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Abstract:

This project investigates the ontology and identity of nations. Drawing from the thought experiment “The ship of Theseus” and some recent literatures on group metaphysics, I explore the domain of nations. There are two major enquiries: One, what *is* a nation? Second, how does a nation maintain its identity over time, despite all the changes it has undergone? I propose a perdurantist (worm theoretical) approach to understanding nations. I argue that a nation is a four-dimensional worm, which has stages as temporal parts. The stages have combinations of the people, the territory and the state as components. Social treatments (e.g. collective intentionality, joint commitment, mental file...etc) are required to bind these stages together.

Keywords: Nation, Metaphysics, Identity, Social Ontology, Perdurantism

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I. Introduction

A. Main thesis

I claim that a nation is social and conventional in nature, and it is best understood as a four-dimensional space-time worm. The worm has stages as temporal parts, and each stage has at least two of the three main components: *the people*, *the territory* and *the state*. There are different combinations of these components, it is also possible for some to be absent. Depending on which component is missing, a stage can either be incomplete or empty. Moreover, all components themselves can be modelled as worms while some can be modelled as groups. These stages are connected by their relations. For instance, material succession (the latter stage succeeds the material constituents of the former), historical succession (B's existence happens after A's), and most importantly, what I call *social treatment*, which I will explain in section I.D and II.B.

B. Background I

In this section I want to briefly go through several features of a nation, and why they are philosophically interesting.

Plutarch (c. 75 CE) gave us the thought experiment of The Ship of Theseus. In which a ship is repaired plank by plank gradually, eventually having all parts replaced. By that point, is it still the same ship? On the one hand, we want to accept the mundane fact that things change, on the other hand, we want to accept Leibniz's Law:

Leibniz's Law: Objects x and y are identical only if they have exactly the same properties.¹

Combine the two, and it appears that we have a violation of the principle.

This question of how things can persist through change has wide applications. This has been asked about individuals and ordinary objects, and I want to expand this discussion to things more 'social' and 'group-like' in nature, particularly, nations.

There are at least two ways to observe the ontological 'behaviour' of a nation. One is to take a nation as the subject of focus. This emphasizes on how the nation *is*. I shall elaborate with reference to the three major components (which I will define in section I.D):

¹ Theodore Sider, "Temporal Parts," in *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, ed. Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean W. Zimmerman (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 244.

The People: There are changes within the population such as gender ratio, age groups, ethnic groups composition, population size, replacement of an entire generation...etc. With these in mind, in what sense have the groups such as 'Chinese', 'Japanese', 'French'...and so on persisted over the years?

The Territory: There are changes of the size of controlled territories. Which version of the map is the most 'complete' for a nation?

The State: There are changes of the total number of officials/ servants, forms of government (republic, empire, dynasty, federacy...etc), rulers...and so on. In what sense a dynasty 500 years ago and a republic today are parts of the same F (the nation in question), but not the same G (different states)?

The other way, quite often related with the first, focuses more on how people think and talk about a nation.

Nation names are often treated like proper names, and the nations are treated like singular objects. Let N be the name of a nation, the following sentences are not a rare sight:

Regarding territories: 'X (a region) *belongs* to N.', 'X (a region) is a part/ an inalienable part of N.'

The first one implies ownership, and typically ownership is only applicable to an agent, whereas it is unclear whether a nation is an agent. The second one implies the relation of parthood between a region and a nation. It is often used in a deontic manner, implying a region *should* remain a part of N. A stronger version is to say: 'X has been a part of N since ancient times.' In practice it expressed a similar deontic sense as the previous one. However, this seems to have beached the is/ought distinction. More importantly, persistence of the identity of N is a prerequisite for claims like this. If the N 1000 years ago has not persisted into the N today, the claim on X appealing to historical parthood or ownership is not justified.

General: 'N is evil/good.', 'N has 5000 years of history.'

The first one not only treats N as an agent, but also a morally accountable one. To do so, N is treated as a singular entity, despite the use of 'N' can sometimes be quite confusing. It could be a civilization, a nation, a state, or a geographical region. Furthermore, to say N is 5000 years old, N needs to be the same N for the entirety of that 5000 years, which is something yet to be found in human history.

In brief, given the ways a nation 'behaves' and how people treat it, I think it is worthwhile to ask: what *is* it really? And whatever it is, does it persist? To add, the persistence problem is applicable to both a nation (as a whole) and to its constituents (the components in a stage).

C. Background II

There is a rich amount of work discussing the nature of the social world. Some focus on a broader scale, attempting to give a general account for the social/ artefactual aspects of the world. They investigate the making of social facts, group actions/ intentions and even values². John Searle (1995, 2010) emphasizes on collective intentionality, status functions and institutional facts. Raimo Tuomela (2013) follows a similar line, proposes the we-mode/ I-mode account. Ron Mallon (2016) develops a framework to explain the construction, stabilization and reference of ‘Human Kinds’. Margaret Gilbert (1989, 2014) develops a theory of joint commitment. Michael Bratman (1999, 2014) works on the theory of share agency. Some philosophers take the discussion to a more specialized area, *groups*. While Brian Epstein (2015) develops a rather comprehensive account (for both material objects and groups), others concentrate on groups alone. For example, Gabriel Uzquiano (2004) suggests that groups are *sui generis* entities with sets as constituents, though the group itself is not a set. Nikk Effingham (2010) denies that groups are *sui generis*, instead argues groups are sets of ordered pairs. Katherine Ritchie (2013) rejects the above, and suggests groups are realization of structures. In addition, Katherine Hawley (2017) argues for a mereological understanding of groups, and Enrico Terrone (2017) suggests we can solve the problem of a group version of the Ship of Theseus using the *mental file* theory from François Recanati.

Although none of the work listed above are dedicated to the analysis of nations, nation is still a social entity and share a lot of common features with other entities of the social world. For instance, a nation is a product of human society, meaning both of its existence and properties are at least partially dependent on the collective action and mentality of humans. Furthermore, a nation inhabits some group-like features. Both social groups and nations may exist but not in all time, or that they can survive the change of constituents without necessarily changing identity. This is a list that I will return to in section III.B. Despite the similarity of these domains, nations are still very different compared to a football team, reading group or supreme court. Hence, it requires a more specialized theory to accommodate its features, and it is the aim of this project. I should also stress that my goal is not to develop an anti-realist account of nation. I want to offer an account that can accommodate our best understanding of the social world (history, anthropology, social science...etc) while preserving as much common sense/

² See Gilbert’s discussion of patriotism and political obligation. Margaret Gilbert, “Political Life,” in *Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 341-409.

intuition about it as possible: under the right conditions, nations can enjoy continuity of identity, as well as capable of undergoing fission and fusion.

D. Terminology and Scope

Before I go any further, it is important to clarify my use of some important terms which we will be seeing later.

1. **Group:** Without committing to any group theory, a neutral way of defining a group is that it is something primarily composed of human individuals. Examples: a mob, a basketball team, a supreme court...etc. There are further complications as to whether a group is only constituted by human individuals, as Epstein noticed there are facts about business corporations (e.g. Starbucks) but these facts are not human related³. This is something I will disregard for the moment as it is not central to my enquiry.
2. **Social Group:** It is also a group, but the group is social in nature. Meaning, it is not defined by natural scientific criteria. A reading group is social in nature because the membership is not granted by a natural cause. It is instead given or earned through human social activities e.g. signing up, asking to join, through invitation...etc.
3. **Components:** As Hawley noticed, our ordinary use of certain terms overlap with philosophical technical terms and that can cause confusion⁴. For instance, we normally speak of groups having members but not parts. The word ‘member’ seems to point towards set-membership, while the word ‘part’ leads to mereological parthood. To avoid confusion, I will be using the word ‘component’ as a neutral way to refer to the relationship between a stage and its constituents.
4. **Nation:** Perhaps the most confusing term of all. It can refer to either nation-the-country or nation-the-people. For nation-the-people it has a double meaning emphasising either a political community or an ethnic community⁵. I will use the word nation as nation-the-country, unless otherwise specified. In addition, nation-the-country is often used to refer to a modern nation-state. I want to use the word in a broader, general sense, such that it can include non-nation-state ‘nations’ in history, such as empires, dynasties, city states...etc. It

³ Brian Epstein, *The Ant Trap: Rebuilding the Foundations of the Social Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 46.

⁴ Katherine Hawley, “Social Mereology,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 2018, 1-17. doi:10.1017/apa.2017.33. .2-3.

⁵ 王柯：《民族主義與近代中日關係：「民族國家」、「邊疆」與歷史認識》（香港：香港中文大學出版社，2015年），頁68-69。

is however not identical to ‘civilization’. In my proposal a nation requires at least some form of government.

5. The people: One of the three proposed components for a stage of a nation. I will use it as nation-the-people.
6. The territory: There are two senses of what a territory is. One is that it is an area effectively controlled and owned by a nation. Usually but not necessarily where the people reside. The second one, is an area believed to be belonged to or connected to a nation or community. I will refer to the former one as Territory₁ and the latter Territory₂. If unspecified it means both.
7. The state: The government of the nation.
8. Social Treatment: Is the umbrella term for human group mentality. Including but not limited to things explained as collective intentionality, group attitude, share agency, joint commitment and mental file. I am using it in a very loose sense, such that my theory can accommodate any of these theories, as I am not committing to any specific one right now.

As for the scope, there are many types of social entities, and the primary domain of enquiry here is of nations. We will come across some groups, especially when discussing the components of a stage. However, I will not develop or commit to a full account of group ontology in this paper. There is also the question of whether nations are groups. I think it is possible, but one should consider this: the ‘standard groups’ have only human individuals as constituents, and their memberships are equal (still, members can have different roles). Suppose we accept Territory₁, a state and the people as the constituents of a nation, are their membership equal in the way the membership of the members in a reading group are? Given my task here it is not of great relevance and I will not attempt to address it. This framework should be compatible to both construes of nation, as a group or not. At last, I am not arguing for perdurantism in general, but specifically for nations. Even then, my position is that given the features of nations, perdurantist modelling suits them naturally. And if a more powerful theory is not available, this should be taken as a default understanding of nations.

A. Social Reality

There are different ways to be a realist about something. Borrowing Stathis Psillos's (2000) formulation of the three theses of scientific realism⁶, a reformulated version for realism of the social world is as the follow.

1. The metaphysical thesis (TMT): There exist social entities which exist mind-independently. Accordingly, there are facts about these entities.
2. The semantic thesis (TST): Some sentences about social entities can be taken at face-value.
3. The epistemic thesis (TET): Matured sciences about the social world are approximately true.

Regarding TMT, there is a problem. When we describe something as being 'social', be that a fact or entity, it already implies that it is a product of human convention, and surely such convention cannot be completely mind-independent.

At this point I believe it will be useful to introduce some distinctions. Searle proposes that we can divide things in the following ways. Something is *Intrinsically objective*⁷, when an entity's existence or/and facts about it do not depend on any mental state at all. The fact that the Earth is not flat is not related to what people think of it, regardless of how firm their beliefs are. What is *ontologically subjective*, is what we mean by 'conventional', or sometimes 'social'. It is when an entity's existence or/and facts about it at least partially depending on mental states. For instance, a stone on the ground can be used as the ammunition for a sling. But the stone has neither the function of being a projectile nor a status of being ammunition simply by virtue of its material composition. Furthermore, take what is ontologically subjective, when both the existence and features of such social entity is dependent on a whole community instead of just an individual, it becomes *epistemically objective*. For example, HKD (Hong Kong Dollar) is the current official currency in Hong Kong. The banknotes' existence (as currency) is neither grounded nor anchored (in Epstein's term⁸) by its material constitution, even it may be designed to be a banknote. It is also not grounded nor anchored by a mere individual's mental state, it requires a society-wide social treatment. E.g. A currency's existence is grounded by the fact that it is produced by the Hong Kong Note Printing Limited (HKNPL) and issue by three commercial banks under the authorization of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA),

⁶ Stathis Psillos, "The Present State of the Scientific Realism Debate," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 51 (2000): 706.

⁷ John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 8.

⁸ Brian Epstein, "Grounding and Anchoring," *The Ant Trap*, 74-81.

anchored by the society's collective acceptance (be that any kind of social treatment) of the authority and power of the above institutions⁹. Therefore, there is a realness to the existence of HKD in the sense that it is sustained by structures/ systems/ institutions much larger than one or a small group of individuals.

Hence, TMT should be rewritten as:

4. TMT*: There exist social entities which exist with epistemically objective independence. Accordingly, there are facts about these entities.

I take that TST is correct. Though I should add that some nation-related names can fail to refer, therefore I am presupposing at least some can. As for TET, I am fully aware of the human factors in play in various types of social sciences. Historical sources can be biased, scholars can be influenced by ideological trends, political and/or religious beliefs. Personal interpretations of data, materials and evidences are difficult to avoid...and so on. Despite of all these potential problems, I don't think it is *impossible* for these social sciences to be at least approximately true. We can be selective about theories, and we can also leave rooms for better theories. Just because some theories are unreliable does not mean all theories are/ should be the same.

To apply the above to nations. I hold TMT*, TST and TET to be true with regards to nations. First, despite of the manipulation of social treatments, fictitious history and construction involved in the making of nations, nations exist and often have a strong epistemically objective independence. Since they exist, there are also corresponding facts about them. Some sentences can be taken at face-value, such as 'New Delhi is the capital city of India.' Although it is context sensitive (since the fact involved is stage specific), there are no ambiguity in the sentence and it can be taken at face-value. Surely some sentences can be problematic. Such as 'China was in a state of internal struggle during the late Warring States Period (247-221 CE).' The concept of China as a nation did not exist back then, and that the warring states may well had considered war against each other as 'international affairs'. It is not clear in what sense China was in 'internal' struggle. In any case, as long as some sentences can be taken on face-value, TST is true. As for TET, some explanations can be deferred to experts in other disciplines, and this theory is constructed in such a way that it leaves room for such deference to fill the gaps in.

⁹ Enrico Terrone, "The Band of Theseus: Social Individuals and Mental Files," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* Vol. 47 (4-5) (2017): 299.

B. Social Treatment

In this section I will give a quick follow-up on how I intend to use ‘social treatment’.

There are various available theories concerning group mentality. It is my intention to leave rooms for as many of them as possible in this framework. This is because in the construction of national identity, from identity of a nation, to the identity of the people (be that race, ethnic group or political community), involve many different types of group actions and beliefs, and each may require a different explanation. So, for my purpose it is useful to adopt a pluralist approach to theories of group mentality.

As Eric Hobsbawm cited Ernest Renan: ‘Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation.’¹⁰ The role of these group mentality theories is to explain how people are ‘getting history wrong *together*’, alongside historical explanations. This is important because as I have argued, for something to be ‘social’ is to say its existence and/or facts about it are at least partially dependent on mental states. Since we want to know how certain objects or categories are grounded, combining the two yields a more informed guess on the ontology of these things.

II. Perdurantism for Nation

A. Nation Features I

The following shows several features concerning the stage components. This shows why a single component cannot form a nation, as well as to pre-empt for section III. B: What goes into a stage. Furthermore, to unmotivated some potential construes of these components.

1. Coincidental parthood of territory and mereological essentialism

Suppose a mereological essentialist wishes to trace Territory₁, one would trace the land under ‘the sort quantity of matter’¹¹.

Assuming there is exactly one region L₀, it be the total Territory₁ of a nation N and assuming N enjoys a continuity of identity. At different stage this region can contain or be split by numerically different regions. As represented by the different ‘Ls’.

¹⁰ Eric. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 12.

¹¹ Sider, *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, 250-251.

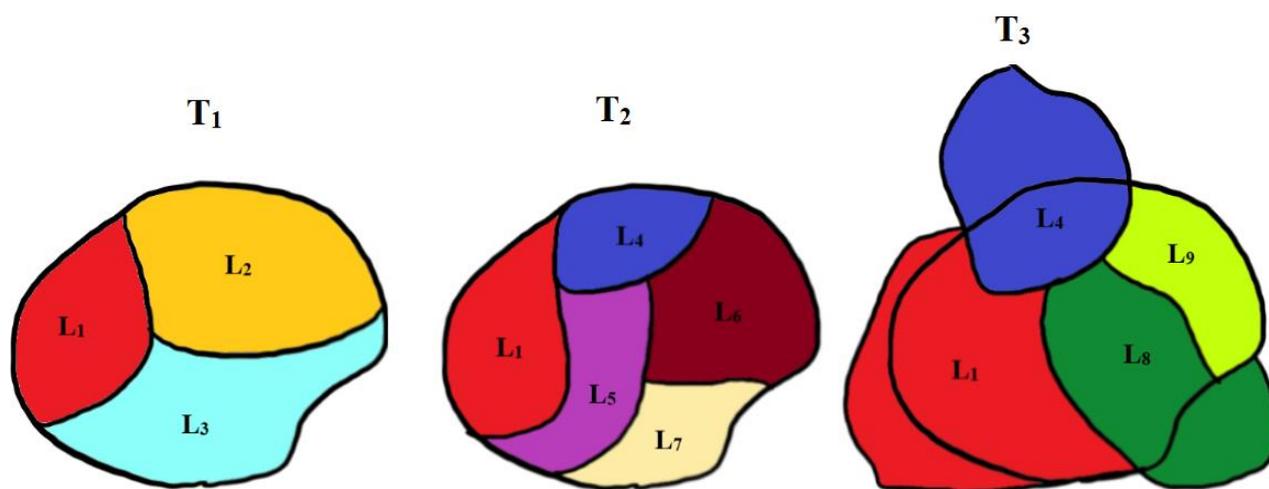


Figure. 1

One way to trace L_0 is to draw a line around it, and trace what is within the line rigidly¹². Meaning, no matter the size of L_0 's parts or how they are split, only the matters within the boundaries of L_0 counts (as in T^1 and T_2).

This is problematic. First, this basically means L_0 cannot change. L_0 cannot get any larger, or smaller. If L_0 is supposed to be a Territory₁, then it directly conflicts with our understanding of history: that Territory₁ do change. Second, not only does L_0 changes in size over time, it is also internally arranged in different ways. Facts about L_0 are only true stage specifically, and no single description regarding the total area of L_0 is true across all stages (e.g. a timeless view). Therefore, there is no matter of fact about which version of L_0 is the 'most real' or 'most complete'. By tracing a certain sort quantity of matter rigidly one is simply ignoring the many stages of L_0 as a Territory₁, and it has no use in explaining the change of a nation, unless nations are supposed to only stick to what they had when they were first founded. Third, Territory₁ is related to a nation, and not merely a geographical region. Then tracing L_0 rigidly can result in tracing the same area back to time when the nation N did not exist. It is clear that such place is not a Territory₁, but merely a surface of the Earth.

2. Essential Territory and Dominant Sort

Another attempt is to take a region as being particularly dominant, that it constitutes the identity of an object. Meaning, the tracing target will be that dominant sort. As an analogy, it is,

¹² I don't mean 'rigid' as in able to refer in all possible worlds

imaginable that a lead singer can be so extremely important to a band, that the retirement of this person can ‘destroy’ the band’s identity.

Suppose there is exactly one region L_0 , which happens to be the current Territory₁ of nation N. Despite of all the different ways of dividing L_0 across time, there is an overlapping part L_e . This is however, insufficient to establish the claim that L_e is the essential part/ dominant part of L_0 and thus L_e can be used to fix nation N’s identity.

First: consider a scenario where the overlapping part L_e is destroyed or occupied by another nation. This however, do not always lead to the destruction of N. Consider a case analogous to Locke’s argument of personal identity. Locke takes that the psychological self is essential to personal identity, therefore if a prince and a cobbler exchanged their minds, the person with the prince’s mind is the prince, not the one with the prince’s body. Now consider two nations, each has a historically overlapping region, for some reason decided to exchange them. Apparently, the result should be opposite to Locke’s experiment, the exchange does not result in an exchange of identity. Therefore, an overlapping region is not an essential Territory₁.

A further consideration is that a particularly iconic or important region (usually the capital city) is essential to a nation. Consider the fact that Napoleon captured Moscow in 1812, but the Russian Empire was neither destroyed, nor surrendering. In addition, during the Second World War, much of France’s territories were occupied by German forces, it is however not true to say France ‘ceased to exist’ during the occupation.

I wish to clarify that I am not denying the possibility for a region to be dominant to a nation’s identity. My take on this possibility is that it has more to do with a region’s relation with the other components rather than the ‘overlapping’. If there is any reason why a region is dominant to the very existence of a nation, then it is usually that the region is a crucial political/ economic/ industrial centre, and the capturing of the region results in the loss of at least two of the stage components, hence leading to the nation’s destruction. For instance, Carthage (both the city and the nation) was gone for good when the Romans sacked and burned their capital city at the end of the Third Punic Wars. Carthage’s Territory₁ and power had diminished severely after the Second Punic Wars, which was reflected by the fact that the major fighting in the third wars were confined to a small area in North Africa (Carthage’s Territory₁)¹³. As the capturing of the city of Carthage effectively led to the complete loss of Carthage’s state and Territory₁, one can consider the capital city an ‘essential region’ when Scipio laid siege on it. Contrast this with Moscow in the 1812 Patriotic War. Despite the capital occupied and set ablaze by Napoleon,

¹³ Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Fall of Carthage: The Punic Wars 265-146 BC* (London: Cassell, 2003), 355.

The Russian Empire was holding on to its Territory₁, people and state, even managed to raise money to fund the campaigns through means of voluntary contributions and loans of state credit institutions¹⁴.

Under this light, the territory alone cannot form a nation, it must be combined with other components. Second, in most cases the territory is not an essence of a nation, even if this region overlaps with the nation's territory at every stage. The only time a region is essential to the nation is when the destruction of it leads to a total loss of at least two stage components. And the problem with tracing with dominant sort is that only under very specific conditions does a region become dominant. In other cases, it is simply unclear what region is dominant and this method offers little usefulness.

3. No Essential Ethnic Group

Assuming nation N is multi-ethnic, and both the state and the people recognize that. Also assume at different stages of N, the component 'people' had different number of ethnic groups included. Moreover, suppose at each stage they give different tags (names that bear concepts of category) to this sum of all ethnic groups. For instance, at some stages they categorically 'wrap up' everyone as 'The people of the central plains', at some other stages they are 'The people of the central plains' culture', at yet some other stages they are 'The N-ians/ N-ese (ethnonational)'. What follows, is that the more ethnic groups N has, the more difficult it is for them to come up with an umbrella term that can coherently include both current and past tags for all ethnic groups (especially if they choose cultural/ biological criteria). Furthermore, the more need to be included, the more arbitrary the tag is.

There are two more potential problems. First, problem of further composition. It is when an ethnic group is growing and becoming more complex, if looked at a fine scale, differences can always be found. It is totally possible that a group finds enough distinctiveness to create their own identity. This is often an important pushing factor for sub-nationalism and localism.

Second, problem of radical fusion. Historically, two very distinct groups, which saw each other completely alien had some encounters. They later fused with each other as well as other groups. For people in current stage, it is difficult for them to create a tag that will coherently describe the two groups in all stages. Currently, they may be bound as a single political/ cultural

¹⁴ Liudmila P. Marnei, "The Finances of the Russian Empire in the Period of the Patriotic War of 1812 and of the Foreign Campaigns of the Russian Army," in *Russia and the Napoleonic Wars: War, Culture and Society, 1750–1850*, ed. Janet M. Hartley, Paul Keenan and Dominic Lieven (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 143-144.

community, but this was not true in most other stages. Even more, it is quite often the case that this tag (including the concept) currently in use did not exist when the two groups were still distinct. Given that, the umbrella tag is only stage specific, but not across all time. To say these historically different groups ‘have always been members of the same group’ is quite often not true.

In brief, for most multi-ethnic groups, a tag that is true of all the groups, present and past, either don’t exist or is very arbitrary. There is also no clear guideline saying which group is the ‘essential’ one. If they use the current umbrella tag, it is unreasonable to say all the past distinct groups are essential, as they could have easily formed some other groups, or there is another group that currently shares similar ethnicity but has their own nation. Even if there is such an essential group, it is not clear how it can be defined, or currently how ‘pure’ they are, given all the changes they experienced in history.

B. Nation Features II

Without exhausting all the features of nations, the following is a list of criteria that capture the major features for most if not all nations:

- (1) Exist-Time: A nation can exist at one time without at every time
- (2) Exist-World: A nation can exist at one world without existing at every world
- (3) Spatiality: A nation can be located within space
- (4) Constituent-Time: A nation can have different stages/ components for a stage at different times.
- (5) Constituent-World: A nation can have different stages/ components for a stage at different worlds.
- (6) Incomplete-Stage: Stages of a nation can exist without having all the major components.
- (7) Stages of a nation are not connected by themselves, it requires social treatment.

To briefly elaborate: For Exist-Time, before human groups reached the complexity to form a government, there were no nation. Also, a nation could have existed for the past 50 years without having existed for the past 5000 years, it can fail to continue. For Exist-World, a nation can fail to exist in some possible worlds. For spatiality, a nation's stage can be located within space. In case where the components are separated, at least the components can be tracked within space. For Constituent-Time, a nation's stages and components of the stages can change. A current nation may not identify itself with a specific stage in history, and a nation can survive changes to territory, government and the population. Similarly, a nation can fail to have a specific stage or combination of components for a stage without necessarily cease to exist. Hence Constituent-World. For Incomplete-Stage, sometimes a nation can persist without one of the components. Consider cases where a nation is in migration (no defined territory) or in war (territory occupied), it does not necessarily cease to exist. At last, the stages/ pieces of histories of a nation don't always connect themselves. It often requires some form of social treatment. Be that a collective imagination, or the updating of a mental file.

These features can accommodate the following 'behaviours' of a nation: To succumb under another nation, then regain sovereignty without having to deny the existence of the nation during the submission. Or to experience fusion or/and fission, which are extremely common in history. Furthermore, nations can have incomplete or empty stages. A nation can be destroyed (by losing two components. If this group (the people) survives long enough to regain their own territory and government, and the new nation chooses to be associated with the old one (social treatment). There is still continuity, but some periods are empty.

C. What goes into a stage?

With the above I should have established that any single component cannot form a nation. The next question is, what can?

In this section I will argue that a nation stage normally contains the state, the people, and the territory with two exceptions. I think article 1 of Montevideo Convention covers something similar:

The state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states.¹⁵

To argue in a more philosophical way, we can check whether there are predicates/facts that are true of both a nation and its components.¹⁶

1. **Nation-Territory:**

- It takes X hours to drive across France from the east to west end. (Territory₁).
- There are 30 active volcanoes in Iceland. (Geographical features, part of Territory₁).
- There are 2914 colleges and universities in China by 2017 (Facilities, things *on* the ground).
- The yellow river is in China (iconic or important geographical features).

Since we can predicate over a nation and its Territory₁, Territory₁ is in a nation-stage. But do notice how some of these, especially those describing the geo features, can be said truly without a nation if the name of nation is used merely as a locational indicator. This does not imply the existence of the nation e.g. ‘This dinosaur lived in China 50 million years ago’ does not imply China as a nation is 50 million years old.

2. **Nation-People:**

- China has 21.93 million active military personnel in 2017 (is contingent, depending on how a nation form its military forces).
- China produced X tons of plastic waste in 2017 (the land does not produce plastic, people do).
- China is 91.644% Han Chinese in 2010.

Similarly, there are facts true of both the nation and the people, the people are in a nation-stage. Note that there can be some indeterminacy about what is involved. In the case of plastic waste, it could be the government, commercial companies as well as the common people. But since we only need to know the people is in the stage, this does not impose a challenge.

¹⁵ Article 1, *Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States*, signed 1933.

¹⁶ This is suggested by Dr. Bryan Pickel in a private conversation.

3. Nation-State

- Canada passed Bill C-16 in 2016.
- The USA left the UN Human Rights Council in 2018.
- The USA founded the CIA in 1947.

Some actions are only performed by a state, not the land or the people. However, depending on how much representativeness a government has, it is possible for the passing of a bill to involve both the state and the people.

In brief, we can see that depending on the context, predication over the nation name can involve both the nation and components of a stage. Thus, these components are in the nation-stage. Aside from nations' composition, it also shows how use of nation terms can be confusing---Especially if one sees only one 'wholly present' nation and no components.

D. Combination

Now I want to talk about the incomplete stage and empty stage scenarios.

Typically, a nation has all three components in a stage, but two exceptional cases are allowed, to accommodate some nation 'behaviours'.

An incomplete stage is when one component is missing, nevertheless still qualifies as a nation-stage. There are three possible combinations:

- State and Territory
- People and Territory
- People and State

The first one does not exist. To have a state without people is like having a committee of reading group but without members. In such case there is no reading group. For the second one, it is possible that a nation is going through a transitional period and that there isn't a functioning government. E.g. During revolution, foreign invasion. In such case it is not necessary that the nation has ceased to exist. For the third one, it is possible when under foreign invasion, the people and its state are driven out of their territory, or that they are in the process of migration, such that they don't have a defined territory. Still, I think it is more plausible to say the identity of such nation is holding during these events, instead of popping in and out of existence.

As for an empty stage, is when there are only one or even no component left. There is however another possibility. One can suppose a nation that used-to-be was conquered by another nation. With the state and territory merged, the only thing left is the people (in case they were not expelled or killed or culturally eliminated) and it does not count as a nation stage. This component may live to see the day that they are free from the rule of other nations, proceed to form their own government and claim their territory---becoming a sovereign state. And if they choose to associate with the previously destroyed nation, they ‘revive’ that nation by connecting it to the existing one.

E. Continuity

1. Main model

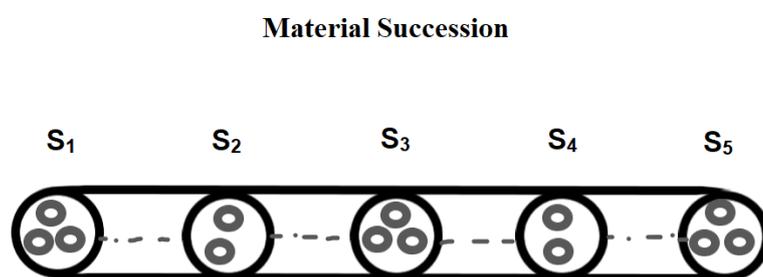
To accommodate for the above nation features, a perdurantist account is a natural answer. Quick recap: A nation is the aggregate of its stages, connected by human social treatments. Just before I proceed further, while I emphasize social treatments are needed to connect the stages for persistence, it is also needed for the creation of all the components. I will continue under this assumption.

A nation is a contingent product that only exist if and only if (8). A nation-stage exists. A nation-stage exists when (9). There are sufficient nation-stage components present, arranged in the right combination. Clearly these conditions can fail to obtain, thus satisfying (1) and (2). Moreover, since these components are located in space, the nation-stage can also be located in space, hence satisfying (3). (4) represents the problem of change, while (5) represents the contingency of such social product. Put simply, (4) can be easily satisfied when we adopt a temporal parts theory for nations. The differences across stages, found between components and stages, are explained by saying that nations spread across time like physical parts are spread across space. The ‘conflicting’ properties and facts are distributed across the temporal parts (the nation-stages) and are no longer conflicting. Also, since I don’t model a nation as having any essential components, both the stages and components can fail to obtain/ have a different one, (5) is satisfied.

One question, is how is a nation-stage defined? Is it an instantaneous one? I think this depends on practical needs and experts’ opinions. Recall that this framework is allowing deference of certain explanations to experts of associated fields, this is one of them. For instance, for more general discussion, a stage can be a dynasty. If this dynasty lasted for some time, surely it faces the problem of change again. So sometimes for a finer look into this dynasty, one can ‘zoom

in' and locate a stage as the reign of a specific emperor, or even just a particular year during his reign. What I want to stress is, there is no absolute *intrinsically objective* fact about how many stages there are or how long one needs to be. The historians and anthropologists are free to give their informed proposals, and it is fine by this framework even if they don't reach a consensus over a specific stage¹⁷ --- as long as the head and the tail of these stages are connected, then there is only numerically one nation. Further, (6) is satisfied since I have modelled the nation-stage to allow for two exceptional combinations of components.

At last, the persistence by connection of social treatments. To visualize:



Historical Succession

Figure. 2

In Figure. 2, the black circles represent the nation-stages, within these stages are the stage components, represented by the grey circles. The line on top is the relation of material succession, meaning the later stages at least succeeded the material constituents (the components) of the previous stages partially. The lower line is the relation of historical succession. Meaning the later stages succeed the previous stages spatial-temporally. While the dotted grey line in the middle represents the social treatments. The three relations bound these stages together, and this is a nation-worm.

Just some examples on what this social treatment can be. Its function here is to bind things 'unrelated' together. For instance, the construction of social groups such as race, ethnic group, or a citizen group. This often requires social engineering. Historian Benedict Anderson (2006) noticed that in early modern times rulers of empires and dynasties not only faced the problem

¹⁷ Some anthropologists are debating whether the contemporary Guatemala is still in the 'post-war' stage. See Gavin Weston and Natalie Djohari, "The Ship of Theseus and the Problem of "Postwar", Answers to Contemporary Guatemalan Problems," *History and Anthropology* 23, no. 4 (2012): 405-24.

of finding new legitimacy, but also the task to unite the diverse and somewhat ‘unrelated’ subjects for various practical reasons (motivation for works/ soldiers). For instance, Joseph II of the Austro-Hungary had changed the state language from Latin to German in early 1780s. As he felt that Latin as a ‘noble language’ could not interest the masses and he needed a unifying language for his empire.¹⁸

Another example is the shifting meaning of ‘China’. According to historian 王柯 (Wang Ke) the concept of ‘China’ as a nation was non-existent until early modern periods. In ancient times it was a culturally defined term, referring to a civilization¹⁹. Moreover, the introduction of the concept ‘nation’ into China was through Japan, imported by the Chinese revolutionists, whom were desperate in building a modern nation-state the way Japan and the European powers did. What these revolutionists did not know was the Japanese went through two phases of understanding the word ‘nation’. The first phase emphasized the Japanese people as a political community, while the second phase stressed strongly on the ethnicity or even race. The Kanji ‘民族’ (Minzu) was then taken by these revolutionists, understood in a confused manner, the word has at least three layers of meaning: Ethnic group, citizen group, and race.²⁰ Which later shaped Chinese nationalism, as it was shown by the president of the Republic of China, Sun Yat-sen’s call for a ‘Chinese nation’ (nation-the-people), which is the fusion of all the existing ethnic groups in China.²¹

Employing terms of theories of group mentality, the construction is about creating a new mental file/ update existing mental file to include the distinct groups into one²². Or it can be a project to start a joint commitment to identify the people as ‘Chinese’, then proceed to build a nation of such ‘Chinese people’. As fictitious or wrong the histories are in these constructions, they can qualify for an *epistemically objective* reality, and can potentially connects the stages into a worm. Hence, (7) is satisfied.

2. Complications

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. rev. ed (London: Verso, 2006), 83-85.

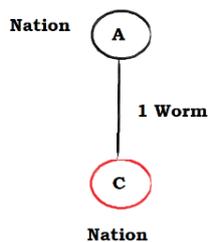
¹⁹ 王柯：《中國，從天下到民族國家》（臺北：政大出版社，2014年），頁 24-25。

²⁰ 王柯：《民族主義與近代中日關係》，頁 64-69。

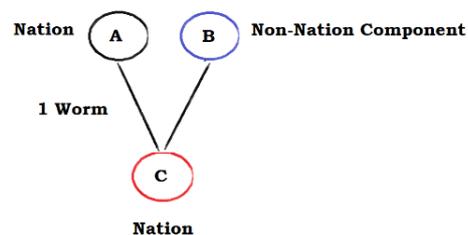
²¹ 王柯：《中國，從天下到民族國家》，頁 229-237。

[Fusion]

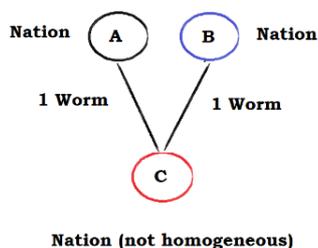
1.1



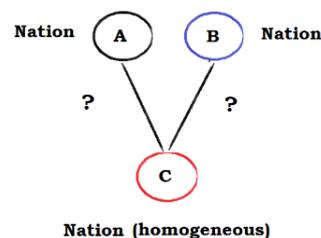
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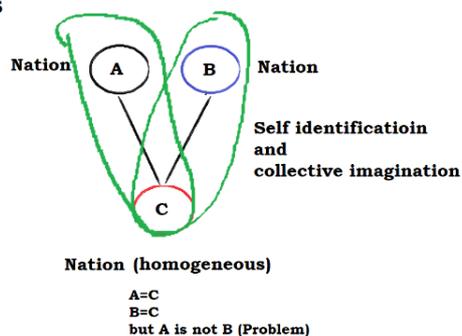
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1.4



1.5



1.6 [Fission]

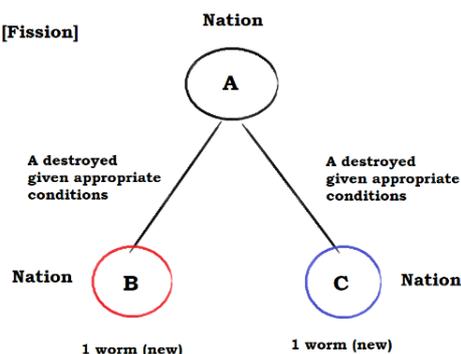


Figure. 3 (nations 'perdure' from top to bottom)

In this section I want to review some theoretical challenges to perdurantism.

Figure. 3 shows the different ways a nation may persist. Including cases of fusion and fission. But there are problems, problems perdurantism typically face.

First, just like the case of splitting a ship: If a ship will be dismantled, then two ships will be built using the same material from the first ship. Suppose we see the ship before the split, how many ships are there? It would appear that a perdurantist has to say two, a consequence of tracing the object by the career of its worm. Applying this to nation: I believe the fission is a nation destroyer. Consider 1.6 in Figure.3, if B and C used all of A's constituents, there will be no stage, people, nor territory left of A. No nation-stage, therefore no nation. A will be destroyed

in the process of the fission, and B, C can continue without tracing their career back to before the fission happens. Therefore, there will not be an over-count of nation.

Second, consider 1.4 and 1.5 from Figure. 3. Suppose 2 or more distinct nations A and B fused together in history into a rather homogenous nation C, how many nation worms are there? Since C is homogenous, there should only be one worm (unlike 1.3, where multiple nations may be ‘succumbing’ under another nation). However, it appears that C can connect to both A and B, implying there are two worms when there should only be one! Worse, we have a situation of $A=C$, $B=C$ but $A \neq B$, which is illogical.

There are four potential replies, as illustrated here:

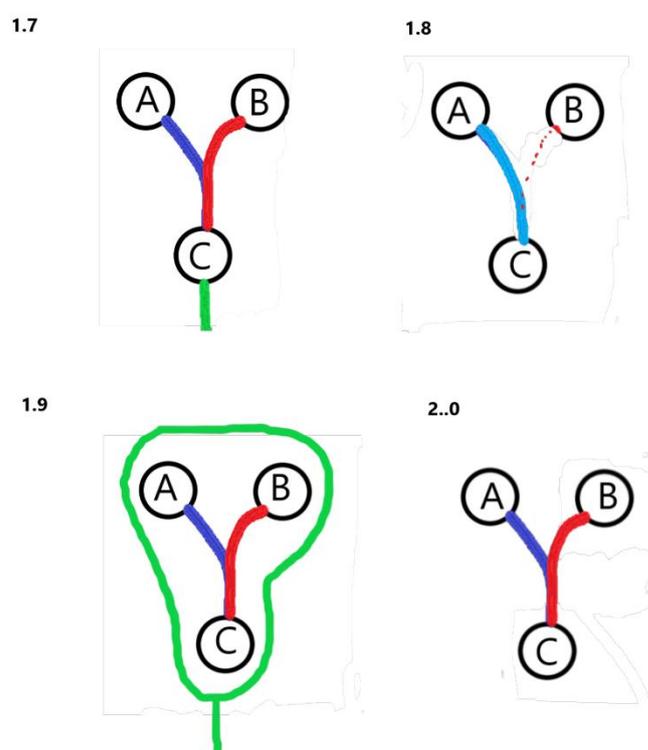


Figure. 4

In Figure 4,

1. In 2.0 the worms of A-C and B-C overlaps. This is to accept that it is illogical, but people are capable of being illogical and we will just accept the consequence of that. This is the least convincing reply.
2. In 1.8, one of the worms is disappearing. What is happening there is that, since social treatment is a necessary relation required for the stages to be bound. While there are still

material and historical succession, missing the social treatment (the people either does not know of B, choose to ignore B or simply don't want to identify with B) will cause the stages fail to connect with each other. Hence, B-C no longer qualifies as a nation worm and thus avoids the overcounting of worms.

3. In 1.7, both A-C and B-C are destroyed. Instead, a new nation is created and it continues its existence. So, a fusion which is also a nation destroyer.

4. In 1.9 a meta-category is created. This new category covers everything including all A, B and C. But how? For instance, to posit a common ancestral origin before A and B, even if that may be fictional and non-existent. A good example is the fiction of 'Huang-ti', a mythical legend in Chinese mythology. This myth of Huang was used differently in different times. Sometimes he was used as a moral role model, sometimes a justification of a ruler's legitimacy. And most importantly, in modern times, a common ancestry of all the ethnic groups in China.²³ By wrapping everything under a larger category, people in 1.9 don't have to choose between A-C or B-C, they created something new. This whole thing counts as one, thus also avoiding the overcounting. Do note, there is still persistence for 1.9's nation, despite the fictitious delusion, these stages do have the material and historical succession relation. While social treatment is essential to bind stages, without the other two relations it only makes for unappealing constructions.

III. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to argue for a realism for nation. The idea is to establish a framework that can accommodate both our best understanding of the social world as well as our ordinary beliefs about them. The understanding of nations from history often tells us that they are highly fictional. Nevertheless, under the right conditions persistence is still possible. I think an extra lesson learned is to see how a lot of words/ concepts about nations are confusing. Sometimes certain components are over-emphasised (the state), and sometimes over-tangled (mixing race, ethnic group and citizen). Hopefully there will be more discussion on this topic in the future.

²³ 沈松橋：〈我以我血薦軒轅－黃帝神話與晚清的國族建構〉，《台灣社會研究季刊》，第 28 期（1997），頁 6-10。

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