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Nationalism and Internationalism

(An address before the Rotary Club of Shanghai
November 26, 1926)

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Rotary Club of
Shanghai and Friends:

I am keenly sensitive of the honor which you are thrusting upon me by asking me to address you this afternoon. I have chosen for my subject, "Nationalism and Internationalism," which is a theme of much importance though much misinterpreted and abused during these days. Whether or not we have a true understanding of this subject and assume a proper attitude towards it will, I presume, greatly affect the peace and happiness of the world.

Generally speaking nationalism means devotion to, or advocacy of, National interests or national unity and independence. So far so good. The troublous question is, "Which national interests are involved?" As our national interests and the conditions of our national life are widely different, and at places are even supposed to be in conflict, we are apt to look upon each other's nationalism in a prejudiced manner. The nationalism of one people is suspected as imperialism, and that of another is condemned as bolshevism. Self-righteousness, self-interest and mutual accusations seem to be the fashion of the day.

A war psychology is rampant. Cunning and destructive propaganda is recklessly resorted to. Whither are we hurrying our respective nations and the world? It requires no prophetic powers to answer this question.

The difference in our national interests should be given proper recognition at the very outset. The interests of one nation for example may be preponderately agricultural, while those of another are industrial. Is this difference of interests causing the present misunderstandings and troubles? Should we try to unify these interests? In my judgment, it is unnecessary, useless, and impossible to unify them. Even if we were able to do so, it would prove to be "much ado about nothing." Worse than that, unification of our interests would spell keener struggle for gains and for supremacy which in turn would lead to more disastrous results. Fortunately, our national interests are different, and these differences should help at once to obviate trouble and to make a better and richer world for all of us. We should, by no means, deplore or abuse our differing interests, but on the other hand should appreciate and capitalize them for our common good.

It is not the differences in our national interests, I am sure, that are responsible for disrupted relations. It is rather our wrong viewpoint and our prejudiced attitude towards them which is creating the hazardous conditions in which we find ourselves. Why should we suspect the national interests of another people as being disadvantageous to our own, and, for that reason, do our best to

destroy them? Perhaps, their interests may not be identical with our own. Our actions are certainly not welcomed when we too aggressively and unjustly push our own interests. What is wrong in a people resisting outside aggression and domination which unchecked will ultimately destroy them and their national life? What justifies our action in supplanting the interests of another nation with our own unwelcomed or even harmful interests?

I have also referred to the differences which exist in the conditions of our national life. One nation may excel in cultural achievements, while another may cover itself with military honors. One people may be more advanced than another in what is called civilization. What do these differences or inequalities mean? And what do we make of them? Do they confer upon the stronger and more advanced nation the freedom or right to trample down and gradually to extirpate the weaker and less advanced nation or nations? This seems to have been the philosophy underlying much of national and international relations. Do we still cling to this type of nationalism today?

I do not for a moment suggest that we should give up our nationalism or the love each of us has for his own country. I well remember the jeers and the contempt which have been bestowed upon my own people when they failed to exhibit that type of nationalism known to the people of the West. In certain ways, this shame has not been altogether retrieved until this day. I have always

maintained, however, that my people have just as intense a love for our country as any other people on earth, although this love is cherished and expressed in its own ways. If my people have not had some form of genuine devotion to our country, how shall we account for our continuous national life of over 4,000 years during which time our contacts with outside peoples and races have been constant? We must all retain our nationalism, which we shall continue to express each in our own special way.

On the other hand, I do not think many of us have a true enough devotion to the highest and best interests of our own nation. Is it not true that our respective expressions of nationalism are often biased, narrow, and prejudiced in favor of ourselves—right or wrong? Do we not often presume upon our better knowledge, superior position, or greater force to impose ourselves upon another people in comparative ignorance or in a weaker condition in order that we may exploit them? As long as we permit and look with favor upon such unrighteous and unjust acts, we are not truly loving our own country but are actually courting trouble and inviting retribution from which there is no escape. We must have an unquestioned devotion to our country, and at the same time this devotion must be placed on a higher plane than that on which it is ordinarily found.

A further definition of nationalism seems to be wanted, as it will affect in no small way our understanding of and attitude towards internationalism. I shall try briefly to

summarize my ideas regarding nationalism. Negatively, nationalism (1) should not mean a biased love of one's own country at the expense of another country; nor (2) a stand for one's national dignity or interests, right or wrong; nor (3) a devotion which is blind to the interests and rights of another people; nor (4) the abuse of fuller knowledge or greater force to advance one's national interests; nor (5) a readiness to take undue advantage of another race which may be found in an inferior or difficult position: nor (6) a negligence of one's national responsibilities in trying to serve the common interests of the world.

Positively, nationalism (1) should clearly and definitely point to a man's national duty to help develop to the fullest extent the special gifts with which his own people are endowed and the natural resources which they have inherited, and this not simply for their own use and enjoyment but as their national contribution to the sum-total of the world's civilization. (2) It should inspire and guide each nation to walk in the pathway of righteousness, justice, and truth, and it should also impel her to go to the assistance of weaker and less advanced nations even though at the time it may seem to be at real sacrifice to herself. I firmly believe that greater knowledge, experience, capacity, and strength are given a race not for self-gratification or for the exploitation of weaker peoples but for its better preparation for greater and more unselfish service to humanity. It is this type of nationalism which we should develop and spread.

Some people may wonder why I have not worded my subject as Nationalism versus Internationalism. It is true, I suppose, that many men think that nationalism and internationalism are opposed to each other, and can scarcely be harmonized. They believe that if they are true and loyal to their own country, then, of necessity, they must fight against internationalism. They may be perfectly honest in their conviction that internationalism means either the sacrifice of their own nationalism which they will refuse to do, or sheer hypocrisy which is worse than futile. What a wrong, unjust and harmful interpretation of internationalism! The fact that we do not find anything like a satisfactory definition of this important word in the modern English dictionary may be looked upon as a clear evidence of the exceedingly small and delimited world in which each nation and race has been living. Do not our prejudices and our self-interest have a terribly dwarfing and debasing effect on us?

Another important factor in our imperfect and obscure understanding of internationalism is, doubtless, the failure to develop our capacities as we should and to adjust ourselves to new and changing conditions. Not long ago, we were separated from each other by mountains and seas, and mostly we lived sufficient unto ourselves. Later discoveries and scientific inventions have succeeded in annihilating distance, and this world of ours has been much reduced in size. We are forced to live side by side, and our interests have become inextricably inter-woven. Moreover, our physical, intellectual and spiritual needs

have greatly multiplied and our dependence upon each other has become greater. Isolated national life is now impractical and unwholesome. Unfortunately, these discoveries and inventions have gotten the better of us in that the human race has failed to keep pace with them in progress. We are now caught not only lacking in the spirit of neighborliness but also sadly deficient in ability to understand and to live internationally.

What is internationalism? To me, it means world-brotherhood or the consummation of the family of nations. These are not mere empty expressions of ideals but are, in my judgment, fully capable of early realization if we are willing to work at it. A world-brotherhood certainly does not mean only one brother, however strong he may be. In the same way, one member can hardly constitute a family. According to our present calculation, there must be between 40 and 50 brother-nations in this world-family. Like the members of a family, they differ in their endowments, heritage, appearance, education, abilities, experience, outlook-on-life, and condition-in-life. These differences do not make them lose their membership in the family, but rather obligate each member to lay his best offering on the family altar, and to assist the other members in whatever way he can. A brotherly spirit should permeate every thought and act. Everything should contribute toward the common good. When nationalism and internationalism are on this sound basis, we shall find perfect harmony and peace. It is not Nationalism versus Internationalism,

but Nationalism and Internationalism in which I firmly believe and which our Y. M. C. A. movement has been trying to inculcate in the minds of our young people.

To a Chinese mind, nationalism and internationalism have not been considered as two opposing or mutually exclusive principles. In fact, nationalism has been looked upon as a necessary and important preparation for internationalism, while internationalism has been deemed the natural consummation of nationalism. The Great Learning most clearly states: "The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the world, first ordered well their own countries;..... their countries being rightly governed, the whole world was made tranquil and happy." How can we rightly govern our country? We certainly must notice the conspicuous omission of any reference to law or to force. The Great Learning points out that in order to govern our country well we must first regulate our families, and, tracing the different steps backwards, we are to cultivate our persons, to rectify our hearts, to be sincere in our thoughts, to extend to the utmost our knowledge, and to investigate things. When our nationalism is lifted and developed on this high plane, it naturally moves in the direction of internationalism as a sequence. When will the nations of the world be able to reach this high standard of life?

In accordance with these principles, my own conviction is that it requires a good nationalist to be a good internationalist, and, likewise, a good internationalist to

be a good nationalist. To elaborate a bit, a poor and unfaithful nationalist cannot be an honest and conscientious internationalist; nor a false internationalist, a true nationalist. When both ring true, I have no fear of any conflict between the two loyalties. Every man can, and should, be a loyal nationalist and a stanch internationalist, at the same time. If he finds this impossible, there must be something wrong either in his nationalism or in his internationalism, or in both. The sooner he discovers the trouble and rids himself of it the better for him, for his country, and for the world.

In the light of these principles I shall now raise a few practical questions for consideration:

1. Shall we not, each in his own way, continue to study the subject of nationalism and internationalism in order to acquire a proper and fuller understanding of it?
2. Shall we not determine to revise and rectify our own thinking and attitude, if a fuller understanding shows that we are wrong?
3. Shall we not examine our own nationalism and endeavor to raise it to a higher standard when found below our highest ideal?
4. Shall we not be willing to practise the highest type of nationalism and internationalism in which we honestly believe even if it costs us something?
5. Shall we not be willing to promote the right understanding of nationalism and internationalism in Shanghai?

6. Will not the members of the Rotary Club, either by themselves or in co-operation with other organizations, or by both methods, try to create a cosmopolitan mind and to foster international fellowship in this great metropolis?

In conclusion, Friends, in speaking on this most important subject of Nationalism and Internationalism, I am not unmindful of the tremendous amount of prejudice, pessimism and hostility in many minds which are exceedingly difficult to overcome. Some people may even refuse to believe in the possibility of harmonizing nationalism and internationalism. Others perhaps wish to advocate one pan-nationalism instead of internationalism. Of course, each man is entitled to hold his own honest belief. However, as far as I am concerned, I set up the world-brotherhood as my goal, and each nation as a member of this world-family on an exactly equal basis with the rest. Each nation lives for itself and for the world, and the world lives for each nation and for all the nations together. The brotherhood of men should be founded in the fatherhood of God, and this foundation will endure forever. May we jointly and severally contribute our best, building on this foundation on which in the years to come the beautiful edifice of universal peace, good-will, and harmony will stand.