not provide sufficient explanations.

One falsifiable hypothesis derived from this proposition is that individuals are more likely to participate in nationalist movements when the ideology espoused by the mobilizers contains more indigenous elements and fewer foreign elements. This hypothesis will be tested against the mass-based instrumentalist explanation I propose (see Chap. 3). If political elites who are able to distribute material incentives among participants gain more support, even if the ideology they espouse contains more foreign elements, the ethno-symbolist proposition will be weakened and I will have more confidence in my argument, and vice versa.

2.3.2 Ethnic Animosities

Different from the ethno-symbolist argument, primordialists attach more importance to the dictates of blood or the role of kinship ties in causing collective action. Many scholars employ primordialist arguments to explain ethnic violence in ethnically plural societies (Geertz 1963; Connor 1994). Collective violence is attributed to ethnic animosities, which have lasted for centuries and will not easily disappear in the future. Ancient animosities supersede rational calculus. When it comes to war or

conflicts between national states, primordialists would predict that the more atrocities committed by foreign troops against the fellow nationals of a country, the more animosities will be caused. Consequently, resistance by a country against the foreign troops will be more intense. Moreover, for primordialists, the animosities between the two nations will not disappear even after the war ends and will continue to sour bilateral relations between the two countries.

If primordialist accounts are correct, we would see that more ordinary people participate in nationalist mobilization when foreign attacks lead to high civilian casualties. Foreign invaders who committed atrocities at the initial stage of the war will find it difficult to consolidate their occupation. This is because previous atrocities generate hatred among the population and such hatred will perpetuate and keep motivating people to join nationalist resistance. Resistance will persist even if invaders give up the initial heavy-handed policies and begin to pursue a mild occupational policy. In contrast, if people refrained from participating in nationalist movements and choose to collaborate with foreign occupiers as soon as the latter stop threatening the former's physical security, primordialist explanations will be weakened and instrumentalist explanation strengthened.

Unlike the primordialist explanations, although my explanation also emphasizes the role that foreign threat plays in facilitating nationalist mobilization, I contend that individuals participate in nationalist movements to maximize the likelihood of survival. Participation is contingent upon not only whether the threat perception persists, but also upon whether the mobilizers are able to deliver effective protection. I will have more confidence in my explanation if nationalist participation reduces when the mobilizers fail to provide participants with effective protection (see Chap. 4).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has laid out my theoretical framework and also situated this research in the relevant theoretical debates. I emphasize the necessity of a mass-based instrumental explanation for state-led nationalist movement. I assume that individuals participate in state-led nationalist movements to advance material interests. On this ground, I argue that nationalist mobilization by the state is more likely to succeed when the public perceives a strong and imminent foreign threat and when domestic institutions are pro-majority. Both conditions encourage individuals to make short-term sacrifices for long-term advantages. Moreover, pro-majority institutions prevent social elites from gaining an autonomous source of power, and thus facilitate the implementation of government policy. As a consequence, the state is able to accumulate human and material resources, so that state elites can invest in their strategic plans. The following chapters present an in-depth analysis of four nationalist movements that took place in Chinese history. I arrange the case studies in chronological order: Jiangxi during the New Life Movement (Chap. 3), Sichuan during the Sino-Japanese War (Chap. 4), the lower Yangtze region during the Korean War (Chap. 5), and Sichuan during the Great Leap Forward (Chap. 6).

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