ABSTRACT: This essay agrees with the contention that China changed fundamentally as a concept and real geopolitical entity from 1900 to the 1950's, rendering many loud assertions of five thousand-year continuous civilization problematic if not untrue. The notion of a modern Chinese nation is the key qualification which challenges such monolithic statements, especially with regard to the interrelated issues of who is included and excluded, the territorial, possibly imperialist consequences for membership in the modern world system of nation-states.

Ethnic or Civic Nation? Assimilative or Integrative Empire?

China's territory and people existed in an extraordinary period of fluctuation in the early to mid-20th century, and one of the legacies of the tumult is an ambiguity about just what kind of political entity China is. While in many ways obviously ideographic, the often polemic categorical purgatory in which China is contested will never satisfy social scientists. This essay's aim is to sort through the scholarly literature, little of which dares to stake out a definitive position, to highlight points from the very late Qing to the early PRC at which China more closely resembled either a nation-state or an empire.[1] Before and after this time frame was by no means uneventful or stable, but the overall concept of China did not fundamentally change. The inevitably inconclusive conclusion will be that the distinction is awkwardly forced by social scientists and politicians who must use China as a unit of analysis, the expectation that all units should fit in a single category. No political entity as large as China can be categorized or experienced by everyone in the same way, and unless the intention is provocation, scholarly texts should continue to dive as deeply as possible while leaving the main questions of this essay to float on the tumultuous surface.

The imperial question will loom implicitly over the course of the essay, as its answers are inseparable from Chinese conceptions of its "periphery", including people and territories. By focusing in these periods on *who* is in the nation of China and *what* territory is Chinese—regardless of the often limited control of the Chinese regime(s)—the categorical nature of China will be both problematized and clarified. Different forms of nationalism are key to this

[1] Unfortunately, the heart of the Republican Era, the Nanjing Decade, will be passed over, in a manner deservingly criticized as treating periodization as "Qing, chaos (too difficult to study), PRC". This is at once for limitations of length, a less-than-firm grasp of events on the author's part, and most defensibly, that the Han themselves (treated as a unified constant for the other decades of this study) were critically divided in these interim years by foreign imperialism, competing regimes and ideologies. In short, the question of national minorities in the periphery was necessarily subordinated to the struggle for the Han "core" in "China Proper". This essay will not be much concerned with Communism, which may seem especially odd when treating the early PRC. The World Wars are also notably absent from the analysis. Not sure if any of these is defensible in the least, but their exclusion is necessary to streamline an already cluttered analysis.

analysis, and the divergent conceptions of the Chinese nation in the first half of the 20th Century offer a unique opportunity to illustrate theoretical affinities. Sampling the historical literature for the thoughts of intellectual elites and actual leaders in government, it will be argued that the Chinese nation followed a very general—and non-unanimous—conceptual evolution from racist, to ethnic, to civic.

While these fundamental changes developed, several constants shaped the proceedings. First, the changes occurred amidst foreign imperialist threats which often became foregrounded in the form of territorial concessions and colonization.[2] Second, keeping the expanded Qing territory was always the preference of the nascent, early, and realized post-imperial Chinese state.[3] Third, the Han would be first and foremost in whatever Chinese nation-state which emerged. Fourth, although at various times the option of secession was entertained and even offered strategically, no *minzu* had national self-determination rights to its own nation-state.[4] And finally, with notable exceptions of Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia, Chinese nation-building was primarily concerned with top-down geographic penetration by the regime rather than (re-)conquest.[5]

After a brief discussion of key terms, national and imperial questions will be posed with regard to prominent elites' views, as elucidated by equally prominent historians, for each of three destructive and formative decades: the last of the Qing, the first of the Republican era, and the first of CCP rule. Attention will also be paid to Chinese national figures' and scholars' implicit views toward nationalist theory and the "constants" just mentioned for each period. If the reader is by now understandably concerned about the level of simplification necessary to make broad claims about the Chinese nation over entire decades, a mild reassurance can be offered in exchange for the suspension of disbelief.

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[2] If this is not discussed further elsewhere, such threats have been cited by Esherick (pg. 248, in terms of the reactive "New Policy" reforms), Leibold (pg. 4-5, in terms of the *jimi* "loose reign" of the Qing frontier), and others as the impetus behind the simultaneous realization that the Qing needed to govern its periphery more directly, lest it be lost to other empires, and the rise of Han nationalism opposed to the weak response of the Manchus in defending China. Revolutionary Han nationalists of the era may not have accepted the Manchu or other minorities as Chinese people, but their land was, if not indisputably Chinese, invaluable to the Chinese nation.

[3] See, however, Esherick's closing consideration of whether to secure "China Proper" or aspire to "Greater China" (pg. 243-4), Bulag's continuation of the "Mongolia Problem" in the same volume, as well as Liu's consideration of the "Part of China" question, pg. 10-11.

[4] We will highlight cases in which elites flirted with the idea of giving minorities a choice to join or leave the Chinese nation, but I find no reason to disagree with Esherick and Leibold's conclusions that the imperatives to keep as much of their vast territory as possible, to deny other empires' ambitions of annexation, overrode any fleeting commitment to self-determination or disgust at having to include obviously non-Chinese barbarians in the glorious new nation.

[5] By this I mean that every regime's primary challenge was to inform rural and non-"core" areas and peoples first of the state's existence and second of their obligations to it. In terms of political culture outlined by Almond & Verba's *A Civic Culture*, all modern states are tasked with turning "parochial" residents of state territory with no orientation toward its political system into loyal "subjects" or even active, citizen "participants". Their typology leaves room for apathetic and "alienated" orientations, but no nation can be built of people without any knowledge of the state's existence.

Complexity will be respected in restraint from making firm conclusions, as counterexamples could easily be offered for any point this essay will make.

Definitions. Without becoming inextricably enmeshed in a conceptual web, this section aims to lay out key terms very briefly, to explain how they are used here and generally within the literature. If this essay is to make outlandish claims related to China, they should at least be based on relatively well-accepted terms. Analysis of scholarly or especially polemic nationalist texts also allows for some definitions to remain less than explicit: based on evidence presented, there are inevitably moments when an "I know an empire when I see it" effect is present.

A state is taken to be Weber's bounded territory with a population and a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. This usually non-controversial definition is challenged here by the question of whether state and empire are mutually exclusive, whether force used to resist imperialism in the name of one's assertively ascribed nation is legitimate or illegitimate.[6] Empires and nations are both more heterogeneous, with no two the same, making them "devilishly difficult" to define generally. Esherick et. all offer conceptualizations on which to build, primarily by citing Kahler's "hub and spoke" model and noting the requirement of both a "core" territory and nation which rules over subordinated lands and peoples indigenous to a "periphery".[7]

Rather than a single definition, this essay proposes that a series of questions be asked to measure the imperialism of a particular polity. To impose soft categories on each of the three decades examined here, the reader is asked to consistently pose the following. First is the fundamental question of leadership, "Is there an emperor?"[8] Second, is the polity a self-declared empire? Third, are its territories non-contiguous?[9] Fourth, is its regime ruling over

[6] This is essential to note in the Chinese case in that Han nationalists saw the Manchu as colonizers, wanted to resist Western and Japanese incursions into China, and deny that the ongoing attempts to keep peripheral regions and peoples in China is at all imperialist. Legitimacy is thus in the eyes of both the beholder and the holder of power.

[7] Esherick et. all, pg. 5-8. Fiskesjo's article puts China's "minority nationalities" firmly in this category as "actors in a foundational story enacted to validate the current nation-building and modernization paradigm".

[8] It is remarkable how many contemporary conversations with Chinese people with whom I've hazarded the subject end here. Even among those who consider Mao something of an emperor himself, since there were no emperors after Puyi abdicated (many whom I've asked don't find Yuan Shikai worth mentioning), China after the Qing has never been imperialist. Nonconsideration of the several Western empires which didn't create their own emperors may be revealing of a different, perhaps specifically Sinocentric definition of empire. Curiously, I've not fielded many Chinese accusations of U.S. imperialism, unless phrased in explicitly Marxist terms.

[9] I've never understood this requirement, as the expectation that there be a body of water between the core state and the subaltern nation would exclude many obviously imperialist land empires. Instead, the contiguity question can be answered by assessing the congruity and simultaneous existence of the historical/traditional "core" lands of "STATE proper" and "greater EMPIRE" lands (which may well be contiguous, uninterrupted by water or other topographic markers). Such seems the distinction preferred by Esherick et all.

people who are not in the ruling nation? And fifth, would subaltern groups secede if not for use of the legitimate coercive apparatus?[10]

The variegated concepts of nations and nationalism will be unpacked with specific historical examples, but one further term, ethnic group, must be distinguished for its lack of political rights and importance of Chinese translation.[11] Virtually all authors note that the Chinese term *minzu* has been anything but static over the decades examined here, that it can be translated variously as race, nation, nationality, and ethnicity. In what follows, Han nationalism will be related theoretically to race and ethnicity among China's *minzu*, concluding that the PRC has adopted a civic nationalism based more on the facts of residence and even modern citizenship, making all the *minzu* living in Chinese territory automatically part of the national family, the *guomin*.

The Last Decade of the Qing. One of the few non-controversial claims about Chinese imperial history is that the Qing was an empire. Did it cease to be one before it fell? A sort of double-speak emerges in the literature, whereby imperialist actions are noted, yet the national project and statehood are undiminished. Yang, for example, refers to the successful "long-term imperial colonization of Yunnan"[12] spanning from the second century BCE to the contemporary PRC. The magic words are there as adjectives and verbs, but the concept of a Chinese empire fades precipitously after the end of the Qing.

Under the openly imperial Qing, China was considered not only a civilization, but civilization itself. In Prasenjit Duara's inimitable turning of phrases, a fundamental shift in perception occurred from "the world of China to China of the world". The creation of a modern Chinese nation, of national consciousness itself, were new concepts resting on

[10] To these could be added several more, excluded more for space than for being less essential: Are the regime and the nation united in their imperial goals and ideals? Is there a noble mission (i.e. civilizing)? Is the empire great (powerful)? (A weak empire is virtually oxymoronic.) Is it expanding? (Even without capacity, there is often desire and intent.) Is there a clearly divided "core" and "periphery" or "hub and spokes"? Finally, and one which certainly impinges on the status of the late Qing, has its own "core" territory been lost to other empires? Presumably an empire must fall before its own land is colonized, but this further illustrates how China is exceptional.

[11] What might otherwise be dismissed as pedantry, Millward (pg. 348) is especially concerned with English translations of *minzu* in official CCP documents since 2005 as "ethnic group", a critical downgrade of Uyghur, Tibetan, and Mongolian nations which are thereby denied rights of national self-determination. Put more succinctly, ethnic groups can never secede. They have neither the right nor the articulated collective interest to do so.

[12] Yang, pg. 242. In comparison to the more obstreperous minority nations, Yunnan nationalities and the rest of the southwest have particularly strong implications for nationalist theory—problematic ethnic groups with proto-national potential which nonetheless do not express nationalist beliefs either because they don't consider themselves to be "of the nation" or they don't know or even deny that the group exists. Regularly referred to in the field as "dogs that didn't bark", this complements the animalistic radicals used in their pre-PRC Chinese characters to an uncomfortably close degree.

the acknowledgement that the world order had become one of competing nations.[13] An inherently great and largely impervious empire which saw itself as the cultural model for the world had much less need for a nation to assert its interests; the less civilized and savage were simply expected to be drawn to and emulate China's virtuous glow. Failing that, military campaigns to civilize barbarians, or rather subdue them and annex their territory, were all but irresistible under the Great Qing. Empires need a national core to conduct and maintain conquest; "original nations" within civilizations, which may be indistinguishable from the over-arching cultural entity, are far more reticent and have a less clearly defined role. This essay cannot pretend or even begin to resolve tensions between the Qing's dual status as a Manchu empire and the early modern embodiment of Chinese civilization. It seeks instead to trace the changing nature and perceptions of the highly fluid and sometimes elusive Chinese nation, the emergent imperial denial.[14]

What distinguishes the years leading up to 1911 from the latter two examined here is the extent to which Chinese nationalism, led as always by the Han, is directed against the rulers of China for being irredeemably non-Chinese. Duara notes that Confucian modernizers had traditionally included non-Han peoples "as long as they had accepted Chinese cultural principles". The 1911 revolutionaries challenged this view fundamentally, as "nationhood" for them was "based on inherited 'racialist' (or ethnocentric) not cultural traits".[15] Articulated in explicitly racist, anti-Manchu terms, the nationalism of revolutionaries such as Zhang Binglin and Zou Rong can best be described as primordialist.[16]

Most illustrative of an eternally-existing Chinese nation which excluded the Manchus on a racial basis is an excerpt from Zou Rong's inflammatory rallying cry, *The Revolutionary Army*:

What our compatriots today call court, government and emperor, we used to call Yi, Man, Rong, and Di [barbarians of the east, south, west, and north] as well as Xiongnu and Dada. Their tribes lived beyond Shanhaiguan and fundamentally are of a

[13] Benjamin Schwartz and Lydia Liu's books from the first week of class clearly show that most of these concepts and views were imported from outside of China, yet taken by most nationalists as reality rather than foreign notions which didn't apply to an ideographic Middle Kingdom. The primary and almost universal consequence of internalizing these was a shared interest that the weak Chinese nation rise again to strength more befitting its undiminished civilization's cultural stature. Conservative Confucians who opposed nationalism on grounds that China should remain a cultural pillar of virtue rather than lowering itself to the foreign level of arms races and conquest are unfortunately missing from this section.

[14] By "elusive" I especially mean that what all Chinese leaders have claimed as their nation has to varying extents eluded their grasp. A strong nation might be able to deny foreign imperialists access to and re-secure its own imperial lands, but only a global hegemon can successfully deny its own imperialism. Aforementioned tensions are said to arise from recent scholarship emphasizing the Manchu-ness of the Qing.

[15] Duara (2009), pg. 100.

[16] As described by Smith, primordialists believe that assimilation of one group into another is only possible, if at all, by intermarriage, because the differences are racial. More likely, the irreconcilable differences require the expulsion of the "other" by ethnic cleansing or even their annihilation by genocide. Elites are required only to articulate pre-existing differences, playing on identities which are already accepted, as people from certain areas will naturally form groups. Two sub-forms include the "social-biological" primordialism of Van Den Berghe, based on "evolutionary advantage", and a somewhat softer cultural version of Clifford Geertz, based on traits, practices, and customs. Note that cultural primordialism differs from perennialism, to be discussed next and which also emphasizes cultural practices, because certain customs are deemed so essential to national identity that to change them (i.e. adopt other, perhaps modern or Chinese practices) would be to relinquish one's status in the original nation. Nations are thereby ancient and all but static.

different race from our illustrious descendants of the Yellow Emperor. Their land is barren; their people, furry; their minds, bestial; their customs, savage.[17]

The Chinese nation, in short, was literally *conceived*, not in the minds of nationalists but in very real genetic lineages born of the primogenitor. Zou's conceptualization of the "yellow people" is also interesting for asserting that others in East and Southeast Asia were the same race as the Chinese, but that Mongols, Turks, and Manchus were of separate "Siberian" stock. Including Tibetans but not Manchus as racially Chinese would confound most Han today, but such arbitrary distinctions are reflective of the era's prevailing political and pseudoscientific imperatives. Such views undoubtedly motivated movements to expel ruling invaders out of the country and reestablish a Chinese regime of, by, and for the Han.

As editor of an influential revolutionary newspaper, *Minbao*, in which the parameters of the future republic were outlined, Zhang Binglin's medium apparently required him to be slightly more stately and equivocating than Zou.[18] Esherick summarizes Zhang's colloquially related thoughts by noting first that *Zhongguo* and *Zhonghua* "are really 'names of an ethnic group (*wenhua zhi zu*)'." While barbarians can absorb the culture and be assimilated, Zhang is a practical revolutionary, noting that because "Mongolia, Muslim areas, and Tibet are not on the map [of the Han Dynasty, delineating the borders of Zhang's *Zhongguo*]", they are a second-order priority and should even be given the option to "stay or leave as they choose". Neither the territories nor people are Chinese, and it seems these are not a Chinese nationalist's utmost concerns. Such views might be highly unorthodox, not to mention staking stronger claims to Korea and Vietnam for their historical adoption of *Zhongguo zi* and Confucianism, were they not followed by the stern warning that Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Tibet must never fall under foreign imperialist control.[19] Zhang's criteria for inclusion and exclusion befit a politician, then, as they are flexible to fit the political and material expediencies of the moment. As the next section will show, revolutionaries in power can never afford such ambivalent rhetoric, and firm assimilationist statements were needed to compensate for the Republic's at best fumbling grip on the Qing frontier.

[17] Cited by Rhoads, pg. 14. His opening chapter includes a "seven-point indictment against the Manchus", of which race was the first and likely most resonant with Han masses who would be the soldiers of the anti-Manchu revolution which overthrew the Qing. I've found this exact quotation in at least two books now and am clearly guilty of "cherry-picking" low-hanging fruit here to make a point which may not be as big or valid as it seems. I suspect that many more extreme racist nationalists existed, but not many more in print due to mass illiteracy.

[18] Rhoads on pg. 15 does, however, find a 1903 call from Zhang for all-inclusive racial revenge, not limited to "only a few individual Manchu commanders". Rather, Zhang states that "when the Han race [*Hanzu*] wants revenge against the Manchus [*Manzhou*], they want revenge against their entire group."

[19] Esherick, pg. 237. As he made these statements at the turn of the century, with a certain Game afoot, Zhang must have realized such imperialist interference was inevitable.

While revolutionary nationalists prevailed over less anti-Manchu reformers such as Liang Qichao and Yan Fu, it would not be accurate to portray views of the Chinese nation as firmly exclusive, uniformly primordial, or against all foreign ideas in principle. Yan Fu in particular saw the need for a strong state to invigorate the nation and turn its members into modern, participatory citizens, not to mention improve literacy and physical health. There is little or no sense in Schwartz's biography of Yan Fu that the Qing were somehow insufficiently Chinese to accomplish these goals; they were simply not strong or proactive enough. With national realization of the evolutionary prime directive, moreover, the existing dynasty had a better chance to lead the needed changes than a new regime whose divisiveness and exclusiveness might render it too weak, leading to chaos instead of progress. A palpable sense of disappointed resignation can be felt in Yan Fu's later years, as racist revolutionaries won the day but ultimately weakened China, just as he'd warned. Yan Fu's prescriptions of Western emulation remain a potent counterfactual for envisioning a less chaotic modernization project, doubly doomed for openly admiring the foreign imperialists and favoring the indefinite extension of the moribund dynasty, seen by many revolutionaries as only somewhat less un-Chinese.

If Yan Fu was unique for prescribing the adoption of Western ideas to revive the Chinese national spirit, Liang Qichao was the consummate nationalist for balancing the need for stability with anti-Manchuism, pointing out that the real danger to China came from more obviously foreign empires than the Qing.[20] He also had much more to say about what to do with domestic non-Chinese *minzu*. Esherick notes his inconsistency in conceptualizing the Chinese nation, and between his treatment and Rhoads', it is evident that the contextual presence of a more salient "other" plays the determinative role in whether the *Zhonghua minzu* were those "conventionally called the Han people" or if the others such as Manchus, Mongolians, and Tibetans were included. "National consciousness," a theme which returns frequently and most consequently in the early PRC, was highly important to Liang, who was ahead of his time for problematizing a top-down dictation of national identity. Like Zhang's furtive consideration of self-determination for non-Chinese minorities, however, Liang had ironed out his self-identification wrinkle by 1922, arguing for a more mainstream concept of a China whose strength lay with its unity in diversity. Each of these diverse peoples "lived within the borders of

[20] Rhoads opens his book with extended quotations from Liang, noting that the Manchu rulers' greatest fault was not being non-Chinese. Liang wavers on this matter but seems to grant them nominal status—at least compared to whites--in the following quotation, noting that the whole of China needs to refocus on real threats and enact meaningful reforms to lessen those that are falsely perceived. On pg. 4, Rhoads quotes a lamentation of Manchu rulers' shortsightedness, and a full following page on the "catastrophic consequences that awaited the Manchus from both the Han and the white race if they did not begin to reform by eliminating Manchu-Han differences" (Rhoads' words). Liang's words: "They look upon the Han, without reason, as an alien race who mean them ill; all the while they are oblivious that the harm that the truly alien race [i.e. the whites] will inflict will be a hundred million times greater."

China…, and…the absorptive power of Han culture throughout history would eventually prove capable of assimilating these people as well."[21]

Finally, we turn from Liang's prescriptions to those actually ruling in China's name. Not even moderates were satisfied with the Qing's stopgap measures in this final decade, as minimal changes were sabotaged by intrigue and death among imperial leaders too blinded by concerns for their own prestige and survival to focus on building or unifying a modern nation. Many of the reforms carried out by Empress Dowager Cixi in the last, perhaps desperate years of the dynasty intended to erase the remaining distinctions and especially restrictions between Manchu and Han. By allowing intermarriage in 1902, ending completely the little-enforced ban on Han entering Manchuria, and abolishing "the Manchus' monopoly on posts in the Eight Banner system",[22] the intention may have been to make the Chinese proto-nation more inclusive of its majority. If successful in that regard, it may also have reassured racist doubters that the Qing was both Chinese and had China's best interests in mind. Nonetheless, as Rhoads concludes, "Considering the virulent anti-Manchu propaganda that the revolutionaries were then putting out, it is remarkable how few in number, how narrow in scope, and how limited in effect they [Cixi's reforms] were."[23]

In short, while the rulers were making mildly inclusive concessions, the revolutionaries who would ultimately carry China into the 1910's had grown radically more exclusive of the Manchu from the nascent nation. Again, such a summary may oversimply, however, as none in the contemporary age wish to have their national heroes portrayed as deluded primordial racists. Opportunistic insincerity for a good cause, by contrast, remains acceptable. So Wai Chor questions the depth and sincerity of revolutionary leaders' racism, claiming that "Anti-Manchuism for them meant solely the overthrow of the Manchu government and not a racial war…," however, widespread mass violence described by Rhoads and the

[21] The first two quotations in this paragraph are Liang's, the last is Esherick's conclusion to his consideration of Liang, on pg. 235-6. I presume from his citations that the earlier emphasis on "national consciousness" and resulting exclusion is from Liang's 1906 "An Examination of the Chinese nation in history" while the assimilative one is from the later but similarly titled "A Study of the Chinese nation in history" of 1922. While in the same volume, their Chinese titles differ in the last word, so I think they're different articles—just unsure if each point corresponds neatly with my periodized argument. One also hopes that the re-use of cited translations by Western scholars throughout this essay doesn't aggregate to a telephone/Chinese-Whispers effect!

[22] Rhoads, pg. 76-7. It is suggested that while these reforms "narrowed the difference" between Manchu and Han, they neither succeeded in placating nationalists nor redeeming Cixi's image as favoring her own at the expense of the Han and the whole of China. Cixi herself is portrayed as unconvinced of any discrimination, a very reluctant reformer, and it is likely that these were too little too late with the Boxer Rebellion and her quashing of the Hundred Days still fresh in collective national memory. After Cixi's death, Rhoads notes, opening a chapter on "Manchu Ascendency", pg. 120, that the regency of Zaifeng oversaw a greater domination of Qing government by Manchus "than at any other time since at least the mid-eighteenth century".

[23] Rhoads, pg. 80.

continuing blood-based ethnic definition of Chineseness held by Sun-Yatsen suggest otherwise.[24] More consequentially, Han-centric mobilization was carried out at the expense of ignoring or alienating the more numerous (than the Manchu) and much less Chinese minorities in the periphery, playing no small role in their declarations of independence.

Before moving on, it bears mentioning that the seeds of "ethnic separatism" were a hybrid of imperial competition and "elite pawns" among Tibetans and Mongolians foreseeing the end of their special arrangements under the Qing. A Han-centric state, they correctly predicted, would not leave their leaders in autonomous power over their traditional nations, as under the *jimi* "loose reign" policy of the Manchu dynasty. Indeed, the policy unraveled precisely in this last decade as other empires, mainly the British and Russians, made their presence known with expeditions and answers to calls for aid to resist advancing Chinese forces. Goldstein's treatment of the "Great 13th" Dalai Lama in this decade shows a peripatetic pontiff who, fearing for his own safety and that of his basically unarmed nation, spent almost no time in Llasa.[25] Similarly, Xiaoyuan Liu describes in detail how Mongol princes and other elites saw their connection solely to the Manchu Qing, and Outer Mongolia was secured from irredentist Chinese retaliation by an agreement with the Russians. It is difficult to separate foreign imperialist threat and actual involvement as causes and effects objectively in these cases, but clearly the Tibetans and Mongolians agreed with the Revolutionaries' racial equivalence of Chinese and Han and saw no place for their nations in a Chinese republic.

The First Decade Post-Qing (Early Republican Era). Given the anti-Manchu invective which coursed through nationalist media in the waning years of the Qing, one could hardly be faulted for expecting the soon-to-form Chinese republic to be a nation of the Han alone, a China for the Chinese, excluding those deemed non-Chinese on principle and even at the expense of material concerns. Yet an exclusively Han "China Proper" was for various reasons inadequate, and "[t]he nearly fifty years of anti-Manchu rhetoric since the Taiping Rebellion" was phased out after a

[24] In support of this claim, Chor cites a *paiman* apologist, Zhang Kaiyuan, and an article in Taiwan by Zhu Hongyuan which also claims that Sun's "hostile racist language" was "completely a political tactic to snit the anti-Manchu sentiments of the time." See pg. 58.

[25] As Goldstein relates from pg. 45-53, Tibetans put up a "hopelessly inadequate effort" to fend off British invaders in 1903-4, and rather than submit to British rule, the Dalai Lama fled to Mongolia (in search of Russian aid) until relations with the Mongolian religious leader "soured". Finding its loose reign no longer tenable, a Chinese army had meanwhile gone about asserting its suzerainty more directly, including a stern warning that the Dalai Lama should return only as far as the Kumbum Monastery in Amdo, present-day Qinghai. Unable to return to Llasa, he was instead invited to Beijing, where he humbly and unsuccessfully pled his own and Tibet's case, only to learn that more Chinese troops were headed to Llasa in late 1909. While in India he apparently decided on the strategy of utilizing India and Britain as "mediators or supporters vis-à-vis China", perceived as the greater threat to Tibet. The 1911 revolution proved a fortuitous occasion to go beyond previous hopes of reestablishing autonomy (in which Tibet controlled religious matters but the emperor had "temporal" power) and declare independence, unmoved by Yuan Shikai's suddenly "dissembling" apology and entreaty to take part in China's republican experiment, pg. 59.

number of isolated but bloody incidents of race violence against former officials and bannermen.[26] The Manchus, so central to Chinese nationalism as the oppressive yet inferior "other" in the previous decade, dwindled in the face of more pressing challenges.

Where reserving a place for non-Han in China, if not the Chinese nation, was seen as somewhat daring and beside the point before 1911, afterwards it became a practical necessity to preserve the aspiring republic's territorial integrity. The polity which began shakily as "a compromise to address the disagreements between moderates and the die-hard anti-Manchu revolutionaries" became untenable for reasons quite other than the republic's status as "one of the first multinational states in the world".[27] Slowly, the idea that non-Han could become Chinese if they adopted Han ways became not only widely accepted but also a state priority by 1921. This would have involved both magnanimity toward Manchus and a return to civilizing missions in barbarian lands, but as noted in sources beyond the scope of this paper, short-lived leadership and competing warlords kept political actors in this formative decade occupied in "China Proper".

How sincere were the beliefs that non-Han *minzu* could become Chinese? Some earlier insights can be drawn from what Rhoads describes as the "Manchufication" of Han subjects under the Qing, described in pg. 59-62. While primordial Chinese nationalists might dismiss the adoption of Manchurian hairstyles, dress, and language as folly or deny that it had any success, perennialists would counter that deep linguistic changes were far less successful than the nearly universal but superficial queue. Yet supposed superficiality was belied in the apparently dramatic symbolism of asserting one's true Chineseness by cutting it off, at risk of severe punishment. Specific changes in custom are less important here than noting the shift toward a more perennialist notion of national origins and their specifically instrumental use for a strong China.[28] How high a priority such a long and difficult project might be were phrased largely in terms of preventing Western empires from annexing them.

[26] The quotation is from Leibold, pg. 37. Rhoads, on pg. 190-2, also describes Xi'an as the first city to experience "large-scale anti-Manchu violence" resulting in thousands of deaths, which spread throughout the country in widely varying levels but mostly brief outbursts. On pg. 229 Rhoads cites some lingering examples of post-revolutionary racism, notably Sun Yatsen's continuing use of the historical slur "caitiff" to describe Manchus and vengeful calls for "wiping out" the Manchu made by the Shanghai Military Government.

[27] Duara (2009), pg. 4. He also notes that the Chinese republic preceded the Soviet Union in this distinction by five years.

[28] Smith's third type of perennialism applies here, noting that pre-national identities such as ethnicity, religion, and culture have existed for a long time and specific nations (such as Jurchens and Khitans) come and go, often absorbed into larger, stronger nations. The main distinctions to be made are with primordialism and modernism, contrasting in the first case for national mutability and the second for origins preceding the industrial revolution (often by centuries). Also, nations cannot be constructed "out of thin air," but elites do have a vital role to lead the masses in the process, made much easier if some foundational elements of pre-existing identities are shared. The concept works much better with ethnic than civic nations, and crucial to the Republican era, it's hard to make a non-ethnic claim to territories not within one's control. To build an ethnic nation, the ethnic argument (of compatibility and shared "cultural raw materials", if not equality or identity) is made first, followed by claims

Sun Yat-sen is probably the most authoritative and consistent Chinese voice in this decade, and as Duara notes, his Chinese nation is ethnic, Han, and most contentiously, "the world's most perfectly formed nation, because the people are bound together by all the five criteria that (for him) form a nation: blood/race, language, custom, religion and livelihood."[29] At the time, to make such a statement about the Han alone would be disingenuous, but evidence suggests that Sun meant to make it true for all the races residing in Qing territory. Fiskesjo notes that Sun wanted China to be, while being less keen or able to form, a "mono-racial state…inspired above all by the example of the dominant modern image and the evolutionist ideology of the unitary nation-states of industrializing Europe," reflected in the 1912 constitution guaranteeing equality of all races, classes, and religions. If the intent was to assimilate all the *minzu* with the stroke of a pen, few better examples of revolutionary naivete and impotence could be cited.[30]

A 2010 article by So Wai Chor suggests that the extreme and unsuccessful Republican objective to unify the nation actually originated from a much-reviled figure, the duplicitous but thoughtful *hanjian,* Wang Jingwei. Wang paid close attention to definitions for the foundation of a new state, with two highly contentious claims that would shape actual policy. Firstly, "*minzu* was a racial concept and *guomin* a political concept." Since the Manchu were not in Ming tax records, never naturalized after conquest or regarded themselves as such, they were never Chinese. Being ruled by a different *minzu*, "it was only logical for Wang to argue that the Qing Dynasty and China were two different countries".[31] From such extremes, a radical about-face might be surprising from anyone but Wang. In what would be highly consequential for the nations which left or never joined the Republic, Wang responded in 1907 to Liang Qichao's "A Nation of Citizens" with the empirically baffling claim that "apart from the Manchus, all the nationalities in China had long been assimilated into the Han people and as such there was no racial distinction between those in China proper and those in the dependent territories."[32] In any case, and on a point of considerable agreement, the Han had not only the capability but also the necessity to assimilate away any differences which *did* actually exist independently of contending rhetoric.

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based on the territory. For a civic nation, the order is reversed. Throughout the Republican era, "Chinese" remains an ethnic term virtually equated with the Han, including the other four "races" in an openly assimilationist national project which held very little appeal to other *minzu* who became embroiled in their most obvious displays of nationalist self-discovery and independence with widely varying degrees of success and endurance.

[29] Duara (2009), pg. 106.

[30] Fiskesjo's treatment of Sun begins on pg. 21 and extends to pg. 25. Various authors note Sun's disapproval of even the Republic's multi-colored flag. Different colors symbolically challenged the "One China" concept which remains highly revered and relevant today in relations between Taiwan and the Mainland.

[31] Chor, pg. 64, 65. On pg. 66 Chor notes that Wang also saw the *jimi* prefecture as non-Chinese barbarians, not within China's sovereignty.

[32] Chor, pg. 66.

The task of national assimilation was an essential component of Sun's *minzuzhuyi*, and other nationalists of the time joined Sun in open admiration of America's "melting pot" model. The distinction between the state leading immigrants to merge as one and state-supported migration and military campaigns to merge indigenous peoples with the dominant nation (aka integrative or assimilationist imperialism) was apparently as lost on Han nationalists then as now.[33] Even as "China Proper" idled or raged disconnectedly for lack of stable, centralized power, "non-recognition or even the active erasure of any ethnic differences for the sake of the unitary nation-state…became the mainstay of the Nationalists' agenda."[34] As Chor points out, Sun himself was actually late to the assimilationist camp, preceded by Wang Jingwei. Sun did, however, have the authority to make active absorption of the minorities into Han culture a state priority, announced in a 1921 speech on the "Three People's Principles".[35] No matter how powerful the newly formed state, and it was quickly shown to be all but impotent, the formation of a single nation on the diverse imperial territory could not have been achieved so soon after so much effort to distinguish the Han on a primordial, racial basis.

That three of the four minorities initially recognized by the Republic had themselves maintained long-lasting empires suggests that each maintained a proud nation distinct from the Han. All four proved to be more interested in forming "independent" nation-states of their own than joining a long and painful Chinese project whose openly stated, paternalistic goal was their assimilation into Han-ness. Mongolia and Tibet both declared their independence when it was clear that their special relationship with China, negotiated under the Qing, had run its course. That neither they nor the later Manchukuo or East Turkestan could do so without tainting themselves with promised aid from non-Chinese empires makes Chinese denial of their independence nothing if not consistent.[36] One expects that the *yangguizi* is in the details, in sources which would extend this essay indefinitely beyond its targets of length and objectivity.

A few additional thoughts bear mention before making the awkward, too-great leap forward into the communist era. Non-recognition of any minorities in the Southwest, where the largest number of *minzu* groups reside in the PRC, as well as a failure to distinguish between the many Muslim "Hui" are highly troubling for the Republican conceptions of

[33] If the American analogy is to be extended, the Chinese national project's Han would be better paralleled as British culture and English language first becoming officially American, then conquering Native Americans and ignoring treaties to leave them alone on autonomous reservations. While French, Polish, German, and Asians (etc.) have arguably come to the U.S. and melted in its national "pot", the post-Qing Chinese state has poured its boiling-hot contents on China's periphery.
[34] Fiskesjo, pg. 25.
[35] Chor, pg. 76
[36] Westerners are concomitantly, at least on the surface, hypocritical for asserting that Manchukuo was no more than a puppet-state propped up entirely by imperialists without national support, while claiming Tibet and Outer Mongolia were legitimately independent. Millward has much to offer in the Uyghur's case to clarify the flash-in-the –pan that was independent East Turkestan.

nation and empire. Obviously, the national power of the minority nation was the key to recognition. Even today, the average tourist can distinguish between a Hui and a Uyghur, but all those involved in recognizing the initial "five races" seem either unaware or unwilling to recognize the diversity in their midst. Were the revolutionaries blinded by their anti-Manchu rage or out of ruling practice to think that such less-than-half-measures could succeed? If this blatant gap can appear at this point, I shudder to think what else I've left out. In the same reckless spirit as the revolutionaries cum Republicans, this essay must bravely march on into the PRC.

Early People's Republic (Post-Civil War). By 1949, China had been a repeatedly humiliated victim of imperialism and was determined to enter the post-WWII era as a modern nation-state. Several texts have appeared in recent years to outline how the prerequisite of a unified nation had to be constructed. Taking the Han as finally strong and unified[37], likely the very ones who'd "stood up", the task of sinicizing the reconquered peripheral peoples once and for all was combined with officially recognizing the many *minzu* left out of understandably unsubtle Republican and GMD classification.

A fundamental distinction with Chinese national construction project under the nationalists is that the official minority policy severely toned down requirements of assimilation, evident also in that colorful minority culture was now to be celebrated. The official policy was now integration; thanks to a new civic conception of the nation, minority *minzu* could keep their quaint, even precious cultures and still be entirely Chinese. As Fiskesjo suggests, minorities were seen by the early PRC as "noble savages" whose ethnic essence was still intact—unlike even the Han who'd been compromised by the many non-Chinese contaminants of modernity. Furthermore, all residents of China were not only automatically Chinese, they had to register as one of the officially approved *minzu*. For many, these combined to force what Mullaney calls a "double assimilation" of many non-Han peoples: first they had to conform to a nationality category; second, these groups had to be assimilated into the PRC state and society.[38] That all minorities should identify first as Chinese and second as their particular *minzu* was and continues to be a national goal which may feel like a compromise to ethnic Han nationalists, an aspiration of the government, and an imposition perceived differently by each of the other

[37] Howland's article suggests that the Han's newfound strength and unity combined with proscribed normative rights to assimilate minorities, a modern idea if ever there was one, to create an overbearing "Han chauvinism" which has certainly persisted to this day, a continuation of the "Great Han-ism" (same term, different translations) described by Zhao in Sun Yat-sen's nationalist thoughts. This is also a consistent theme in Dru Gladney's body of work on Chinese minorities. Such is still a far cry from the 1911 revolutionaries' claims that not even the ruling Manchu were Chinese, especially as they are now far closer to an ethnic group than a nation.

[38] Mullaney, pg. 12, and in more detail in note 24. He credits Francine Hirsch with the concept, based on the U.S.S.R.

minzu. In the last and most contentious case, the imposition differs critically by whether *minzu* classification was preceded by or *created* national consciousness. The PRC, then, was to be "a nation-state by construction", and the Chinese nation became a civic concept based on residence in the newly reclaimed territories.

Constructivism was immediately challenged by the most open-ended anthropological field experiment the world has ever seen, the 1954 Ethnic Classification Project. Thomas Mullaney's 2011 book describes the most complicated area, Yunnan, in great detail, and Suisheng Zhao's 2004 overview of modern Chinese nationalism as a constructed historical whole also highlights several feats of creative community imagination. Space permits only a few examples, but the gist of Mullaney's insights is that Yunnan's initial self-identifications alone presented the CCP with 200 new *minzu*, half of an impractical 400 applicants. Many of these consisted of fewer than a thousand people, and twenty shared the conceptual asymptote as nations of one.[39]

Zhao's most eye-opening observations involve the Zhuang in an intersection of constructivism and instrumentalism which may be too stark to be true. Those populating the southwestern autonomous region, as the PRC's numerically largest minority, are not only little-known because they haven't demanded their own nation-state. Distilling two English articles by Western scholars into their most provocative points, he does not disagree that the unity of the over ten million Zhuang is wholly an invention of the Party to incorporate "the vast areas in the southwest into the unified Chinese state" and even more cynically "to obfuscate the issues of Xinjiang, Tibet, and Mongolia and to send a message to Uyghurs, Tibetans, and Mongols that they were not in a position to demand more recognition."[40]

Despite these wild tales from the old west of ethnic taxonomy, both Mullaney and Zhao find the process to have been politically worthwhile and necessary, if not normatively sensitive or positive. The "accuracy" of the initial project, with the wise ideological guidance of the Party and the increasing numbers who internalize labels into which they are born, has improved with time, and Mullaney claims that the resulting 56-*minzu* model is all but taken for granted. He takes special care to note, however, that being more accurate does not make it "self-sustaining or invulnerable". Just as every new regime must come to terms with its nation, there will be future classifications with their own strengths and

[39] Mullaney, pg. 36-7. He also considers the notions of "last peoples" of nations on the verge of extinction, but more of the phenomenon is explained by the protocol of the interviewers and the vastly different conceptions of *minzu* among those who'd never given the matter any thought.

[40] Zhao, pg. 181. The sources are Kaup, Katherine Palmer. 2000. *Creating the Zhuang: Ethnic Politics in China* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner) and Hudson, G.F. 1960. *The Nationalities of China* (London: Chatto & Windus).

weaknesses, moments when policy that is at once self-serving but well-intentioned and grounded in supposedly scientific theory come crashing against a great wall of reality.

Conclusions. Leibold's 2007 book makes a simple and crucial point which this essay has sought to expand: "During a time when racial and moral hierarchy set the terms of the world order, Chinese identity was forged in conversation with both a 'superior' alien Other and an 'inferior' familiar Other."[41] Treating either China's national or imperial questions in isolation neglects the considerable, triangular influence each alterity has had on the other, creating an impossible "one-sided conversation" which too easily becomes polemic and ahistorical. Terrill's ambitious but ultimately unsatisfactory book, for example, treats sincere nationalist efforts to construct a unified nation as more of a footnote to a grand imperialism which faces only brief interruptions in his somewhat old-fashioned narrative and is never much subjected to counterarguments. This has obviously erred on the side of trying to answer too many questions at once, but the challenge of remaining both focused and fair in these critical decades needn't be completely overwhelming.

This essay has suggested that the revolutionaries who overthrew the Qing largely subscribed to a primordial concept of nationalism which could not tolerate a racial "other" in control of a modern nation-state. Reformers, by contrast, were less bothered by racial and ethnic differences but agreed that a strong Chinese nation had to form if China was survive in modernity. The Republicans as a whole were primarily concerned with ensuring that the four recognized minority nations would, despite deep perennialist roots, follow the Manchu and other north Asian nations into historical footnotes, with only assimilated Han in their wake. One may find it strange that an essay such as this has made no mention of the GMD, but it seems they largely continued the aspirations of the Republicans with regard to minority assimilation, no more successfully but still a broad propaganda target which swung the periphery in favor of the CCP. With greater capacity to realize a nation-building project, the CCP has sought to put a kinder, more colorful face on its explicitly integrative plans, and its nationalist views began firmly in the modernist, constructivist vein. Their project is, of course, ongoing, more gradual, possibly the same assimilationism disguised, and highly sensitive to accusations of imperialism. These are all nationalisms of elites and regimes themselves, but each likely extended into the general population to a degree which probably cannot be measured.

[41] Leibold, pg. 6.

A final word from James Leibold on Liang Qichao's "ultimate goals" forces the streamlined conclusions of the previous paragraph to confront the real complications of combining nations and empires. While by definition less extreme than the revolutionaries, reformers in the last years of the Qing also had imperialist designs on the periphery and its peoples.[42] Liang, Leibold claims, favored "what he viewed as a liberal and progressive type of 'national imperialism' (*minzu diguozhuyi*) that would see the mighty Han people dominate and eventually assimilate the weaker, ahistorical races on the environmental margins of the Chinese geo-body. Thus, at the center of what many have termed Liang's civic or state nationalism, there remained an essentialized racial core, complicating (in the case of China, at least) the popular analytical distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism."[43] I would argue that, regardless of the capacities and stated goals of successive Chinese governments since the Qing, China's primary modern continuity has been with Liang's theory-bridging objectives.

The three decades treated here diverged primarily in three mutually dependent aspects with regard to the national and imperial questions: 1. Which people were Chinese and why (who wasn't and why not)? 2. What did elites say was China, and why? 3. What did the Chinese government actually control? The first varies according to whether the Chinese nation was conceptualized as racial, ethnic, or civic—existing primordially, constructed long ago or instrumentally and recently by pragmatic elites. Status as a true nation-state—the only form of political body accepted as legitimate in the current world order—requires that Ernest Gellner's modernist definition of nationalism be met. The national and political borders must be congruent, implying that all the disparate groups living in the land of the openly imperialist Qing must internalize an unprecedented civic oneness. When such a project might conclude, whether it is possible, and what it would look like are practical questions undoubtedly occupying the minds of every *minzu's* nationalists, and it is not the place of this historiography or the scholars cited to speak authoritatively on these matters. One can say, however, that a scholar must grasp at straws for any hints that the wishes of minority nations themselves were ever considered by prominent Han leaders: Zhang Binglin's flirtation with self-determination based on non-Chineseness, Liang Qichao's later obscured mentioning of "national consciousness", and the CCP's strategically-offered carrot to woo minorities away from the Nationalists make for a meager body of evidence indeed.

[42] They may even be seen as less conflicted than revolutionaries because they accepted the Qing as a Chinese empire.
[43] Leibold, pg. 33

Given the era, conceptual and historical muddiness, China's categorical ambiguity is perfectly understandable, if not always well understood. To be accurate, a description of the modern Chinese nation must be phrased contradictorily in a phrasal monstrosity: a nationalism based on both anti-foreign imperialism and defacto domestic-imperialism. No work single work of scholarship will ever pass final judgment on how to categorize the political entity that has been China. It is oddly far easier to call it a 5,000 year-old civilization than to pigeonhole it for even a ten-year span in the periods examined here. And on a pragmatic note for this aspiring scholar, any classification which diverges from the current "party line" as a multinational state is likely to be labeled imperialist, at the extreme even preventing an interested student from entering the country. Best to leave it at that, then.

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