Asian Nationalism in the Twentieth Century

The modern movement of nationalism has its origins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was a reaction against the colonial powers and their attempts to suppress national identities. Asian nationalism in the 20th century was a response to the challenges posed by Western imperialism, and it was a key factor in the struggle for independence in Asia.

In the Meiji period in Japan, nationalism consisted of a blend of native and imported political philosophies, initially focused on defense against colonization by Western powers, and later in a struggle to attain equality with the Great Powers.

However, behind this feeling of insecurity, several forms of nationalism co-exist: an official nationalism inspired by Chinese and Indian ideas of race and Social Darwinism, and a “primitive” and revanchist nationalism with racist tendencies, which is disseminated in the 20th century.

In general, they portray the first two decades of the Meiji period, between 1868 and 1890, as the era when a modern education system was established and began to institutionalize and propagate nationalism throughout Japan. This was achieved through the establishment of a newly formed compulsory, centralized school system.

Resistance to Japanese imperialism also shaped Korean nationalism during this period. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, key shapers of nationalism in East Asia included ideas of race, Social Darwinism, and pan-Asianism.

In the 20th century, nationalism spread to many Asian countries and to the new independent nations of Africa. It is an ideological movement, promoting the autonomy, unity, and sovereignty of those gathered in a single territory.

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