Response

Emily Mandelman

Law's essay is a complex historical and religious account of the rise of nationalism in Japan. It goes far to explain the transmutation of religious thought and tradition into a nationalist ideology of Japanese supremacy. She emphasizes that Japan's religious nationalism should be used as a cautionary example for the global community, since the development of a nationalist state in Japan had disastrous consequences for both Japan and the wider world. She stresses the threats posed by the reemergence of this nationalist idea in Japan and warns us all against those ideas.

Law introduces to the reader a pattern in which Japanese nationalism develops through several strains of religious ideology. The idea of religious nationalism developed in Japan as a component of political modernity and the need for a unified national identity. Though the model is a complex one, I will restate its major points. Law's model contains four major elements that Japanese religious thinkers and political actors employed to create a nationalist religious state. The first element involved the idea of Japan's exalted position as a "divine country." The second theme is the bushido ethic, developed during the Tokugawa period. The next movement, chronologically, was the Kokugaka, a spiritual shift in emphasis wherein "Religious ideas and rites which were Shinto in nature were no longer considered religion but, rather simply, a natural behavior." Finally came the Meiji synthesis, which wrenched traditional Japanese religion and politics into "modernity" after 1868. This restored the Imperial family to the center of government and Imperial worship became the worship of the state.

What were the consequences of religious nationalism in Japan? According to Dr. Law (and it is difficult to disagree with her), they were disastrous. This religious nationalism exploded in the 1930s and 1940s and created an imperialist xenophobic state that had the ultimate goal of conquering Asia. Proponents of this ideology believed that Japan's destiny was to control all of Asia. Part of this plan involved creating the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. In September 1931, Japan launched an attack on Manchuria resulting in the infamous atrocities associated with the "Rape of Nanking."[1] And, of course, the same militant strains of xenophobic nationalism also propelled Japan into World War II.

The consequences of this moment for the Japanese people and for the world in general were certainly tragic. For this reason above all, Law warns us that Japan's religious embrace of xenophobic nationalism is a powerful caution to all of us. Furthermore, she is deeply concerned about the reappearance of this same strain of nationalism in Japan today, witnessed in a rising volume of contemporary discourse on the idea of an exclusive and superior sense of "Japaneseness." As she explains, this "discourse continues to feed the very structure of society that has given rise to the rampant nationalism in the first place. They shortchange the real beauty of Japan, a beauty that is rooted in incredible diversity." The other discourse that she fears is also emerging is the reassertion of militarism, as seen in the rewriting of history to de-emphasize atrocities that were surely the Japanese military's responsibility before and during World War II. This action is equivalent to Germany rewriting its history to deny the Holocaust ever occurred.

Law's concern about the reemergence of nationalism certainly seems to be very well founded, as my own reading on this subject confirms. Recently, the Rising Sun Flag and the Ode to the Emperor were voted official symbols of Japan.[2] Some people in Japan see the Flag and the Ode as reminders of a glorious past of nationalism and a justification for transforming atrocities into noble acts. The Japan Teachers' Union opposed this move and expressed concern. Another pertinent example involves the election of Shintaro Ishihara as Governor of Tokyo, who campaigned heavily upon the ideas of nationalism. He blames the United States for preventing Japan from reasserting its economic dominance in Asia and calls upon Japan to revoke its post-war disarmament legislation and take responsibility for its own national defense by building a strong and potentially aggressive military force. He also denied that the "rape of Nanking" ever occurred, a clear example of attempting to rewrite history. One of the questions he rhetorically asks is, "What's wrong with nationalism?"[3]

However stern Law's warnings about nationalism are, she has chosen to conclude her essay on a positive note. She is hopeful that Japanese people today will be able to formulate a new sense of national identity that is not exclusive and will promote differing ideas and the value of competing religious systems. She talks optimistically about new discourses that are being created that emphasize diversity and difference, not a unified thought. These are philosophies, she asserts,

that the country should be following, providing us an example of religious pluralism essential for the survival of our globalizing world.

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I found Law's ideas insightful and provocative. I am grateful to have had this experience and to be able to comment on this essay. This has been a very intimidating task at times, but one I have enjoyed. As I have struggled to prepare these remarks, it has been helpful to remember that I am a student of history as well as a religious studies major, and have been taught how religious movements in past times can be explored and evaluated in broader historical contexts. For this reason, I think it is wise to attempt to figure out how religious traditions and secular circumstances impact one another. To put it another way, I find it important to place a religious concept in its time and circumstances.

Responding to Law's model from this point of view, I would like to suggest that, although she traces over time the religious concepts that grew into nationalistic trends, she might wish to explain the larger historical circumstances that help to account for their development—that is, the stresses, tensions, and confusions of the time that would lead people to embrace these powerful religious ideas. It remains unclear, however, exactly why the Japanese ultimately found militant exclusiveness so attractive. In this sense, the larger social and political history of Japan in the 1930s and 1940s is missing. What was occurring in Japanese political culture in this pre-war era that changed religious traditions into xenophobic nationalism? The traditions themselves do not seem sufficient to explain the transformation.

Again, from a young historian's point of view, it also seems to me that Law needs to contextualize what occurred in Japan's recent past, from 1945–1999. This would help us better delineate the reasons for her most pressing worry — the resurgence of Japanese nationalism today. I certainly understand the reluctance to rehash the tragic consequences of World War II, but how can we decode the reemergence of Japanese nationalism without opening up these critical historical moments? A warning is not as helpful if a person cannot fully appreciate the nature of the impending threat. The religious nationalism that once developed in Japan led to unspeakably tragic consequences; it set the stage for the dawn of World War II. Since Law tells us very little about the specific circumstances leading up to this moment, we are left with unanswered questions about the War's legacy and its impact on

resurgent Japanese nationalism. Here, one would like her to discuss the meaning of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the long-term impact this terrible ordeal had on Japanese spirituality. Further, one would like to know more about the lasting effects, if any, the unconditional surrender had on the people of Japan as well as the effect of the demilitarization of Japan upon the nation's religious outlook and mentality.

Finally, in the same historical vein, I wish Dr. Law had had sufficient time to discuss the spiritual implications of Japan's transformation from military devastation into a super economic power. From such an analysis, we might better understand the roots of resurgent nationalism in Japan today.

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The larger purpose of the Roundtable, of course, is to explore problems like the religious roots of nationalism in Japan and then bring that wisdom to the larger and global discussion. Law's treatment of Japan's religious nationalism has relevance to other countries today. For example, there are movements in the United States disturbingly similar to those discussed in the essay, such as the Christian Coalition. The Christian Coalition's sectarian Protestant religious thought sets itself the task of shaping the destiny of the nation as well as framing the social policy of the state. Ralph Reed, former executive director of the Coalition, states, "This movement is based not on a single organization or personality, but on a set of values that are burning in the hearts of millions of Americans of faith. As long as they exist, this movement will exist, and no amount of Monday morning quarterbacking by their critics will make them go away. And thank goodness, for our nation is a more decent and civil place because of it."[4] Can parallels be drawn between Reed's assertions and the concerns raised in Law's essay?

Another illustration involves the nation of Israel. The Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community insists that their ideas govern the rest of the nation. For instance, recently an explosive controversy took place over whether a giant turbine could be transported on Saturday, counter to the rules of the Shabbat. If it had been done on another day of the week it would bring Tel Aviv to a halt. In this case, proponents of a powerful religious ideology seemed to stand in the way of what seemed to be in the best interest of the nation.[5]

A further example is occurring right now in Austria. Here, the legacy of Nazism and xenophobia from World War II is evidently alive and growing. Based on current reports, it appears that the conservative Freedom Party placed second in a recent election. The leader of this party, Joerg Haider, has been appealing to xenophobia and the alienation of the Austrian worker by preaching Austrian "purity" in the face of "threats" by immigrants. He also commented that the Third Reich had a sound employment policy and that he respected Nazi SS officers' courage. The echo of ideas of World War II are shaping political values in Austria; similarly, some believe this is also occurring in Japan.[6]

Law's essay helps us to confront where we do not want to go. The idea of a nationalist and xenophobic state animated by religious belief is a path that continues to be taken. The global community and individuals, such as the audience of the Roundtable, need to promote a viable alternative to religious single-mindedness. Faith is a very strong force and, consequently, one lesson we could take from this essay, and from history in general, is this: religion is a double edged sword that can be used as a source of mutual enrichment or destructive bigotry.

Notes

1. Michael H. Hunt, *Crises in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 63.

2. "Japan Vote Officially Makes Ode and Flag its National Symbol," *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, 10 August 1999), 4A.

3. Richard Samuels, "The Voice of Nationalism Gets an Official Bully Pulpit," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, 2 May 1999), Opinion Section 2.

4. Sabrina Eaton, " 'You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet,' The Christian Coalition Vows." *The Plain Dealer* (3 October 1999), National, 25A.

5. David Sharrock, "Barak Coalition Split as Sabbath Row Escalates," *The Guardian* (London, 27 August 1999), Foreign Pages, 13.

6. "Austria's Right Conjures Ghosts," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, 5 October 1999), Metro, B: 8.