

Imagined Commonalities: Making Sense of China's Genealogical Nationalism

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The concept of a common, genealogical ethnic origin plays a key role in Chinese nationhood to accommodate heterogeneous groups within one imagined family often depicted as common descendants of the Yellow Emperor. This mythicized narrative of genealogical unity has forged a sense of imagined commonalities through a trans-ethnic kinship metaphor—we, the Chinese nation, are one big family with many members. This paper focuses on the continuity and persistence of the genealogical discourse of ethnohistory from ancient times until today. It also suggests that China's hegemonic familial rhetoric is regularly employed to control non-Han groups, whose discontents are mediated not through the politics of exclusion, but rather through the politics of inclusion.

Keywords: nationalism, ethnicity, Chinese nation, the Yellow Emperor, Sima Qian

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I. Introduction

When Ban Ki-moon, the then-foreign minister of South Korea, was elected as the eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations in late 2006, the Chinese media soon proudly produced numerous articles on his 'Chinese' origins, tracing the history of his lineage. This argument was based on the genealogical ties between two Ban clans, one in Korea and the other in China's Henan Province. Their kinship affiliation dates back to the thirteenth century, when the progenitor of the Ban branch in Korea, Ban Wenjie (Ban Mun-jeol in Korean), migrated to the Korean Peninsula and settled there. In 2009, the local media in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, challenged the existing theory and argued instead that Ban Ki-moon's ancestors originated from the Ban lineage in Quanzhou, separate from its northern branches.¹

The author would like to thank James Z. Lee, Ronald G. Suny, and anonymous reviewers for their helpful insights and suggestions. The Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange provided generous financial support for this research.

¹ "Ban Ki-moon's Ancestral Home Was Originally Quanzhou," *Quanzhouwanbao* [Quanzhou

China has a long history of imagining primordial kinship ties modeled on the myth of common descent. As the debate on Ban Ki-moon's ancestry reveals, the Chinese have constructed a sense of "imagined commonalities" with non-Chinese, no matter how alien they may be to the Chinese standard. One exemplary case would be the diplomatic strategy of Qiyong (耆英, 1787-1858), a Manchu imperial kinsman of the Qing state, for negotiating a peace treaty with Great Britain after the First Opium War. In 1843, despite his pejorative attitude against European "barbarians," he proposed an honorary adoption of the son of the chief British plenipotentiary, Sir Henry Pottinger (1789-1856). As John King Fairbank vividly describes:

Seeing a miniature of Pottinger's family, for example, Ch'i-yong [Qiyong] explained that, having no son himself, he wished to adopt Sir Henry's eldest boy. On being told that the boy must first finish his education in England, Ch'i-yong replied, "Very well, he is my adopted son from this day"; henceforth his name should be "Frederick Keying Pottinger." Having obtained the son's miniature, he then made bold to ask for that of his mother and offered a portrait of his own wife in exchange. After some hesitation Sir Henry gave up Lady Pottinger's picture also. Ch'i-yong received it in elaborate Manchu fashion and ordered it borne home in his chair of state.²

It proved to be a merely symbolic gesture in that Sir Henry's son, Sir Frederick Pottinger (1831-1865), did not become Qiyong's adopted son. Nevertheless, this episode illustrated the strategy of "harmonious kinship" (和親) and alluded to the traditional Chinese way of

Evening News], March 21, 2009. I would like to thank Professor Liang Chen at Nanjing University for bringing this news to my attention.

² John K. Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), 110.

conceptualizing foreigners.

The *mentalité* of conceiving commonalities through fictive kinship ties, which endures into the present, is a mainstay of modern Chinese nationalism. In particular, the unifying myth in China, as elsewhere, has been crucial to the formation of modern nationhood since it has apparent advantages for cementing the various groups together. In contrast with the process of exclusive ethnic boundary-making in most of the world's nationalizing states, however, this primordial foundation of the Chinese nation has displayed the supra-ethnic feature of boundary-clearing in the sense that the rhetoric of common blood and kinship is not to exclude but to accommodate heterogeneous ethnic groups into a single genealogical origin. I suggest that the Chinese practices of imagining kinship commonalities could be conducive to the development of a social theory of nationalism in an age of post-imperial and post-colonial nation-states.

From a comparative-historical perspective, moreover, it is important to note that the Chinese notion of common descent, one that strives to accommodate all ethnicities, differs significantly from the Judeo-Christian idea of God's chosen people, in which the superiority of one ethno-religious group over others is assumed. As Philip Gorski, who has challenged the modernist approach to nationalism, convincingly suggests, the Hebraic mythology which entails a binary opposition between sacred "us" and profane "others" not only became a crucible in which Western nationalism was forged but also had its roots well before the early modern period.³ As he put it, the Hebraic idiom was "well-nigh universal in Medieval Europe" and was later precipitated particularly by Calvinism in early modern Europe.⁴ As Christian universalism was replaced by confessional particularism, some nationalist discourses in early modern polities were "no less nationalistic than the nationalism

³ See Philip S. Gorski, "The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism," *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 5 (March 2000): 1428-468.

⁴ Gorski, "The Mosaic Moment," 1455.

of the French Revolution.”⁵ Although I limit my argument to China’s case, I wish to remind readers of how China’s boundary-clearing conceptualization of common descent, including present-day genealogical nationalism, can be distinct from other boundary-making ideas embedded in nationalist discourse.

II. Imagined Kinship and Primordial Ethnicity

In general, ethnicity is defined as an extension of the concept of family. In modern society, ethnicity “has replaced kinship as the principal method of identity-conferment.”⁶ Furthermore, ethnicity as an extended family, either real or imagined, manifests “a greater resiliency and recuperative power than corporate bodies which are not centered on primordial qualities.”⁷ In this sense, the strength of ethnic nationhood in a given society primarily hinges upon its ability to arouse primordial sentiments based on kinship bonds and blood ties. The process of modern nation-building tends not to silence such primordial sentiments but to accelerate them.⁸

The scholarship on ethnic nationalism has paid attention to the myth of common descent and eventually focuses on biology in a genealogical sense.⁹ Max Weber clarified that ethnic group identity is almost always based on the subjective belief in a common ancestry, from

⁵ Gorski, “The Mosaic Moment,” 1428.

⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 46.

⁷ Edward Shils, “Tradition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 2 (1971): 158.

⁸ See Clifford Geertz, “The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States,” in *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Free Press, 1963), 105-57.

⁹ See Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Ronald Grigor Suny, “Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations,” *Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 4 (December 2001): 862-96.

which the shared characteristics of co-ethnic members are ostensibly derived. Ethnic groups are, therefore, “those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.”¹⁰ Other ethno-symbolic elements like shared memories, values, symbols, and traditions also play a critical role in what constitutes the foundation of ethnic and national identities.¹¹ So the notion of ethnic nationhood entails a sense of ascribed, inalienable attachment to a larger community, especially via the myths of common descent and shared histories. Here, the issue of nationhood becomes not a question of choice but a matter of destiny that transcends individuality. This nationalist appeal to primordial traits is, by and large, more strident when the ethnic identities in question seem to be threatened. As Ronald Suny aptly illustrates, “Even though immutable identities should be the least threatened, primordialist nationalists, as if unconvinced by their own rhetoric, fear the loss of identity and seek actively to intervene to save it.”¹² The problem is that this kind of primordial feeling tends to demarcate rigid ethnic lines between the national majority as a core and the ethnic minority as an alien outsider. In turn, ethnic groups having clear-cut and uncontested boundaries are more likely to enter into conflict with each other in many forms: ethnic and national discrimination, forced segregation, violence, oppression, exploitation, and resistance movements. Extreme forms of ethnic conflict, accompanied and driven by the politicization of ethnicity, include ethnic cleansing and genocide in the contexts of post-colonial and post-imperial nation-state building.

¹⁰ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 389.

¹¹ See Anthony D. Smith, “The ‘Sacred’ Dimension of Nationalism,” *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 3 (December 2000): 791-814.

¹² Suny, “Constructing Primordialism,” 893-94.

In China, as elsewhere, ethnicity has been imagined as an extension of family, whose idea has been essential in the process of post-Qing nation-making. The narrative of common descent, in particular, has served not only as the source of primordial sentiments to the Chinese nation comprising the Han and non-Han peoples, but as the official propaganda of a “unified multiethnic state” (統一的多民族國家). In the familial metaphor of the Chinese nation as being one big family (中華大家庭), China’s ethnic minorities are considered as the “brothers” of Han peoples who constitute “inalienable” family members rather than the exotic and inferior “Others” who need to be civilized by the “Self.” Such rhetoric represents an essential facet of the all-inclusive whole of the Chinese nation, one that embraces fifty-six official nationalities.

It should be emphasized here that this boundary-clearing nationhood makes China incommensurable to most post-colonial and post-imperial nation-states, which are modeled on the logic of ethnic or racial boundary-making and include neighbors such as postwar Japan, two post-colonial Koreas, and Vietnam. This crucial bifurcation began to emerge in the course of the empire-to-nation transformation. The dissolution of other continental empires such as the Ottoman and Habsburg resulted in ethnic separatism in nascent national states, the condition of which was also common aftermath of European colonial powers. On the contrary, China has reconfigured its ancient ideas of common descent and kinship across various ethnic groups, so much so that its historical heritage has to be taken into account to explain the primordial foundation of modern Chinese nationhood. The question, then, is: in what ways have the Chinese created, expanded, and transmitted such ancient conceptions?

III. The Formation and Expansion of the Myth of Common Origin

The notion of genealogically-defined descent group persists, most

notably through the ancestral worship of the mythical Yellow Emperor (黃帝) and the Flame Emperor (炎帝). Since no later than the fourth century BCE, the Yellow Emperor has been regarded as the founder of Chinese civilization and an ancestor of the legendary sage-rulers of antiquity such as Yao (堯) and Shun (舜).¹³ For modern Chinese nationalists, the Yellow Emperor has remained the most revered figure,¹⁴ although many historians like Gu Jiegang (顧頡剛, 1893-1980) and Yang Kuan (楊寬, 1914-2005) have been skeptical about the historicity of such a figure. In this respect, the national discourse on the Yellow Emperor as the progenitor of the Chinese people is not simply an “invented tradition” of modern times but is based on an ancient cultural repertoire. My intention is not to examine the factuality of Chinese myths of common descent which, after all, is a task that belongs to historians. Given that the myths of common descent need not, and usually will not, correspond to historical realities, sociologists are concerned “not with actual descent, but with the sense of imputed common ancestry and origins.”¹⁵ So I focus on the socio-political function of the myth of the descent of the Yellow Emperor, emphasizing its all-embracing feature. Both yesterday and today, the Chinese imagination of descent group has sought not to preclude or demonize ethnic strangers, but to construct primordial myths over the “Chinese” origins of non-Chinese peoples.

Indeed, the use of fictive kinship metaphors as a way of integrating a heterogeneous population is common in ancient world history. China is

¹³ Around the sixth-fifth century BCE, the legends around Yao and Shun became well known and people came to believe that these two sage-rulers really existed. Later, the myths of Yao and Shun were incorporated into a part of the genealogy of the Five Emperors. See Masaru Mitaraï, “Myths and History: The Chinese Case,” in *Ethnic Identity and National Characteristics*, ed. Wolfram Eberhard, Krzysztof Gawlikowski, and Carl-Albrecht Seyschab (Munich: Simon & Magiera, 1982), 148-54.

¹⁴ See Terence Billeter, “Chinese Nationalism Falls Back on Legendary Ancestor,” *China Perspectives* no. 18 (July-August 1998): 44-51.

¹⁵ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 24.

not an exception. Just as the supposed ancestor, Abraham, united the various tribes of ancient Israel, so did the Chinese during the Warring States period (475-221 BCE) aspire to embrace virtually all clans of the Sinitic cultural sphere under a common genealogy descended from the Yellow Emperor. The first authenticated reference is found in a bronze inscription attributed to King Xuan of Qi (齊宣王, r. 319-301 BCE) to whom Mencius gave advice.¹⁶ Although that does not mean that the idea of the Yellow Emperor was an invention of the Qi kings, the Yellow Emperor was nevertheless the high ancestor of the Tian family, the ruling house of Qi. The myths of the Ying clan, the ruling family of the state of Qin that eventually established the first unified empire, also centered around the Yellow Emperor and his descendants.¹⁷ More probably, the ancestral worship of the Yellow Emperor was widespread among the ruling houses of such large powers as Qi and Qin, which were “most anxious to establish the cosmic and historic prestige of their own pedigrees.”¹⁸ It also reflected the political ideal of unifying all the states into one large empire, one that prevailed during the Warring States period.

This mythology of the descent from a quasi-divine, quasi-human sage-ruler of the remote past was not limited to the political sphere, but disseminated into the philosophical and religious domains. In particular, the Taoist school in the pre-imperial period made attribution to the Yellow Emperor as its origin, which later created the Yellow Emperor-Laozi, namely Huang-Lao (黃老), Taoism, so popular during the early decades of the Former Han dynasty (前漢, 206 BCE - 9 CE). The linkage between the Yellow Emperor and Taoism (and other schools) clearly appeared in the Four Canons of the Yellow Emperor (黃帝四經), also

¹⁶ Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 239.

¹⁷ Mitarai, “Myths and History,” 149.

¹⁸ Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, 239.

known as the Huang-Lao Silk Manuscripts (黃老帛書), excavated from the Mawangdui (馬王堆) tomb, Hunan Province, in 1973.¹⁹ In this document that was most probably written during the late Warring States period, the Yellow Emperor was depicted as the only one who united All-under-Heaven (天下) as one.²⁰ As a corollary, the Yellow Emperor as a universal sovereign was believed to be the ancestor of all humankind.

This notion of a single kinship community as the common descendants of the Yellow Emperor had grown more elaborate during the early imperial period, for the Chinese continued to encounter various foreign groups previously barely known to them. In the first half of the Former Han dynasty, the syncretic complex of Huang-Lao Taoism became so dominant that it even received imperial support until the triumph of Confucianism as state orthodoxy.²¹ As a follower of Huang-Lao thought, Sima Tan (司馬談, d. 110 BCE), who served as the court historian and astronomer, proclaimed the superiority of Taoism over other schools of thought. His son, Sima Qian (司馬遷, ca. 145-86 BCE), was also influenced deeply by the Huang-Lao scholarship, which is clearly reflected in his monumental writings, *Shiji* (史記).

Sima Qian lucidly formulated the allegedly shared ancestry not only in terms of Chinese but also of non-Chinese on the basis of his belief that all human history and society stemmed from the Yellow Emperor, as summarized in Figure 1. Thus, the first chapter of *Shiji* is the Basic Annals of the Five Emperors (五帝本紀) and, among them, the

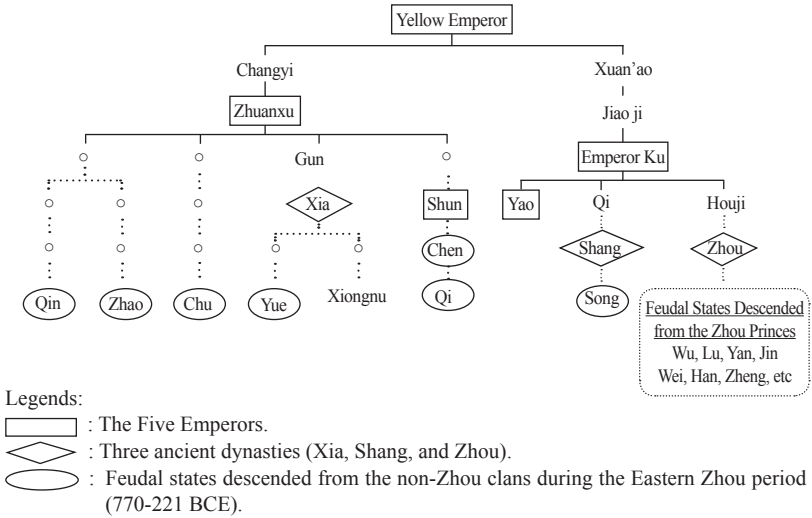
¹⁹ For the English translation with general discussion of the Four Canons, see Leo S. Chang and Yu Feng, *The Four Political Treatises of the Yellow Emperor: Original Mawangdui Texts with Complete English Translations and an Introduction* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998); Edmund Ryden, *The Yellow Emperor's Four Canons: A Literary Study and Edition of the Text from Mawangdui* (Taipei: Kuangchi Press, 1997).

²⁰ Chang and Feng, *The Four Political Treatises of the Yellow Emperor*, 155.

²¹ For the discussion of the Huang-Lao Taoism and its changes, see Ryden, *The Yellow Emperor's Four Canons*; Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, 237-54.

Yellow Emperor comes in first.²² In fact, the very first word of the *Shiji* is the “Yellow Emperor.” Sima Qian accordingly created a narrative of imagined commonalities among all human societies from the creation of the state by the Yellow Emperor until his own days.

Figure 1. The Genealogy of the Yellow Emperor Recorded in the *Shiji*



To construct the myth of common descent within Han proper, Sima Qian wrote that originally non-Sinitic polities of pre-imperial times like the Chu, Yue, and Qin indeed originated from the descendants of the Yellow Emperor (see Figure 1). For instance, he related how the ancestors of the

²² The Five Emperors in the *Shiji* consist of the Yellow Emperor, Zhu'anxu, Emperor Ku, Yao, and Shun. At the beginning, however, there were no such sequential and genealogical relationships. These gods had originally been worshipped in a parallel manner by the different clans in the various regions in early antiquity. So the very early form of the Chinese myths had been shaped independently by each clan. See Gu Jiegang, *Zhongguo shanggu shi yanjiu jiangyi* [Commentaries on Classics for the Study of Ancient Chinese History] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 13-19, 86-95; Mitarai, “Myths and History,” 148.

kings of the state of Chu in the central Yangtze River basin were descendants of Zhuangxi (顓頊), one of the Five Emperors and believed to be a grandson of the Yellow Emperor, and by the end of the Shang dynasty they were “at times in the Middle Kingdom (中國) and at times among the alien (夷狄) peoples.”²³ His records on the genealogical origin of the state of Qin were the same as Chu: the ancestors of the Qin core group descended from Zhuangxi and resided “sometimes in the Middle Kingdom and sometimes among the alien peoples,” having been located in the northwestern fringe of the Sinitic culture realm.²⁴

When Sima Qian recorded the history of foreign states beyond Han proper, he pointed out that they were mostly founded by disaffected or defeated Chinese who fled to the wilderness and reestablished their regimes there. So he formulated their ethno-genealogy as having some connection to Chinese ancestors—the descendants of the Yellow Emperor. His intention in the *Shiji* is clearly embodied in the chapters on Vietnam (then the Nam Viet kingdom), Korea (then the Wiman Joseon kingdom), and even the Xiongnu (匈奴), China’s main enemy. The passage on the ethnic origins of the Xiongnu people reads: “The ancestor of the Xiongnu was a descendant of the ruling clan of the Xia dynasty (夏后).”²⁵ Hence, the Xiongnu became the descent of the Yellow Emperor because, from the Yellow Emperor down to Yu the Great, one of legendary sage-kings who founded the Xia dynasty, they all shared the “same *gens* (同姓) but adopted different appellations for their states.”²⁶ This “Chinese” origin of the Xiongnu marked them out as legitimate constituents of Chinese history from the very beginning and, more importantly, made them part of the family alongside the kinship rhetoric

²³ Sima Qian, *Shiji* [Records of the Grand Historian], 10 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 1689-690.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 173-74.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2879.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 45. See also Figure 1.

in Han-Xiongnu diplomacy formed by the policy of marriage alliance. Such reconstructions of the Xiongnu's remote past "have a highly normative function and fulfill two goals: making the unknown seem familiar, and establishing a certain subject as one worthy of investigation (and therefore worthy of record keeping)."²⁷

The works of Sima Qian reflect the typical Chinese understanding of the Middle Kingdom and its neighboring states during early imperial times. The construction of the myth of the Yellow Emperor as a common ancestor tells us how the ancient Chinese began to imagine their communal ethnic history by forging a fictive kinship narrative to make sense of the ever-increasing inhabitants within and beyond China proper. Yet they did not have a belief analogous to the Israelite's self-image as Yahweh's chosen people. As mentioned, they conceived the nomadic peoples outside the Great Wall not as the descendants of the wicked ancestors banished to the outer world but as having a common kinship with the native Chinese. There was no similar story in the myth of the Yellow Emperor comparable to the expulsion of Abraham's eldest son Ishmael to live in the wilderness. In the long run, such interpretations had become the foundation of China's all-inclusive conception of ethnicity. Moreover, this imagined commonality was asserted not only by native Chinese, but by non-native peoples as well.²⁸

About half a millennium later, despite going largely unnoticed in much of the scholarship, Sima Qian's kinship rhetoric of the Xiongnu was appropriated by Helian Bobo (赫連勃勃, r. 407-425), the founder of the short-lived Xia, the last Xiongnu state in Chinese history. When he established the empire, he proclaimed himself as a descendant of the Xiongnu Xiahou clan (which exactly followed the *Shiji*) and thereby

²⁷ Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 298.

²⁸ See Bret Hinsch, "Myth and the Construction of Foreign Ethnic Identity in Early and Medieval China," *Asian Ethnicity* 5, no. 1 (February 2004): 81-103.

chose “Great Xia”(大夏) as the name of his state.²⁹ At the same time, unlike his ancestors who sinicized their surname to Liu, the imperial surname of the Han dynasty, he went back to the old Xiongnu noble clan name, which reveals that he was keenly conscious of his ethnic identity. It was not contradictory for Helian Bobo to be both Xiongnu and Chinese on the ground of his reference to the “Chinese” origin of the Xiongnu in the *Shiji*.

During the Age of Disunion (220-589), we can observe many instances in which fanciful ethno-genealogies were drawn up. Several alien conquerors, who adopted the image of the Chinese ruler as the exclusive holder of the Mandate of Heaven, portrayed themselves as the descendant of the Yellow Emperor. Although he was of the proto-Tibetan Di origin, for example, Fu Jian (苻堅, r. 357-385) of the Former Qin, who temporarily unified northern China, strove to be the sole legitimate ruler of the Middle Kingdom. To prove his qualification as the Son of Heaven, he identified himself with the personage of the Yellow Emperor.³⁰ In addition, the rulers of the Northern Wei dynasty (北魏, 386-534), the Tuoba clan of the Xianbei (拓跋鮮卑), declared that their ancestors descended from the Yellow Emperor, which is well reflected in the Book of Wei (魏書). On the ethnic origin of the Touba Xianbei, it reads:

In antiquity, the Yellow Emperor had twenty-five sons. Those who stayed at home became the ancestors of the Hua Chinese (諸華); those who went abroad scattered in the wilderness (荒服). The youngest son, Changyi, was given the northern lands containing the Great Xianbei Mountain, from which he took his tribal name.... Since the Yellow Emperor ruled through the virtue of earth (土德) and northerners call the earth “Tuo” and the ruler “Ba,” therefore, “Tuoba” became their lineage

²⁹ Fang Xuanling et al., *Jin Shu* [Book of the Jin], 10 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 3202.

³⁰ Michael Rogers, trans., *The Chronicle of Fu Chien: A Case of Exemplar History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968), 163-164.

name (氏).³¹

Imagining non-Sinitic nomads as descendants of the Yellow Emperor becomes quite explicit here: even the tribal name Tuoba stands for the descendants of the Yellow Emperor. Likewise, the Yuwen clan of the Xianbei (宇文鮮卑) that established the Northern Zhou dynasty (北周, 557-581) claimed descent from the Divine Husbandman (神農), also known as the Flame Emperor—the legendary founder of Chinese agriculture and herbal medicine.³² Later, the royal house of the Liao dynasty (907-1125) was recorded in the *Liao shi* (遼史) to be descended from the Yuwen Xianbei. The Khitans were, therefore, simultaneously descendants of the Divine Husbandman. Perhaps they intended to consolidate the political legitimacy of the Liao in Chinese history by tracing their ancestry to the Northern Zhou placed in the legitimate line of dynastic succession.³³ In summary, for alien rulers, the manipulation of ancient mythologies and symbols of an idealized antiquity represents their efforts to secure the right to govern the Middle Kingdom and its multiethnic subjects. It was also a political strategy to mitigate any potential threat from the majority native population. In this sense, the appropriation of ancient Chinese mythology was one practical way to coordinate diverse ethnicities.

Although scholars of modern Chinese nationalism have paid little attention to it, this shared sense of common ethnic origin has been fundamental since ancient China. In addition, the historical memories of

³¹ Wei Shou, *Wei shu* [Standard History of the Wei], 8 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 1.

³² Scott Pearce, “Form and Matter: Archaizing Reform in Sixth-Century China,” in *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200-600*, ed. Scott Pearce, Audrey Spiro, and Patricia Ebrey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 150.

³³ However, the later conquest dynasties of the Jin, Yuan, and Qing did not share the ancestral myth of the native Chinese but cherished their own tribal mythologies. To accommodate all ethnicities, they instead pursued the ideal of political unification and employed Confucianism as the official state ideology, one that preaches a trans-ethnic cultural universalism.

interethnic exchanges have contributed to the metaphorical narrative of familial genealogy not just between Han and non-Han, but between Chinese and non-Chinese. Most importantly, this genealogical mentality based on a primordial belief in common descent has shaped the Chinese national self-image up to the present.

IV. The Search for Shared Commonalities in Modern China

After the collapse of Qing China in 1911, the idea of common blood has been the dominant force in the formation of post-imperial Chinese nationhood. The Republican-era (1912-1949) nationalists transformed the ancient myth about the Yellow Emperor into a systematic theory of the antiquity and consanguinity of the Chinese nation.³⁴ The Republican government adopted a calendar based on the Yellow Emperor and the fourth of April was declared a national holiday in honor of his birthday. As critical historian Gu Jiegang recollected, “The official bulletins posted on every street and lane in the days of the Revolution [of 1911] stated that we were living ‘in the year of the Yellow Emperor 4609.’ On what basis was this chronology compiled?”³⁵ Moreover, Chinese nationalists regarded non-Han groups such as the Manchu, Mongol, Hui Muslim, Tibetan, and Miao as racially related “branches” (分枝) off the Han line of evolution. Their emphasis on the “Chinese” origin of non-Han peoples was in a manner remarkably similar to Sima Qian’s fictive ethno-genealogy that united the Han and Xiongnu peoples in common blood and kinship. Thus, even when the Chinese began to read their

³⁴ See Frank Dikötter, “Group Definition and the Idea of ‘Race’ in Modern China (1793-1949),” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13, no. 3 (July 1990): 420-32; James Leibold, “Competing Narratives of Racial Unity in Republican China: From the Yellow Emperor to Peking Man,” *Modern China* 32, no. 2 (April 2006): 181-220.

³⁵ Arthur W. Hummel, trans., *The Autobiography of a Chinese Historian, Being the Preface to a Symposium on Ancient Chinese History (Ku Shih Pien)* (Leyden: Brill, 1931), 81.

national history through the idea of linear history³⁶ and the notion of race³⁷ since the late nineteenth century, their application of such concepts has asserted the inseparable ties among the members of the Chinese nation. As shown in his wartime treatise, Chiang Kai-shek claims that “our various clans actually belong to the same nation, as well as to the same racial stock. ... In short, the differentiation among China’s five peoples is due to regional and religious factors, and not to race or blood. This fact must be thoroughly understood by all our fellow countrymen.”³⁸ This practice of emphasizing interethnic commonalities has, of course, continued in the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

In the PRC, the basic principle for interpreting ethnic relations in the past has been to search for the “scientific” evidence of shared primordial commonality between Han and non-Han nationalities. That has been a central tenet of nationhood and statehood, as reflected in the PRC’s official mantra that China is a “unified multiethnic country,” articulated both by statesmen and scholars. China’s current ethnic discourse is not simply intended to substantiate a putative binary opposition between the advanced Han and the backward minorities. Rather, the orthodox theory of the origin and development of Chinese civilization has been what Fei Xiaotong coins the “pluralistic unity” (多元一體)—there has been but one enduring civilization with regional and ethnic variations.³⁹ From two examples of contemporary historiography, I will discuss how the Chinese strive to essentialize “inalienable” links between Han and minorities by means of the ideas of race and social

³⁶ See Luke S. K. Kwong, “The Rise of the Linear Perspective on History and Time in Late Qing China c. 1860-1911,” *Past & Present* no. 173 (November 2001): 157-90.

³⁷ See Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

³⁸ Chiang Kai-shek, *China’s Destiny and Chinese Economic Theory* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1947), 39-40.

³⁹ Fei Xiaotong, ed., *Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yiti geju* [The Pattern of Diversity in Unity of the Chinese Nation], Revised (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 1999).

evolutionism.

1. Tibetan as the Racial Brothers of Han Chinese

It has been well-known to foreigners that the Chinese government has always wanted to legitimize its possession of Tibet proper. Outside China, however, what has been less understood is China's justification—treating the Tibet peoples as racially defined “brothers” of the Han peoples without regard to the will of the Tibetans. For instance, the authors of *The Historical Status of China's Tibet* counter the theory of Tibetan independence found in much Western scholarship by insisting, “This 1000-year-long written history between the Tibetans and various other nationalities in the big Chinese family is an inalterable fact.”⁴⁰ As for defending China's sovereign claim to Tibet, most of the state-sponsored works on Tibetan history have been dedicated to the argument that Tibet is and historically has been an inalienable part of China. This idea of interethnic commonalities is modeled on at least two aspects of the indivisible Sino-Tibetan connection—one is historical-cultural and the other is racial.

On the one hand, the PRC's official sources unanimously underscore the long-lasting cultural and economic exchanges between Han and Tibetans, especially since Princess Wencheng of the Tang (文成公主) was married off to the Tibetan ruler (*btsan-po*) in 641. Following the government's propaganda line, almost all scholars in the PRC highly esteem the history of marriage alliances as a catalyst for reciprocal interactions between the Han and Tibetan peoples, one that ultimately consolidates China's political integrity.⁴¹ At present, therefore, the epic of

⁴⁰ Wang Jiawei and Nyima Gyaincain, *The Historical Status of China's Tibet* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 1997), 4.

⁴¹ Ma Dazheng, “Zhongguo jiangyu de xingcheng yu fazhan [On the Formation and Development of China's Territory],” *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu* 14 (2004): 1-17.

Princess Wencheng is taught in nearly every school in China and serves as a critical instrument for asserting Beijing's undeniable control over Tibetan regions. Hence, the memories of Chinese princesses who became mothers of the Tibetans serve the PRC's national interest (*raison d'état*). As common in cases of primordial nationalism, these imaginary narratives simply transcend time and space. Likewise, on the political status of Tibet, the Chinese state highlights a historical continuity of Chinese "rule" since the Mongol Yuan dynasty that invaded Tibet in the 1240s, despite the fact that even Mao Zedong acknowledged that for hundreds of years "there was no unity between the Han people and the Tibetan people."⁴² Yet still, it deliberately discounts the reality that Tibet's political relations with Ming were sparse and merely maintained through a nominal recognition of Tibetan leaders and a tea-horse trade, albeit the Chinese label of "tribute."

On the other hand, the Chinese government makes use of the modern science of race to corroborate blood ties across its ethnic groups. It asserts genetic similarities between Han and Tibetans and differences between Tibetans and Indians.⁴³ The eminent ethno-sociologist Ma Changshou (馬長壽, 1907-1971), for instance, argues for Han-Tibetan racial similarity on the grounds that both belong to the Mongoloid race and the same Sino-Tibetan language family.⁴⁴ He then tries to refute two major claims that contradict his argument. First, based on some anthropometrical researches suggesting physical similarities between Han and Tibetans, he criticizes the theory that treats the Tibetan race as an inherently separate group from the Chinese nation as an ideological

⁴² Mao Zedong, "Speech on the Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet (May 24, 1951)," in *The Writings of Mao Zedong: 1949-1976*, vol. 1, September 1949-December 1955, ed. Michael Y. M. Kau and John Leung (Armonk, NY; London: M.E. Sharpe, 1986), 201.

⁴³ Barry Sautman, "Peking Man and the Politics of Paleoanthropological Nationalism in China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 1 (February 2001): 107.

⁴⁴ Ma Changshou, *Ma Changshou minzuxue lunji* [The Collected Ethnological Works of Ma Changshou], ed. Zhou Weizhou (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2003).

weapon of Western imperialism. Second, despite admitting to a long history of cultural interaction between Tibetans and Indians, he harshly denounces the idea of the Indian origin of Tibetan peoples as falling short of any “objective” validity: “We are against a subjective idealist who constructs a deductive reasoning of racial origin on the basis of religious origin.”⁴⁵ His idea apparently resonates with the PRC’s official narrative: both Tibetans and Han peoples share inseparable commonalities in terms of racial and linguistic grounds and maintain hospitable relations since the age of Princess Wencheng. As such, China’s appropriation of modern racial theories is not so much to delineate a dichotomy of “superior” Han and “inferior” non-Han as to construct blood-linked brotherhood to accomplish its political goal of maintaining territorial integrity.

2. Minority as the Living Past of Chinese Civilization

In line with the theory of race, the linear evolutionary perspective on ethnic history has been another important framework accounting for the conceptual development of the modern Chinese nation. The PRC’s official vision of historical progress, in particular, has been based on Marxist social developmental theory, initially proposed by the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan and later developed by Friedrich Engels in his work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Insofar as the goal of research has been given to Chinese archaeologists and ethnologists by the state, it has been precisely to prove the correctness of the Morgan-Engels unilineal evolutionary theory in terms of the Chinese situation.⁴⁶ So Western scholars, critical of ethnic

⁴⁵ Ibid., 348.

⁴⁶ See Charles F. McKhann, “The Naxi and the Nationalities Question,” in *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Stevan Harrell (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), 39-62. According to the Marxist-Leninist theory of ethno-social development practiced in the PRC during the 1950s, all human societies should go through the progressive sequence of primitive band, matrilineal clan, patrilineal clan, slave society, feudal society, capitalist society,

studies in the PRC, criticize Chinese ethnologists for totalizing the diverse aspects of minorities' cultures within the linear stage theory, rather than appreciating their history, society, and politics in their own rights. For example, Stevan Harrell remarks that, under the guidance of the dominant Morgan-Engels historical paradigm, Chinese scholars have envisioned "the Han as the leading nationality and big brother to the backward minorities."⁴⁷ What he fails to observe, however, is that even during the apogee of canonical Marxist-Leninist historiography, the emphasis of their discourse was not so much to prove a superiority of the hegemonic Han as to confirm a fundamental premise of interpreting China's past—the commonality between the Han and the minorities.

Chinese ethnologists and historians, including both Han and minorities, have considered some non-Han nationalities as having preserved the primordial and ancient nature of Sinitic culture. They tend to conceive these groups, particularly the Yi (彝族) and the Naxi (纳西族) minorities in the southwest borderland, as holding traces of many of Morgan's major stages and are probably the examples *par excellence* of the application of Morganian theory.⁴⁸ In this respect, these groups have been conceived as the "living past"—a crucial key to solving the question of the origins of Chinese civilization. The writing system of Naxi nationality, for instance, supposedly of greater antiquity than that of the ancient Egyptians, is believed to enshrine the traits of archaic Sinitic language, which subsequently leads to the bold nationalist assertion that

socialist society, and, ultimately, communist society. This paradigm still influences Chinese archaeology today. Tong Enzheng, "Thirty Years of Chinese Archaeology (1949-1979)," in *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology*, ed. Philip L. Kohl and Clare P. Fawcett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 182.

⁴⁷ Stevan Harrell, ed., *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 4.

⁴⁸ Stevan Harrell, "The History of the History of the Yi," in *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Stevan Harrell (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), 63-91; Harrell, ed., *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China*; McKhann, "The Naxi and the Nationalities Question," 39-62.

Han Chinese is the oldest language in the world.⁴⁹ Even though the Morgan-Engels paradigm is not as popular as it used to be, the revisionist perspective on the Yi ethnohistory still continues to hold this “living past” hypothesis. This new scholarship since the 1980s aggressively places the ancestors of the Yi at the forefront of the development of early Chinese civilization and portrays them as having been pushed to the periphery only in the last thousand years.

Several native Yi ethnologists, led by Liu Yaohan (劉堯漢, 1922-2012), who set up the “Chinese Yi Culture School” (中華彝族文化學派), have emphasized the inalienable relationships between proto-Yi/Tibetans and proto-Han people in the earliest stage of Chinese civilization, and argued that the former’s contribution to the latter was very significant. One of the similarities between ancestors of the Yi and the Han is that they all respected black color and thought of black as a precious thing.⁵⁰ Liu Yaohan and his Yi colleagues also suggest that although the worship of black ceased to exist among Han people, contemporary Yi people still respect black (“Ni” in Yi language) as spiritual energy and thus Ni becomes the highest object of worship. In this way, PRC scholars support the hypothesis that the Yi nationality today preserves China’s glorious past, and gives useful clues for deciphering the origins of the Yellow River civilization, although they admit that the ancient connection between proto-Yi and proto-Han people is still hard to prove.

Not only did he argue that the elementary cultural traits of the Yi are the prototype of Chinese civilization, Liu Yaohan even proclaims that Taoism indeed originated from the Yi culture.⁵¹ He also asserts that the

⁴⁹ Sautman, “Peking Man and the Politics of Paleoanthropological Nationalism in China,” 106.

⁵⁰ Liu Yaohan. *Yizu shehui lishi diaocha yanjiu wenji* [A Collection of Essays of Research and Investigation of Yi Society and History] (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1980), 212-17; Liu Yaohan, *Zhongguo wenming yuantou xintan: Daojia yu Yizu hu yuzhouguan* [A New Approach to the Origins of Chinese Civilization: Taoism and the Tiger World View of the Yi Peoples] (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin chubanshe, 1985), 25-34.

⁵¹ See Liu, *Zhongguo wenming yuantou xintan*.

ancestors of the Yi are believed to have made at least three great contributions not only to Chinese civilization but to the world: the ten-month solar calendar, the binary mathematical system, and the knowledge of crossbreeding the horse with the donkey to give birth to the mule.⁵² Interestingly, his radical Yi-centric “nationalism” is hardly challenged by Han scholars in public. Insofar as he makes a contribution to the formation of the Chinese nation rather than to its deconstruction, there is no need to repudiate his arguments. The current discourse on the Yi ethnohistory evidently reveals what seems to be politically correct in the PRC.⁵³ By the same logic, the PRC’s minority policy generally tends to be lenient as in this interesting analogy from Lucien Pye:

[T]he Chinese policy, if transferred to America, would be similar to the United States government’s sponsoring the ‘Black Power movement,’ monopolizing the teaching of ‘Afro-American studies,’ and directing those who are thus trained to be more ‘knowledgeable’ about a somewhat synthetic ‘black culture’ to make all their ‘cultural performances’ climax in uninhibited praise of the President.⁵⁴

To sum up, treating some non-Han peoples as the “living past” of earlier phases of Chinese civilization is to forge a sense of shared commonality between the majority and the minority. Even the ultra-nationalistic historiography of minority scholars who may challenge the leading role of Han majority is tolerated as long as it does not breach the principle of a unified multiethnic state modeled on the idea of a common genealogy

⁵² Jiao Pan, “Theories of Ethnic Identity and the Making of Yi Identity in China,” in *Exploring Nationalisms of China: Themes and Conflicts*, ed. C. X. George Wei and Xiaoyuan Liu (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 200.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 200-01.

⁵⁴ Lucien W. Pye, “China: Ethnic Minorities and National Security,” in *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, ed. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 508.

from the Yellow Emperor, or even more remotely from Peking Man, as a common ancestry of the Chinese nation.⁵⁵ By contrast, any opposition to this line of official narrative would be strictly forbidden. When the Tibetans mobilized into armed revolt in March 1959, the response from the PRC government was to defend the Chinese nation as a great family: “Tibet is an inalienable part of China. It belongs to the big family of the Chinese people, not to the handful of reactionaries, much less to the imperialists and foreign interventionists.”⁵⁶ This familial metaphor embodies a striking continuity in conjunction with a universalistic ideal of Chinese empire—namely, “All-under-Heaven is one family” (天下一家).

V. The Familial Metaphor in China: Yesterday and Today

I have suggested that the primordial kinship discourse is not simply a modern invention but rather a cultural repertoire that has persisted since early China. Much scholarship on Chinese nationalism, however, has largely conceived this primordial aspect of the Chinese nationhood as an “instrumentalist manipulation” or “invention of primordial essence”⁵⁷ without paying due attention to its historical background. As discussed, one of the typical characteristics of Chinese historiography has been the

⁵⁵ See Leibold, “Competing Narratives of Racial Unity in Republican China”; Sautman, “Peking Man and the Politics of Paleoanthropological Nationalism in China”; Sigrid Schmalzer, *The People’s Peking Man: Popular Science and Human Identity in Twentieth-Century China* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ Resolution of the Question of Tibet, adopted on April 28, 1959, by the First Session of the Second National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China. As rendered by George N. Patterson, “China and Tibet: Background to the Revolt,” *China Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (March 1960): 102.

⁵⁷ Uradyn E. Bulag, “The Chinese Cult of Chinggis Khan: Genealogical Nationalism and Problems of National and Cultural Integrity” (presented at the Statement for Discussion, Victoria, Canada, October 3, 2003).

appeal to the conception of common ancestry, which holds that both Sinitic and non-Sinitic peoples originated from the same ancestors.⁵⁸ Similarly, Patricia Ebrey points out that the ethnic dimension of Chinese identity “was rooted in the habit of thinking of the largest we-group in terms of patrilineal kinship, that is, imagining the Hua, Xia, or Han, metaphorically at least, as a giant patrilineal descent group made up of intermarrying surname groups.”⁵⁹ She is right, but this emphasis on kinship relations has not been exclusively beneficial to the development of in-group solidarity among Han Chinese. My point is that the Chinese have imagined some primordial commonality between the Han and non-Han peoples on the basis of the myth of common descent and the historical memory of interethnic exchanges. Furthermore, the discourse of such ‘imagined commonalities’ as constituent of the genealogically informed Chinese nation reverberates with the state project of the PRC. From the 1980s, in particular, this has been an important part of the state’s efforts to construct a new nationalism that would serve as an ideological bond to traverse and transcend complex class, regional, and ethnic lines in order to fill the vacuum left by the decline of Maoist ideology.⁶⁰ At the same time, PRC policy has re-emphasized greater autonomy for non-Han groups, which partly accounts for the current trend of ethnic revival among them, such as Manchus, Mongols, Yao, Yi, and Zhuang.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Hinsch, “Myth and the Construction of Foreign Ethnic Identity in Early and Medieval China,” 102-03.

⁵⁹ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Women and the Family in Chinese History* (London: Routledge, 2003), 166.

⁶⁰ See Frank N. Pieke, “The Genealogical Mentality in Modern China,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 1 (February 2003): 101-28; Hui Wang, “The ‘Tibet Issue’ Between East and West: Orientalism, Ethnic Regional Autonomy, and the Politics of Dignity,” *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 42 (2010): 7-30.

⁶¹ For the discussion of the Manchus, see Lian Bai, “Identity Reproducers Beyond the Grassroots: The Middle Class in the Manchu Revival Since the 1980s,” *Asian Ethnicity* 6, no. 3 (October 2005): 183-201. For Mongols, see Almaz Khan, “Chinggis Khan: From Imperial Ancestor to

But China's assertion of shared commonalities is not always consensual, for it often faces a severe resistance from outside the PRC on the ground that such a genealogical idea renders the position of China's non-Han groups highly vulnerable.⁶² The Dalai Lama, for instance, denounces the PRC's claim of historically constituted common blood relations and argues that "archaeological findings have revealed that the Tibetans and Chinese have been two distinct people since the dawn of human civilization."⁶³ Similarly, the recent cult of Chinggis Khan as the number one "Chinese" national hero, the unifier of China and the only "Chinese" who ever defeated Europeans, would offend many Mongols in Outer Mongolia and elsewhere.⁶⁴ After the Cultural Revolution, the cult of Chinggis Khan has been intensified as implied by an official evaluation; in 1980, he was praised in the *People's Daily* (人民日报) as a "leader of Chinese and foreign peoples, an outstanding military strategist and statesman" without identifying even his Mongol ethnicity.⁶⁵ The Beijing government has also espoused the official sponsorship of the rituals of Chinggis Khan as a proof of concern and love for the Mongol nationality. The annual honoring ceremonies have been held in the Chinggis Khan Mausoleum located in Ordos of Inner Mongolia, which was built in the 1950s and rebuilt after the destruction of the Cultural Revolution.⁶⁶ Such addition of Chinggis Khan to the Chinese national

Ethnic Hero," in *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Stevan Harrell (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), 248-77. For Yao, see Ralph A. Litzinger, "Memory Work: Reconstituting the Ethnic in Post-Mao China," *Cultural Anthropology* 13, no. 2 (May 1, 1998): 224-55. For Zhuang, see Katherine P. Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang: Ethnic Politics in China* (Boulder, CO: Rienner, 2000), 125-48.

⁶² Pieke, "The Genealogical Mentality in Modern China," 121.

⁶³ Sautman, "Peking Man and the Politics of Paleoanthropological Nationalism in China," 107.

⁶⁴ Uradyn E. Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); Bulag, "The Chinese Cult of Chinggis Khan."

⁶⁵ Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 466-67.

⁶⁶ See Khan, "Chinggis Khan: From Imperial Ancestor to Ethnic Hero."

pantheon is an intricate process, “reflecting the complex relationship between Mongols as an ethnic minority that wishes its culture and heroes to be properly represented by the state and the state’s desire to integrate minorities, including Mongols, into a national state.”⁶⁷

Taking such ethnic politics of the PRC into account, foreign scholars and human rights activists together with overseas non-Han nationalists have been critical of the official theory of the Chinese nation as an ideological weapon to suppress the rights of self-determination for non-Han groups, which would inevitably eliminate their cultural independence—leading to “cultural genocide” in Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang [Eastern Turkestan]. Among them, for instance, the overseas Mongol anthropologist bitterly rejects the PRC’s formulation of the Chinese nation, noting that “an inclusive concept presumes the ‘Han’ as its core and is deeply inflected by racism.”⁶⁸ He is certainly correct to argue that this is grounded in the all-embracing whole that does not demarcate an immutable ethno-racial line. However, his accusation of Han “racism” is problematic in light of Chinese realities. The representation of Chinggis Khan as winning the “racial” glory for the Chinese people is absurd yet still understandable within the context of the race-oriented genealogical nationalism in China today. In this sense, the nationalist question stems from its all-encompassing definition, which in turn does not tolerate any state-seeking nationalism from the minorities. It is a case of the violence of inclusion.

The conceptualization of ethnicity in China, because of its inclusionary nature, can be distinctive from that among colonial powers and the post-imperial and post-colonial national states. It does not necessarily impose a fixed objectification of “Self” and “Other,” nor does it essentialize non-Han minorities as inferior beings. Also, it is not based

⁶⁷ Bulag, *The Mongols at China’s Edge*, 243.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

on the representation of ethnic minorities as “impure” and “foreign” vis-à-vis the national majority. From pre-imperial times to the present day, there is a historical continuity and persistence in the making of a primordial dimension of nationhood. In the past, the Son of Heaven embodied the father of the imagined family. In the present, although the Han is customarily considered as the core ethnicity, the leader of the giant family of the Chinese nation is not so much the ethnic Han as the Communist leaders. In this respect, the ethnic logic of nation-building, which was crucial to the empire-to-nation transformation in post-Ottoman, post-Habsburg and post-USSR societies, has not been fully implemented in post-Qing China.

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