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IDENTIFICATION AND BELONGING

Like elsewhere in the world, the transition from empire to nation-state in modern China dramatically reshaped the sociopolitical processes of identification and belonging. Yet, unlike in Europe, nation and state building occurred alongside one another in China, ensuring that the cacophony of new social categories (gender, class, place, ethnicity, etc.) that emanated from China's nascent civil society and public sphere were immediately mobilized by the state and its agents in the name of a shared national imaginary. In short, these new modes of modern belonging came to be configured within an increasingly bounded system of globally competing, territorial nation-states.

FOREIGN IMPERIALISM AND BIRTH OF THE NATION

Placing themselves at the center of the Confucian ecumene (*tianxia*), the Manchu rulers of China's last imperial regime, the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), constructed an elastic multiethnic empire that incorporated five distinct ethnic constituencies (Manchu, Mongol, Han, Tibetan, and Sino-Muslim). In exchange for their loyalty toward the court, each polity was largely free to govern themselves in accordance with local tradition and free of daily oversight. Yet, as the empire unraveled under internal pressures (rising population, corruption, millenarian revolts) and external encroachment, the Chinese state sought to expand its capacities to demarcate, govern, and patrol its sovereignty, as reflected by the ballooning of 20,000 Mandarin officials in 1800 into over forty million state and party cadres today.

The rise of state-centered nationalism and the steady enclosure of the Chinese geo-body was a direct reaction to foreign imperialism. What began in 1839 as a distant nuisance in Guangzhou (Canton) escalated into a major crisis when the British navy outmaneuvered, attacked, and easily defeated Qing forces during a series of skirmishes that became known as the Opium War. The humiliating terms of the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) marked the opening salvo of the “century of humiliation” (*bainian guochi*) that helped to fuel the rise of Chinese nationalism. The British were granted the barren island of Hong Kong in perpetuity, and other “unequal treaties” (*bupingdeng tiaoyue*) soon followed that provided most Western trading nations with access to Chinese ports, legal extraterritoriality, and major trade concessions.

The so-called carving of the Chinese melon was not limited to European and American powers; after defeating the Qing navy and army in 1895, Meiji Japan joined the scramble for concessions by obtaining the island of Taiwan. By the time the Qing dynasty collapsed in 1912, the imperialist powers had even made inroads into the empire's vast nomadic frontier of Tibet (Xizang), Xinjiang, Mongolia (Menggu), and Manchuria (Dongbei), resulting in a dramatic increase in the discussion of “national sovereignty” (*guojia zhuquan*) and the unwanted image of China as the “sickman of the Far East” (*yuandong bingfu*) among late Qing and Republican elites.

MIGRATION AND EMERGENT CHINESENESS

The forced opening of China sparked an unprecedented wave of migration, as over twenty million Chinese were

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pushed and pulled onto the gold fields of California and Victoria, Australia, the agricultural plantations of Hawaii and Sumatra, and the urban centers of San Francisco and São Paulo; millions more flooded into the treaty port cities of Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Tianjin. Native-place associations (*tongxiang huiguan*) and sworn brotherhoods (*jiebai xiongdì*) facilitated this mass migration by providing a familiar sense of belonging and identity in these new, more cosmopolitan surroundings, but the increased intermingling of people outside of their village environs also opened up spaces (parks, restaurants, cinemas, and bathhouses) for the emergence of a new collective identity: a burgeoning yet fluid sense of “Chineseness” that was defined in opposition to both the alien Other of the foreign concessions and countries and the familiar Other of the nomadic frontier. There was no single articulation of this communal identity—some spoke of the common blood and descent ties of the *hanzu* (Han race), others of the shared cultural traditions of the *huaren* (Chinese), and yet others of the political rights of all *zhongguoren* (Chinese), and their possible extension to the *huaqiao* (Chinese sojourners) living overseas. Rather, this shared identity was rooted in the widespread recognition that the former subjects of the Qing empire shared a common past of subjugation and a future route of liberation.

In sum, the shift from empire to nation-state in China accompanied an epistemic rupture in space and time, as a fixed notion of territoriality replaced the fluid space of empire and a notion of linear, progressive time supplanted the cyclical dynastic cycle. Within this new framework, hierarchical and overlapping subjectivities were reimagined as bounded and equal citizens, as the state sought to bring identity space into line with decision-making space, and replace particularistic loyalties with a collective, territorial sovereignty. Yet, the dynamic and multiple nature of identity formation ensured that this new national identity continued to compete and interact with a whole series of local and transnational ties.

THE NATION AND ITS ETHNIC FRAGMENTS

The establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 formally ushered in this new community of citizens on the Chinese mainland, as a series of civic rituals (national day parades and military reviews) and symbols (national flags and anthems) replaced the imperial rites and regalia of old. When Liang Qichao spoke of the “new citizen” (*xinmin*) and Sun Yat-sen (Sun Yixian) of a “single race” (*tongzhong*), they both envisioned a new national collective that would, in their words, “smelt together in single furnace” (*rong er ru yu yilu*) the disparate subjects of the Qing empire into a new unified body politic. Throughout the twentieth century, Chinese state elites sought to trans-

form what Sun Yat-sen saw as a “loose sheet of sand” (*yipian sansha*) into the “coagulate core” (*ningju hexin*) that leading sociologist Fei Xiaotong spoke of as central to Chinese identity today.

Yet, the lack of a single strong state during the Republican period (1912–1949) ensured that local, provincial, and transnational ties remained salient, while regional militarists facilitated the opening of China’s inland frontiers by pushing Chinese institutions and Han settlers deep into the interior. There the non-Han minorities were first colonized and then nationalized, as their formerly imprecise borderlands were bordered and garrisoned. Both the Republican state and the People’s Republic of China (PRC, 1949–) envisioned the nation-state as a multiethnic mosaic. On the one hand, they formally recognized the independent existence of first five and then fifty-six *minzhus* (peoples, races, or nationalities), while on the other hand, they actively encouraged their nonviolent fusion (*ronghe*) into a single national whole—what was termed the *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese race/nation).

The colonial context of the Chinese nation’s birth ensured that territorial sovereignty became a central focus of the Chinese state and its elites. Successive state leaders such as Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi), Mao Zedong, and Deng Xiaoping each spoke of the need to fight foreign imperialism, recover lost territories, and guard against regional splittism. The PRC has maintained a firm grip over the frontier regions of Tibet and Xinjiang, whereas the recent return of Hong Kong (1997) and Macau (1999) to Chinese sovereignty has only intensified the problem of Taiwan in domestic and international affairs. At the same time, the dramatic economic rise of the PRC since the death of Mao in 1976 has caused many overseas Chinese to redirect their attention and investment dollars back to the motherland.

Belying these radical changes in identity and belonging is the continued tension between the transnational flows of modernity and the enclosure of political sovereignty that is fundamental to the nation-state system. The result for modern China has been the continual mediation of new forms of social identity by an overarching sense of national collectivity, no matter how ambiguously defined.

SEE ALSO *Chinese Overseas: Diaspora and Homeland; Hong Kong; Macau; Nationalism; Taiwan, Republic of China.*

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IDENTITY, CHINESE

The status of Overseas Chinese in relation to both China and their countries of residence has remained a persistent issue throughout Chinese history. In 1955, Zhou Enlai addressed this issue in a speech at the Bandung Conference, during which a treaty was signed specifying that overseas Chinese could no longer claim dual nationality (Poston and Yu 1990, p. 482).

Currently, diverse forms of cultural, racial, and political identification characterize the ways that Chinese people in the mainland and abroad conceive of Chinese identity. Modern Chinese notions of Chineseness, both folk and official, were formed around discourses of race, culture, and nation that crystallized as part of nation-building efforts at the beginning of the twentieth century. This occurred alongside the collapse of the imperial order, as China struggled to find its place as a nation among nations (Duara 1993; Townsend 1992).

Contemporary government discourses define Chineseness in terms of citizenship, race, and culture. But these conceptions of “Chinese” citizenship neglect both transnational forms of identity and the diversity of identities that exist within the borders of mainland China and abroad. The various terms used to describe Chinese identity in China and overseas (*zhongguoren*, *zhonghua minzu*, *huaren*, *huaqiao*) carry a range of connotations and were formed under specific political and historical circumstances (Wu 1991). Furthermore, it has become increasingly evident that it is possible for one to identify culturally, but not politically, with mainland China. Taiwan and Singapore also lay claims on Chinese culture, and overseas

Identity, Chinese

Chinese identities are marked by complex variation. Overseas Chinese identities are constructed in relation to economic, political, and identity politics in the country of residence, by mainland Chinese claims to the identities of the overseas Chinese, and by transnational flows that both link Chinese people in new ways and allow for the production of new forms of Chinese subjectivity.

Chinese identity thus must be understood as both emerging from complex histories and also as fluid, negotiated, and conceptualized in relation to power and place. Chinese identities can be conceptualized on multiple levels, from native-place, regional, and ethnic forms to broader forms including race, nation, and diaspora. These forms are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and a given individual or community can possess identities as Chinese on a number of levels and in varying ways.

CHINESENESS AS RACIAL IDENTITY

Notions of Han Chinese racial identity, in which Han Chinese are seen as descending from a common mythical ancestor, are central to demarcating Han Chinese from non-Chinese identities. What came to be known as Han civilization is thought to have originated five thousand years ago in the Yellow River basin. According to the origin myth, the emperor Huangdi defeated Yandi, and the two tribes combined to form the Hua Xia. From the Hua Xia evolved the Xia state, marking the beginning of Chinese civilization. These Han people spread throughout China, creating the Chinese empire.

Frank Dikotter (1994) documents the development of racial discourses in China from the fifteenth century to the present. Racial discourses, he argues, were a product of intellectual and political ideologies that served to bolster conceptions of Chinese national identity largely in contrast to the foreign “other.” An emphasis on race over culture helped smooth over the question of cultural diversity and ethnic conflicts within China.

MINORITY AND REGIONAL IDENTITIES

According to contemporary official Chinese government discourses, China is a nation composed primarily of Han peoples, along with fifty-five minority nationalities. But the modern Chinese nation and its borders are a construction rooted in a prenational polity. Throughout much of early Chinese history, the geographical area that now comprises modern China has been home to numerous culturally diverse peoples who together did not easily or willingly conform to a cohesive identity uniting them within a nation or empire. Han identities both within China and abroad are characterized by great internal differentiation at various levels. Reevaluations of ethnicity in China, inspired in part by symbolic and poststructuralist social theories of ethnicity