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Imperial Ideology and British Nationalism in the XIX and XX Centuries

Darima D. Amogolonova[a]* and Andrei V. Simonov[b]

*[a] Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies,
Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences,
6 Sakhyanovoi, Ulan-Ude, 670047 Russia
[b] Russian State University for the Humanities,
6 Miusskaya square, Moscow, 125993 Russia [1]*

The paper "Imperial Ideology and British Nationalism in the XIX and XX centuries" deals with the phenomenon of Britishness as a form of national identity in a context of British Empire. The authors argue that arising and functioning of the Empire became the most essential factor that affected the ethnic groups of Great Britain in the processes of the XIX century nation-building in counterbalance to ethnocultural identities. Collapse of the Empire resulted in deactualization of Britishness and return to the previous identities. Simultaneously, the British identity appeared to be rather productive for the self-identification of the "newcomers". Thus, Britishness has got extra senses related to distinct racial and cultural differentiation of the British society.

Keywords: Britishness; identity; ethnicity; British Empire; world-system; constructivism

Introduction

The epoch of globalization is characterized with unprecedented confluence of nation-states in the political and economic alliances, increasing migratory flows, and arising new forms of multicultural and multiethnic societies. Simultaneously, the present-day situation shows manifestation of various ideologies with common content that can be named nationalism. Modern humanities recognize that the concept of nationalism is very broad and does not necessarily imply the involvement of a big number of people who feel themselves as members of the national community into political activities. The most general definition of nationalism, which includes both nationalism of the emerging nation and nationalism of the existing nation, is proposed by the Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology: "Nationalism is the political doctrine which holds that humanity can be divided into separate, discrete units – nations – and that each nation should constitute a separate political unit – a state. The claim to nationhood usually invokes the idea of a group of people with a shared culture, often a shared language, sometimes a shared religion, and usually but not always a shared history; to this it adds the political claim that this group of people should, by rights, rule themselves or be ruled

by people of the same kind (nation, ethnicity, language, religion, etc.)" (Barnard, Spencer, 2003: 590).

In this sense, the nationalism of the United Kingdom completely corresponds to the idea of Britishness (Britishism) in at least two definitions: the first one, patriotic unity within the nation-state, which, as W. Connor defines, is characterized by the absence of ethnic conflicts (Connor, 1994: 69) and the second one, daily life and social customs that can be described in M. Billig's terms of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995).

Which content of Britishness will occupy prevailing status, depends on a sense of homogeneity and horizontal ties. As a matter of fact, the conflict in the framework of a nation consists in particular in the fact of dominance when one or several ethnic groups prevail in number, influence or cultural expansion thus preventing the sense of super-ethnic unity. In the course of last decades, polyethnicity and multiraciality of the British society have actualized a problem whether Britishness exists at present, or existed in history, or will exist in the future. Actually, the situation in Great Britain is not unique: almost all multiethnic states including Russia are facing a crisis of all-national identity. Therefore, the investigation of the phenomenon of Britishness is relevant for identifying common and peculiar features of nationalisms. Comparativist analysis of situations in different communities contributes to better knowledge how national ideologies impact public consciousness; British example is rather indicative in the sense of gradual increase of tension in interracial relations and "washing out" of all-national identity.

Materials and Methods

In our work we employ materials from relevant research works on political and cultural history of Great Britain (M. Storry, P. Childs, P.W. Barker, T. Wright, A. Aughey, J. Darwin,

etc.), printed archives (Hyam, 1992; Goldsworthy, 1994), and mass media discussions, such as in the Daily Telegraph, the Daily Star, the Mirror, the Sun and the Sunday Times.

The research applies the methodology of the world-system analysis (Wallerstein, 1974) and constructivist paradigm (Anderson, 1991; Barth, 1969; Cohen, 2000; Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1986) of contemporary social and political anthropology in combination with the system principle to social processes. The basic methodological principles are supplemented with a concept of depoliticized nationalism in M. Billig's interpretation. The latter concept strictly divides nationalism into the ideology of arising nation and banal or everyday reproduction of national belonging by means of "flagging" that implies a sort of repeated actions aimed at consumption of symbols. On the one hand, banal reproduction of Britishness seems to be older than most other nationalisms. And on the other hand, in the present-day conditions of globalization and impetuous immigration to Great Britain, traditional British values (whatever is understood under them) being fixed within the limits of banal nationalism get a political context of non-tolerance.

Results

The phenomenon of Britishness is tightly connected with the historical processes in the UK, with its role in the international politics both in the past and present, and with globalization, which manifests in the growing immigration of the representatives of other ethnoracial and cultural communities to the British Isles. When proposing consideration of Britishness as a specific form of nationalism, we do not exclude other interpretations of the phenomenon, such as cultural identity. At the same time it is worth marking that in the modern social science nationalism is often represented beyond the limits of a militant political ideology: it can act

as a collective "we-image", i.e. as a language and principle of self-description that promotes construction of communality.

Historically Britishness was formed within the United Kingdom and for political reasons was far inferior to ethnic (ethnocultural and ethnopolitical) identities of the Scots, Welsh and Irish. Status inequality of different ethnic groups in the economic sphere and access to the power resources (A. Smith caustically marked this as "residential segregation" (Smith, 1998: 60)) contributed to a steady representation of the British as almost exclusively Englishmen from the point of view of both outside observers and non-English British.

The situation has changed significantly when military-colonial expansion began. Widening overseas possessions gave career opportunities to all ethnic groups in Britain, thus improving their financial situation. Since the end of the XVIII century, thanks to the participation in the conquests, the British identity (as belonging to the most successful community) has coexisted with ethnicity though the latter was not replaced. Due to the fact that the social basis and ethnicity of the participants of colonial campaigns (sailors and soldiers) was very broad, the term "Englishmen" was losing its narrow ethnic content: it was getting the meaning of Britishness that was taking roots in the representations of both conquered peoples and British public consciousness.

Final formation of Britishness as a nationalist ideology and self-awareness of the Brits took place in the second half of the XIX century when the British Empire reached its development having become a major force in world politics and economy. Actively propagandized British values coupled with the rapid growth of British wealth derived the notion of Britishness from merely political rhetoric and introduced into the broadest social classes. Britishness has become synonymous with world domination and

legitimized rights to economic resources of the colonies and to the fate of the peoples of Asia and Africa. This results in strong relationship between Britishness and British imperialism that was understood as a civilizing mission of the United Kingdom among the disadvanced communities, which thus joined Christianity, European education, and social institutions and systems.

Collapse of the British Empire could not but affect the Britishness in ideological sense. The loss of the empire "core" entailed actualization of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish ethno-cultural identities instead Britishness. It would be appropriate to cite a letter from our British friend who wrote (quotation was kindly permitted): "People thought of themselves as English, Irish, Welsh, Scottish, (and actually, more than this, from Warwickshire, Somerset, Perthshire, London, Cornwall, etc. etc.), but as united in living under the British Imperial Government". This young woman, a British researcher, is of opinion that actualization of Britishness alongside with ethnic identity was initiated in the late XX century by the communities of immigrants who call themselves the "British" ("black British", "Muslim British" or simply "British"). Precisely for this reason, the "indigenous" white British try to "reserve" the term and corresponding sense of Britishness for themselves. Thus at present, Britishness is considered as an ambiguous concept: on the one hand, it implies greatness of the nation that possesses glorious historical memory; on the other hand, this meaning of Britishness is being pushed aside due to newcomers whose Britishness has exactly opposite meaning: the British by citizenship but not by "roots and blood". The term thus again shows the opposition between the "ethnic" British and "newcomers".

Of course, the Britishness is far beyond the imperial context. Other contexts are of no less importance: traditional values in which a notable

place is given to the monarchy and Anglican Church, customs and way of life and behavior, democratic institutes and freedoms, level and quality of life, etc. Complete research implies studying and analyzing the totality of Britishness, in which imperial ideology is only one of the constituent elements.

Discussion

Scientific literature on British identity is rather wide; most researchers are of opinion that the formation of Britishness took place within strengthening British monarchy and successful albeit painful process of inclusion of Scottish, Welsh and Irish areas in the structure of a united state (Wright, 2003; Julios, 2008). However, political actions, though uncontroversial, did not create a British national identity. When defining political identity in Britain, Philip Lynch argues that in the everyday consciousness, Britishness is a synonym for Englishness, the latter forming in fact all the specific features of national patriotism and national character, which manifests in commitment to conservatism. "The emergence of the English then British nation-state and national identities prior to the era of ideological nationalism and democratic politics limited the scope for the emergence of ethnic or oppositional patriotisms... In the United Kingdom's (UK) multinational state, the balance between a state-based British identity and older ethnic or national identities has been a complex one. The nations of the UK maintained important aspects of their ethnic, political and cultural identities, with a British state patriotism added to these to provide a sense of shared identity and interests, thereby limiting the scope for separatist sub-state nationalisms" (Lynch, 1999: 2).

Priority of English in the British national values as well as in the idea of the British nation grows out of ideas that emerged and developed in the British political culture and English national identity. Being the most advanced political and economic part of the UK, England extrapolated all over the country its bureaucratic model, the social hierarchy and relationships between social strata, property relations and interpersonal relations, home and foreign policy. And the French revolution that threatened the British state security in particular because the Irish belonged to the Roman Catholic Church promoted unconditional recognition of Anglicanism as the national religion.

Introducing British/English traditions into different ethnic groups was uneven: while anglization of the Scottish elites was rapid, the same process among the Irish was, first, delayed and, second, faced considerable resistance at least because of obvious political and cultural discrimination against the backdrop of economic backwardness. Absence of the national religion, that could be a bridge between ethnic and cultural groups, implied an inner contradiction between the Anglican Church and other branches of Christianity – Roman Catholicism and Calvinism – thus increasing cultural differentiation.

However, in the XVIII and XIX centuries, the processes of national homogenization greatly intensified by the establishment of Britain as an imperial metropolis; simultaneously, the monarchy being the bulwark of the imperial ideology became the British national heritage and national idea. In addition to economic, military and political characteristics of the empire, a geopolitical factor was of undoubted importance. The Empire, over which "the sun never set" occupied by the end of the XIX century the fifth part of the Earth with a population of four hundred million people; this placed Britain into "the center of the world" (Johnson, 2003: 1).

This undoubtedly contributed to a feeling of British/metropolitan superiority over all other parts of the Empire. No doubt that actual participation in the creation of the empire was of

more importance than simple self-identification with the imperial power. Such participation with accompanied financial incentives was large scale and included into the notion of the dominating nation also those who due to their ethnic characteristics and historical memory held a subordinated position in the British society. Isaac Land marks that colonial wars became the biggest unifying force of Britishness because thanks to them the various ethnic and social groups – "competing factions" – chose to cooperate with the government rather than recalling past wrongs or to call for separatism. Military campaigns of British Army and Navy were represented as patriotic actions, in which the civilians took an active part (for example, women collected donations and made clothes for the soldiers, and traders created philanthropic societies) (Land, 2009: 6). While military service in the colonial army for defending the interests of Great Britain in various parts of the world certainly created a patriotic image, British nationalism for soldiers and sailors became a quite pronounced alternative to the ethnic (local) identity: "Britain was a nation forged in war, and the sine qua non of "Britishness" was a more or less direct contribution to the war effort. By this logic, sailors should have been among the first and most enthusiastic Britons. Conscription removed them from whatever local or provincial milieu they knew before" (Land, 2009: 7).

This was especially true concerning the Irish: in the middle of the XIX century, the Irish in the Bengal army by number almost caught up with the English. The Irish who were also colonized by the British understood military service as one of very few employment opportunities. It is worth marking that decrease in the number of the Irish in India after the Great National Revolt (1857-59) and ensuing famine meant their return to homeland only partially: many of them chose to leave for the United States (Mohanram, 2007:

167). Thus, the British identity that prevailed in the Irish in the colonies came into conflict with the feeling of their discriminatory status in Great Britain.

However, in the colonies, as Graham Dawson wrote, the notions of "Englishmen" and "British" turned out to be interchangeable in the identification sense. Unlike in Britain, in the colonies both words meant belonging to Britishness understood as "imperial race" that in its turn included equally the English, Scots, Welsh and Irish – all those who enjoyed the privileges of being the British both in the "color" colonies and "white" Dominions (Bassnett, 2003: xxiv).

Thanks to the social significance of the formation, expansion and strengthening of the empire, Britishness in the XIX century was closely linked with British imperialism. The latter was and still is understood in two ways: initiated by John Hobson, it implies a policy of territorial expansion, while the Marxist interpretation of John Hobson' ideas presented by Vladimir Lenin offers the class nature of this phenomenon with simultaneous statement that imperialism is the last stage of capitalism. It is clear that in the Marxist ideological terms, imperialism is completely negative and unfair phenomenon, which is aimed at pillaging of the colonies. Economic and political interpretation of British imperialism in the non-Marxist key implied the missionary spread of Anglo-Saxon civilization and in this sense the Victorian political leaders of all parties were enthusiastic supporters of imperialism (Tompson, 2003: 255-256). Thanks to huge profits from the colonies, it became possible to increase significantly in the British level and quality of life; in its turn, this contributed to a certain leveling of economic borders between social layers and reducing social tension.

Colonialism promoted getting rid of "superfluous" people: migration to the colonies, Australia and other regions reduced

unemployment, expanded markets for British goods and ultimately improved the living standards of the British Isles. The proceeds from colonial expansion as well as organization of trade unions, raising the educational level of the British made possible the enforcement of important laws relating people engaged in physical labor. For example, women's work in the mining industry was prohibited; besides, according to the new law, women's working hours could not exceed ten hours. Important reforms touched also the sphere of politics: for example, at the initiative of the Prime Minister B. Disraeli, in 1867 the Parliament adopted the "Reform Act" that significantly expanded the social base of voters. In other words, the general democratization of British society promoted a sense of British identity. In the epoch of Queen Victoria's Golden Age when Great Britain took the place of the first world power, the British felt true prosperity. A feeling of imperial superiority was skillfully constructed by conservators at power and was commonly shared by the British.

No doubt that when vast majority of the Brits felt real benefits from the imperial government policy, imperialism was assessed positively thus contributing to the consolidation of Britishness as a nationalist ideology that influenced public consciousness of all social and ethnic groups. It is safe to assume that for the British community in general, Britishness and imperialism were synonyms and that is why imperialism was not the approved ideology only: it formed the basis of national pride with the consequent uncritical attitude to the seizure of foreign territories and building up British prosperity on the robbery of other nations. British "we-image" as civilizing missioners in Asia and Africa has not been shaken even by the great national revolt in India when the British received though sketchy but still some objective data about the brutality of British soldiers and officers during the suppression of

insurgency. Moreover, the victory over the Indians and the subsequent transition of India under the British Crown (formerly these functions were formally fulfilled by the East India Company) were perceived as a logical and important step in strengthening the Empire, which would be beneficial for the Indians.

Anti-imperialist ideas in Great Britain were not closely linked with liberal thinking (which would entail liberalism within the British society); this rather results from Labor Party (founded in 1900) activities. During the XIX century, even with the growing authority of trade unions, British society as a whole was under the influence of conservatives, the social achievements of the metropolis being attributed mainly to them: higher salaries, improved working and living conditions. At the beginning of the XX century, when anti-imperial sentiments became quite pronounced, they in fact meant only a "more equitable" distribution of income from the colonies between the regions of Britain.

Imperialism as a military and economic way to mastering the resources of the weaker parts of the world did not cause among Britons any moral and ethical challenge as British public consciousness uncritically supported the postulate of their superiority. Moreover, the right to somebody else's territories and life was transformed into an obligation and moral duty to civilize the backward peoples by for example converting them to Christianity and introduction of the English language. One can say that imperialism that was inseparably connected with national pride was in the XIX century the main content of Britishness. State sovereignty and individual freedom that had been by that time fully formed in the British political culture did not mean the universal principle of their application in relation to the colonial regions of the empire. Therefore, all forms of colonial domination (the destruction of traditional systems of land

tenure, tax increases, protectionism in relation to British goods, changes in administrative and political boundaries, brutal suppression of uprisings and riots) were presented and perceived as necessary steps for the gradual integration of the underdeveloped nations in the civilized world. This assumed that after the completion of this mission, the British would give control over this or that colony to the local democratic forces providing them with full jurisdiction of an independent state. In other words, imperialism was presented as a heavy burden that the British were forced to bear for the good of the many millions of people in the colonies. This illusion, supported by powerful anglization of the native elites, dominated the British public consciousness until the middle of the XX century.

Conclusion

Understanding of Britishness as messianic British imperialism was carried out in all possible ways of imperial propaganda, "from which there was no escape for the population between the 1880s and the 1960s" (Ward, 2004: 15). The vehicles of imperialism aimed at propaganda of Britishness as national superiority included the system of education: textbooks and teachers' worldview, various patriotic organizations, the ideology of political parties, church services, art culture including literature (in particularly for children), exhibitions, theater, and later – radio,

cinema and television. Ideas of Britishness have been actively commercialized: "Imperialism itself became a commodity to be sold to the British public… Empire was all around us, celebrated on our biscuit tins, chronicled on our cigarettes cards, part of the fabric of our lives. We were all imperialists then… While consumption played some part in fostering British national consciousness, it also helped to reinforce other forms of identification – especially with the Dominions, with England, Wales and Scotland, and with particular regions and localities" (Ward, 2004: 15). The quotation is important from different points of view. First, it allows us to evaluate the concept of "banal nationalism" proposed by Michael Billig (in the context of our topic – "banal imperialism" that replaced British nationalist ideology (Billig, 1995). Banal imperialism was of everyday character and usage since it did not necessarily and directly call to all-British goals and interests; it rather maintained pragmatic and material assessment of one's belonging to Britishness as a way to solving life problems. Second, the imperial worldview promoted leveling of social conflicts in the context of regional identities and objective differences in incomes. Thirdly, and this is very important, the collapse of the empire led not to the disappearance of Britishness but to its return to the "old" forms of identity – ethno-group and ethno-territorial.

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Имперская идеология и британский национализм в XIX и XX вв.

Д.Д. Амоголонова[а], А.В. Симонов[б]

[а] Институт монголоведения, буддологии и тибетологии СО РАН
Россия 670047, Улан-Удэ, ул. Сахьяновой, 6
[б] Российский государственный гуманитарный университет
Россия 125993, ГСП-3, Москва, Миусская площадь, 6

В статье «Имперская идеология и британский национализм в XIX и XX вв.» феномен британства рассматривается как форма национальной идентичности в контексте Британской империи. Авторы доказывают, что становление и развитие империи было наиболее существенным фактором, повлиявшим на процесс британского нациестроительства в XIX веке, вследствие которого в иерархии идентичностей общенациональная идентичность стала доминировать над этнической. Развал империи привел к тому, что британская идентичность стала утрачивать актуальность, а доминантные позиции заняли исторические этнические идентичности. Одновременно «британство» стало широко использоваться в самоидентификации «новых» граждан Великобритании. Таким образом, британство как идентичность приобретает новые смыслы, тесно связанные с расовой и культурной дифференциацией британского общества.

Ключевые слова: британство, идентичность, этничность, Британская империя, мир-система, конструктивизм.