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A Legacy of the 'White Man's Rule,' and a Lesson for Future Global Politics

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INTRODUCTION

Four seemingly unrelated events in the last 2 weeks, namely, (a) the problem of blacks with law enforcement in the U.S., (b) the U.K. Iraq Inquiry Report, (c) the ISIS terrorist attack in Nice, France, and (d) the South China Sea ruling, can tell us a heart-breaking story about a historical legacy of the "white man's rule," which in turn teaches us a hard lesson for future global politics. And the term "white man" here is used as a metaphor to mean those Western European powers (including their descendants like the U.S.) in the Age of Colonization and its aftermaths in our time and therefore do not refer to all white folks literally).

(1) THE WHITE MAN'S RULE

In historical hindsight, it is tempting to narrate the rise of the modern West in global politics with the Western European expansion to the rest of the world in the Age of Colonization, which had looted and exploited, often with ruthless brutality, enormous amounts of wealth from those poor lands to enrich and sustain the rise of modern Western European Empires (by they English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and so on). But the historically unprecedented havoc that this "white man's rule" during the Western European expansion had brought to the rest of the world still has its remnants left over for us today, a few centuries later. Consider, for illustration, the 4 recent events in the last 2 weeks.

(a) Event #1 - Problem of Blacks with Law Enforcement in the U.S.

In the first event, the recent killings of white police officers in both Dallas and Baton Rouge in the U.S. (in revenge of the deaths of 2 black victims shot by white police officers earlier) show us the historical legacy of the "white man's rule" in the "good old" U.S.A. The racial tensions between whites and blacks can be traced back to the Western European enslavement of blacks in Africa and its forced relocation to the New World for hard labor. Of course, no one denies that, long after the emancipation of black slaves at the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement since the 1960s, much progress has been made to promote racial equality, and one only needs to mention the election of Barack Obama, who considers himself a black man, to be the president of the United States in the last 8 years as a historic milestone in this progress.

But Obama is an "exceptional" case, as many black folks do not have his credentials. So, racial discrimination against non-white minorities in the U.S. continues, and the recent case of police brutality against blacks speaks volumes of this historical legacy, although it is equally racist to treat all (or most) white police officers as "black haters," as those radical "Black Lives Matter" activists would like us to believe, in their often hot-headed (at times equally "racist") views towards others.

(b) Events #2 & #3 - U.K. Iraq Inquiry Report, & the ISIS Terrorist Attack in Nice

In the second and third events, the U.K. Iraq Inquiry Report (or the "Chilcot Report" in short) on July 05, 2016 and the ISIS terrorist attack in Nice, France on July 15, 2016 show us again the historical legacy of the "white man's rule" in the Middle East. Edward Said, the well-known Palestinian-American professor at Columbia University who died in 2003, once wrote the influential book titled "Orientalism" to show how the (mostly Western) European Imperialists frame their prejudiced analysis of peoples and cultures in the Middle East. The current Chilcot Report is no exception, although it is more subtle.

As a start, the U.K. is no stranger to the imperialist practice of colonially intervening into the internal affairs of Iraq in its modern history. For instance, back in the 1920s, Iraq was under British control, and the U.K. invaded Iraq in 1941 when Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and members of the Golden Square carried out a coup d'état to threaten Western interests; and the British authorities made the fateful decision at the time to select Sunni elites to facilitate the British control, and this fateful selection of the Sunnis continued to the days when Saddam Hussein came into power some decades later.

When the U.K. under Tony Blair, together with the U.S. under George W. Bush, invaded Iraq again in 2003, they made another fateful decision to kick the Sunnis out of power and put the Shiites in charge, which inflamingly intensified the internal conflicts between the two groups and eventually led to the rise of ISIS (also known as the "Islamic State Group") in Iraq (and its spread to nearby "hot spots" like Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Pakistan, Tunisia, and the like). Even worse, the spread of ISIS goes even farther than the nearby hot spots and reaches more distant places, all the way to the heart of Europe, as shown in some of the "jihadist-terrorist" attacks in Western European cities themselves in the last few years -- and the most recent example is the bloody terrorist attack in Nice, France on July 15, 2016, killing more than 80 lives and wounding more than 200, by a Tunisian-French national with ISIS connection (together with at least 5 accomplices arrested), since ISIS claimed responsibility for that attack afterwards.

Not less importantly, another aftermath of the Western invasion and destruction of Iraq has led to the subsequent Iranian (opportunistic) strategic intervention inside the country (because of its Shiite connection) and contributed to its current emergence as a dominant regional power to fill in the power vacuum left over by its former rival now in ruins (Iraq). Even Israel is getting nervous, and its opposition to the Iran nuclear deal is its fear that the lifting of the economic sanctions would further empower its regional nemesis (Iran) and that any rapprochement between Iran and the U.S. would make Israel more dispensable to the American foreign policy in the region.

In addition, the Chilcot Report makes some damning conclusions that the war undermined the authority of the United Nations, that the war "was not a last resort," that the war was based on "flawed intelligence," that the war had no legitimacy in international law, that the war resulted in some hundred thousand Iraqi civilian deaths and millions of Iraqi refugees [fleeing to neighboring countries and, worse, all the way to the heart of Europe, that is, to the E.U. itself, with its subsequent "refugee crisis" and its contribution to "Brexit"], and that the war caused massive destruction to the country.

To make things much worse unnecessarily, in spite of these damning conclusions, there is still no call in the Chilcot Report nor in the Western mainstream media to hold the British leaders (especially Tony Blair) and their allies (especially George W. Bush) accountable for their "war crimes." So, these Western leaders do not need to face any international war crime tribunal, just as the British authorities did (what they pleased) to Iraq in their invasion of Iraq in the 1940s, with impunity. But, if these leaders were African or Asian instead, these Western powers would furiously call for their arrests and put them on trial for "war crimes" in the name of international law. These double (discriminative) standards reflect the historical legacy of the "white man's rule" in global politics - with deadly consequences (as described above and also below).

(c) Event #4 -- South China Sea Ruling

In the fourth event, the call (by the West) on China to respect the South China Sea ruling by the Hague Tribunal shows us again the historical legacy of the "white man's rule" in Southeast Asia (and to a small extent, in parts of East Asia). The one-sided ruling against China and Taiwan by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands on July 12, 2016 angers the Chinese (both in PRC and ROC) for six main reasons.

The first reason is that the ruling is clearly "biased" in favor of the Western alliance, since four of the five-member arbitration tribunal were appointed by Shunji Yanai in 2013, when he was the president of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), but Yanai was a hawkish Japanese diplomat working for the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and served as the chairman of an expert panel in 2014 advising the Japanese prime minister to revise the Japanese pacifist constitution so to give Japan a more assertive military role abroad (especially in its territorial disputes with China). To make things more scandalous, the fifth member of the five-member arbitration tribunal was appointed by the Philippines, who brought the case against China. It is therefore no wonder that the ruling was so overwhelmingly negative against China, given the five members with their "Western" connection, as Japan and the Philippines are part of the U.S. alliance in the Pacific region. As Motofumi Asai, a former official of the Japanese Foreign Ministry and a former colleague of Yanai, thus remarked on July 19, 2016 after the ruling: "The arbitration was obviously conducted in accordance to the will of the Abe administration."

The second reason is that it is historically unprecedented for an international tribunal to pass judgment on a legal case without the participation of the defendant, as mainland China did not recognize its jurisdiction and did not participate in the case -- neither did Taiwan, for that matter. So this raises the critical issue of "legality" in regard to "due process." This is what some legal scholars called the controversial "power grab" in international law.

The third reason is that, to the Chinese, it is China which discovered these islands (i.e., the Paracel Islands, the Spratly Islands, and other areas), as they can be traced back to centuries before modern times, when the Chinese Empire was busy exploring distant lands far away from its shores (like the daring exploration of East Africa by the famous Chinese explorer Cheng Ho on behalf of the empire, some centuries before the European conquest of Africa) - at a time when other countries in the Pacific region were still "less developed."

The fourth reason is that, in the Age of colonization, Western powers themselves had engaged in massive territory grabs all over the Pacific region; and many of the 20,000 to 30,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean were colonized by the British, French, Dutch, German, and American (whereas the Japanese joined the colonial race later on); and many of these 20,000 to 30,000 islands are still under Western control or influence in one form or another (e.g., Guam, Midway, and Hawaii by the U.S.; French Polynesia and New Caledonia by France; Tasmania by the U.K. then but Australia now; Vancouver Island by the U.K. then but Canada now; North Island and South Island by the U.K. then but New Zealand now; Australia by the U.K. then but an independent white country now; New Zealand by the U.K. then but an independent white country now; Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Palau by the U.S. in control of their foreign and military affairs; Northern Mariana Islands by the U.S. with "commonwealth status"; and so on -- as there are simply too many islands in the Pacific region to list them all here). So, this means that the international legal system gives a free pass to Western powers to occupy and control islands in the Pacific region but discriminates against the Chinese historical territorial claims in its own backyard.

The fifth reason is that Western powers (like the U.S., the U.K. and others) have historically ignored any international rulings against them in the past, so they have no moral high ground to ask China to do the same, when they themselves set up the historical precedents to ignore rulings unfavorable to them. For example, do people still remember the ruling by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention against the U.K. in February 2016 in regard to its "unlawful detention" of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in the Embassy of Ecuador in London? But the U.K. categorically ignored the international (UN) ruling.

And the sixth reason is that it invokes a long and painful memory of humiliation and oppression under the "white man's rule" in modern Chinese history (to be discussed in the next section).

(2) THE NON-WHITE MAN'S RESSENTIMENT

The historical legacy of the "white man's rule" has produced its subsequent reaction ("counter-oppression"), namely, what I called "ressentiment" (in the 2 volumes titled "The Future of Human Civilization" in 2000), that is, a feeling of anger towards and frustration with the imperial encroachment of the dominant group, that is, the "Same" (or "white men" in the current example but some other groups in different contexts) on the homelands of the dominated "Others." Consider, for illustration, the 4 recent events in the last 2 weeks again.

(a) Event #1 -- Problem of Blacks with Law Enforcement in the U.S.

In the first event, the police brutality against blacks in the U.S. has led to the rise of the "Black Lives Matter" movement -- and the subsequent killings (in revenge) of 5 white police officers by a radical black vigilante in Dallas and then the killings (in further revenge) of 3 police officers by another black in Baton Rouge precisely show the emotional intensity, among many non-whites, of anger towards and frustration with a justice system which favors whites and discriminates against non-whites, in spite of all the progress which has been made to promote racial equality since the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

But the downside of the "Black Lives Matter" movement is their equally "racist" narrative of blaming the problems faced by "black" folks on the "white" establishment (or the "white" police officers in the current example). For example, if those "black" victims (in the incidents) did not carry "guns" on the streets (as advocated by those radical members of the "New Black Panther Party") and stayed "calm" or "respectful" when confronted by a "white" police officer, a substantial part of the problem could be resolved. Many Asian Americans, by contrast, do not like carrying guns on the streets and often stay calm when confronted by a "white" police officer, so their experience of police brutality is rather uncommon (although this does happen to them too sometimes). Those "black" folks in the "Black Lives Matter" movement who protest on the streets are quick to lash out at the innocent deaths of black victims but show no emotional sorrow towards the innocent deaths of the white police officers (murdered by black vigilantes aforecited). If "black" lives matter -- then do "white" lives, "brown" lives, "blue" lives, "yellow" lives, and other lives matter too? Precisely because of this equally "racist" narrative in the "Black Lives Matter" movement, there is now the "Blue Lives Matter" movement to defend those police officers who dutifully do their jobs with honor. But the historical legacy of the "white man's rule" has become so "toxic" that it will take many years to calm down the emotions on both sides and to rationally draw a middle ground between the two opposing sides.

(b) Events #2 & #3 -- U.K. Iraq Inquiry Report, & the ISIS Terrorist Attack in Nice

In the second and third events, it is legally important to enforce "accountability" by holding those leaders (regardless of whether they are Western or non-Western) accountable for "war crimes" that they had committed -- but the international legal system in modern times was set up by Western powers in such a way that international law is often used (or better, "abused") time and again to punish those (more often than not, "non-Western") leaders who challenge Western interests but to turn a blind eye to those "Western" (more often than not, white) leaders themselves who had caused many times more destruction and deaths to the rest of the world.

The word "often" (not "always") is used in the above sentence, because there are exceptions to any generalization, as shown in the recent international ruling against the U.K. for its "unlawful detention" of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in the Embassy of Ecuador some months ago. But there is a good reason for this exception, since Assuage is an influential "white" from Australia (a "Western" ally), and the international legal system shows more impartiality when dealing with cases involving "white" folks (in "Western" countries) on both sides of the dispute. But if Assange were a "Chinese" from China or a "black" from Africa, this legal case against the U.K. would not even have been brought up in the first place, let alone the unfavorable ruling against the Western power. This is the historical legacy of the "white-man's rule" in global politics.

Thus, there is a widespread perception in the non-West that international criminal courts or tribunals are an instrument of Western powers to punish those who threaten "Western interests" (and the interests of "Western allies") but to give a "free pass" to "Western leaders" for their imperialist destruction abroad (on a much larger scale) with impunity, so this ensures that Western powers can continue to commit "war crimes" with impunity time and again in the future, just as they did many times before in the past (also with impunity).

But there is a bloody price to pay for these double standards, as the Others will relentlessly strike back against the heartland of the contemporary West with a "vengeance," as shown in some of the "jihadist-terrorist" attacks in Western European cities in the last few years. And the bloody terrorist attack in Nice, France on July 15, 2016, killing more than 80 lives and wounding more than 200, by a Tunisian-French national with ISIS connection (together with at least 5 accomplices arrested), is only the most recent example but will not be the last, as long as the international legal system continues to give a free pass to Western powers for its destruction and killing abroad with impunity (as illustrated in the Western invasion and destruction of Iraq, with the subsequent rise of ISIS).

Of course, there is a downside of this widespread negative attitude towards international criminal courts in the Non-West, which is that it is all too easy to blame the problems faced by them on the Western colonial past and its aftermaths in the present. In the current case of Iraq, there is much to hold the Iraqis responsible for all the mess that they had brought to their own country: corruption, poverty, backwardness, ethnic cleansing, religious schism, and so on. Yet, in a BBC news broadcast on July 05, 2016 about the Iraq Inquiry Report, an Iraqi man in Baghdad was shown on TV who, when asked (by a British journalist) what he thought about the invasion and occupation of Iraq, thus answered: "Tony Blair, you are a criminal. I spit on you." Thus, the historical legacy of the "white man's rule" has become so "toxic" that it will take many years to rationally draw a middle ground between the opposing sides.

(c) Event #4 -- South China Sea Ruling

In the fourth event, the call (by Western powers like the U.S. and the EU) on China to respect the South China Sea ruling only brings back a long and painful memory of humiliation and oppression under the "white man's rule" in modern Chinese history, not just to those in mainland China (PRC) but also to those in Taiwan (ROC).

For instance, in the 19th century, the dying Chinese empire experienced Western imperialism during the First Opium War (1839-42) and the Second Opium War (1856-60) with Britain and France, which forced China to sign humiliating treaties to pay the outrageous "monetary compensation" (for the military costs of Western invasion of China at the time), open "treaty ports," give "extraterritoriality" for Western nationals above the Chinese law, and handed over the Chinese port city (Hong Kong) to the U.K. -- whereas another Chinese port city Macao was handed to Portugal in 1887, under another humiliating treaty. To the Chinese historians, this remains unto this day the "100 years of humiliation" in their national psyche (counting from the Western encroachment on Chinese soil in the mid-19th century to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, when Mao Tse-Tung then formally declared: "The Chinese people have stood up.").

The anger expressed by both mainland China (PRC) and Taiwan (ROC) towards the South China Sea ruling is therefore understandable, in light of this modern history of humiliation under the "white man' s rule" (besides the other 5 reasons as explained in the previous section). To the Chinese on both sides of the aisle, their territorial claims can be traced back to centuries before modern times and do not need nor depend on Western-dominated international tribunals for

formal recognition. Even Taiwan angrily reacted to the ruling by sending a few warships to the South China Sea for patrols, as a "symbolic" protest against the ruling.

But the downside of this anger towards the international ruling is its blaming the problem faced by China with its neighbors on the historical legacy of the "white man's rule." Smaller neighbors like Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei, for instance, have their own territorial claims with their own historical reasons. And this problem is made more complicated when the U.S. and other Western powers take side with these regional claimants (like the Philippines) against China, while playing "false innocence" with the (Western) rhetorical pretension of "neutrality" on the issue.

To make matter worse, the U.S. deployment of aircraft carriers and other warships in the South China Sea to show its military might in the name of "freedom of navigation" is both 'unnecessary," "provocative," and "counterproductive," if viewed from the Chinese perspective. To the Chinese, it is "unnecessary," because China never claims to deny other states from access to the South China Sea for navigation. It is also "provocative," because the idea of "freedom of navigation" does not mean the deployment of aircraft carriers and other warships to harass and spy on a sovereign state next to its disputed territory, for days or even weeks without moving on in "free passage" (as the idea of "freedom of navigation" requires). And it is "counterproductive," because it invokes their (Chinese) painful memory about the long history of Western "gunboat diplomacy" in the Pacific region -- starting from the forced opening of Japan by Commodore Matthew C. Perry and his Black Ships in 1853-54, through the French and British encroachment on the Chinese soil in the Opium Wars during 1839-42 and 1856-60, to the contemporary American display of military might in the First Taiwan Strait Crisis (1954-55), the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis (1958), and the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995-96). And this does not yet mention the Western military intervention (under the U.S. leadership) into the Korean War in the 1950s and then the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s.

Thus, this long history of Western "gunboat diplomacy" in the region only plays into the Chinese narrative about the Western "containment" of the contemporary rise of China, on top of its historical imperialistic approach towards China under the "white man's rule" in the past centuries.

CONCLUSION

The historical legacy of the "white man's rule" during the Age of Western European colonization still has its remnants in our time, and this can teach us a hard lesson for future global politics, which is that "ressentiment" will return, if certain historical conditions are ripe, with a "vengeance" to demand its fair shares in shaping the conflicts that the "Others" have with the dominant powers (the "Same") in a way which may "appear" revengeful or unreasonable to those on the other side. Or more generally, the lesson here is about the dialectics between oppression and counter-oppression (ressentiment) in history over time.

In fact, the most important case (with profound global implications) to support this visionary caveat here concerns the rise of China in our time, as the next dominant superpower, which is something that the modern West has never faced until now and, naturally, find it very difficult to

accept.

With this lesson for future global politics in mind, the rest of the world should not be surprised to realize, sooner or later, that China is now determined, and will continue to do so, to regain what it lost to other powers (be they Western, Japanese, and the like) in the Age of Colonization and its aftermaths. And this includes not just its territorial claims in the South China Sea but also, further down the line, its lost territories in Eurasia, Taiwan, and the East China Sea, as well as its influence over the First Island Chain, the Second Island Chain, and beyond, so as to regain its former preeminence as the "Middle Kingdom" (or the "center of the world") for the past millennia - thousand thanks to the "100 years of humiliation" as part of the historical legacy of the "white man's rule" and its aftermaths unto this day. "Ressentiment" can return with a "vengeance," if certain historical conditions are ripe, when history moves on to the next chapter of power shift in global politics.

However, this hard lesson for future global politics is ignored or dismissed by Western powers (the U.S. in particular) in our time, which assume, with wishful thinking (as part of the new "Cold War mentality," this time towards China, not the U.S.S.R.), that the more they contain China, the more it will back down, or at the very least, the more this will slow down its rapid rise. But this is a serious strategic "miscalculation" of historical proportions, because this Western "containment" (regardless of its official "denial" time and again) not only has not prevented China from its meteoric rise in the past decades but also has played into the hands of Chinese "ressentiment" and fired up its determination and righteousness to regain its former preeminence, by "revenge" when necessary and by "cooperation" when expedient.

Therefore, a "wiser" and more constructive approach, in light of this awareness of the historical lesson for future global politics, is for the West to come up with an integrative strategy to incorporate the rise of China in a "win-win" manner so as to benefit the world as a whole. But the historical legacy of the "white man's rule" has blinded the contemporary West from this historical self-understanding. After all, "containment of China" is the favorite son in American foreign policy nowadays - just as "China bashing" is an American political pastime in our time, and those critics against these questionable practices are often dismissed as "un-American" or "anti-American."

Beneath the surface of all this rhetoric, however, it really "hurts" the "inflated pride" of the contemporary West to see its global dominance coming to an end, and it "hurts" even more the "oversized ego" of the contemporary West to accept the coming world order centered around a country upon which Western powers encroached with impunity in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Of course, it is easily understandable that no power wants to easily give up its dominant status and privilege in global politics, and therefore it is quite natural for the contemporary West to stubbornly cling to the declining Western-dominated world order as a historical legacy of the "white man's rule" and its aftermaths in our time.

But the contemporary West would risk paying a higher and costlier price in the future if this lesson for global politics were not learned -- as "ressentiment" can return with a "vengeance," when its historical conditions are ripe. And these historical conditions are getting ripe now and all the more so in the rest of the 21st century and beyond...

Act now with "foresight" - or pay later with "blind sight."