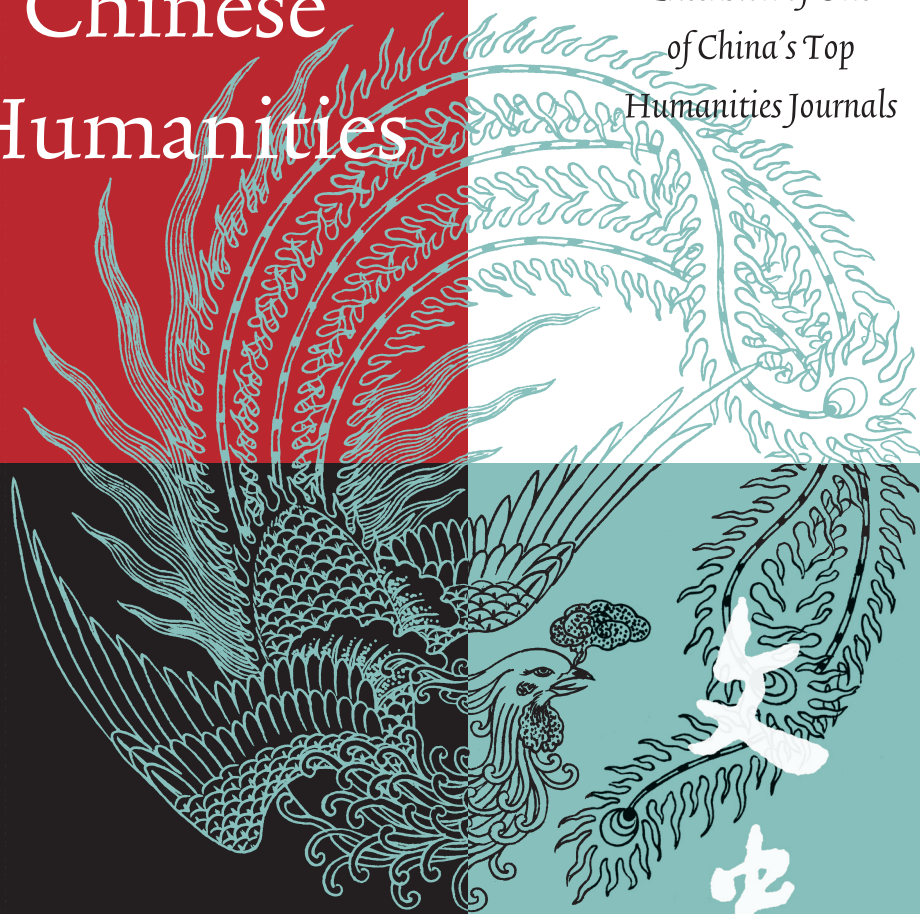


Journal of Chinese Humanities

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Journal of Chinese Humanities

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Journal of Chinese Humanities is an English-language extension of *Literature, History and Philosophy* (Wen Shi Zhe 《文史哲》), a famous Chinese journal published by Shandong University. The content is not restricted to one aspect of Chinese culture but rather spans important topics within the fields of Chinese history, philosophy, and literature. It covers both traditional and modern areas of research. Importantly, as opposed to most English language journals that treat on Chinese studies, this journal aims to represent the current research coming out of mainland China. Thus each issue will be composed primarily of articles from Chinese scholars working at Chinese institutions, while at the same time including a small number of articles from foreign authors so as to provide opposing perspectives. This way, top scholars in China can be read in the Western world, and our Western readers will benefit from a native perspective and first hand material and research coming out of China. Every issue will be theme-based, focusing on an issue of common interest to the academic community both within and outside China. The majority of articles will relate directly to the central theme, but each issue will also accept a limited number of articles not directly related to the current theme. This journal primarily targets academics in the English-speaking world who are interested in multiple aspects of Chinese civilization and humanities. It will be of interest to both scholars and advanced students, both specialists and informed readers. It is one of the best windows for western readers to deepen their understanding of Chinese literature, history and philosophy.

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Introduction: All under Heaven: Evolving Ideas on the Identity of China

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It is normal for an ancient civilization to have thought of itself as the center of the world at some point, but only China incorporated this idea into its own name: *Zhongguo* 中國, “the Middle Kingdom”. The subsequent world order, *Tianxia* 天下, or All under Heaven, with *Zhongguo* in the middle, was the basis for the identity of the Chinese civilization which would remain relatively stable and uniform from the bronze age until the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century, under ideological and military attack from the West, China had to reexamine its supposed central position. It became just one of many nation states. Despite being forced to accept a new world order, the ancient idea of *Tianxia*, with China still at the center of its own space and destiny, has remained a strong part of Chinese culture and identity.

With the twenty first century rise of China and the ensuing shift in the world order, the shortcomings of the Western-based nation state system are becoming apparent, and the traditional concept of *Tianxia* is being reconsidered as a valuable conceptual alternative. Is this an outdated concept, or can it be adapted to the new century? In recent years Chinese historians and philosophers have been revisiting this important concept, trying to understand better its historical meaning and its modern value. The current issue presents five articles on these themes.

The first two articles both treat on the ideological underpinnings of “All under Heaven” as well as its modern utility. Yang Nianqun 楊念群 begins by differentiating the parameters of “the Middle Kingdom” and “All under Heaven”. After this he introduces another important principle that guided China’s dynastic policies for nearly two millennia: Striving for Unity (*Dayitong* 大一統). This idea helped the Chinese people look past the racial and ethnic differences within their borders and aim for social harmony. It is this same idea that serves

as fuel for much Chinese nationalism and anti-Western sentiment that is alive and growing today.

Ma Rong 馬戎 examines how China went from being the Middle Kingdom at the center of its own *Tianxia* system to being a modern nation state in a Western dominated world. His article emphasizes the linguistic aspect of how China came to redefine itself using a Western political science vocabulary.

The next two articles look at the origin and development of the “All under Heaven” concept from a historical perspective. Zhao Yongchun 趙永春 and Chi Anran 遲安然 examine the term *Zhongguo* and argue that, while its earliest recorded use is from the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE), the Chinese people’s idea of seeing themselves as the kingdom in the middle of all others perhaps existed as early as the Xia dynasty (ca. 2070–ca. 1600 BCE). The earliest use of *Zhongguo* was for the sake of political discussion; later during the Spring and Autumn (770–476 BCE) and Warring States (475–221 BCE) periods it took on ethnic and cultural connotations.

Lin Gang 林崗 researches ancient maps to reveal two competing concepts of territory and identity. The author calls them the Central China system and the Peripheral China system, which happen to correspond perfectly with *Zhongguo* and *Tianxia*, respectively. By the Qing dynasty (1616–1911) these two systems merged into one and became the final version of ancient China’s “All under Heaven” geopolitical identity.

In the last article, Ran Jiantao 任劍濤 discusses the practical applications of the ancient concept *Tianxia*. He believes that this idea has always contained three aspects: a geographical identity, a political system, and a world view. The first two aspects are no longer relevant to international politics, but the third is. A political theory based on seeing the world with a certain amount of cohesion and commonality, seeing the world as All under Heaven, could help overcome two prevailing and equally prejudicial doctrines: the fast-emerging Sino-centric world view, and the Western-dominated nation state world order.



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Comparative Outline of the Terms “Great Unification”, “China”, and “All-under-Heaven”

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Abstract

The concepts “Great Unification” (*Dayitong* 大一統), “China” (*Zhongguo* 中國), and “all-under-Heaven” (*Tianxia* 天下) are all research topics which continue to attract the focus of the Chinese historical community. The three concepts are both related and different. This paper conducts a preliminary comparative analysis of the content of the three concepts and the role that they play in specific historical studies. It finds that the concept “China” emphasizes the origin of *Huaxia* 華夏 civilization and its significance as a center for expansion and Sinicization of surrounding ethnic groups. The concept “all-under-Heaven,” meanwhile, places more stress on the overall political governance relationship between the center and the periphery. Finally, the concept “Great Unification” focuses on the process by which a dynasty establishes its legitimacy in terms of both ideology and practice. Only by examining the three concepts together can we fully grasp the overall direction and characteristics of Chinese history.

Keywords

Great Unification – China – all-under-Heaven – *Zhuxia* – *Yidi*

In recent years, the three concepts “Great Unification” (*Dayitong* 大一統), “China” (*Zhongguo* 中國), and “all-under-Heaven” (*Tianxia* 天下) have gained attention in Chinese historical research. If we examine their connotations and extensions, the three concepts are both related and different. In general, explanations of “China” start by going back to the origins of recorded civilization and integrating new archaeological discoveries to explain the emergence and

migration of the *Huaxia* 華夏 ethnic group, as well as the historical trajectory of smaller ethnic groups gradually merging into a multi-ethnic community with the *Huaxia* at its core. Research on the concept “all-under-Heaven” typically focuses on ancient people’s imagination and construction of the peripheral world. In general, it is difficult to draw correspondences between the concepts “China” and “all-under-Heaven,” on the one hand, and any specific practices, on the other. By contrast, from its earliest citation, the concept “Great Unification” served to secure emperors’ “legitimate” (*zhengtong* 正統) status. It has more complex ideological and practical implications. “Great Unification” is not only an ideological formation, but also a concrete political practice. Consequently, understanding the similarities and differences between the three concepts “Great Unification,” “China,” and “all-under-Heaven” should be a core task of current historical research. This paper proposes to use it as an entry point for preliminary analysis.

1 “China”: A Concept That Is Difficult to Define

In recent years, the concepts “China” and “all-under-Heaven” have been the objects of frequent and fierce debate within the scholarly community. With respect to the debate about “China,” there have been many recent, relevant research works.¹ These writings make clear that there is not yet any scholarly consensus about how to define and understand the concept. This makes the concept “China” even more vague and indistinct.

In the era before the Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE), the concept “China” distinguished ethnic boundaries by relying on geographical orientation and ritual culture. Its scope was the *Zhuxia* 諸夏 fiefdom and area of activity, with the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE) royal court at its core. Such vassals, located in remote areas, could only be considered “barbarian.” In pre-Qin records, the concept “China” often appears paired with concepts like “barbarian.” In terms of spatial distribution, the concept of “China” represented by the term *Zhuxia* stood mainly in structural opposition to the surrounding “barbarian” groups

1 To cite a few examples: Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Zhai zi Zhongguo: Chongjian youguan “Zhongguo” de lishi lunshu* 宅茲中國：重建有關“中國”的歷史論述 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011); Xu Zhuoyun 許倬雲, *Shuo Zhongguo: Yige buduan bianhua de fuzha gongtongti* 說中國：一個不斷變化的複雜共同體 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2015); Xu Hong 許宏, *Heyi Zhongguo: Gongyuan qian 2000 nian de Zhongyuan tujing* 何以中國：公元前2000年的中原圖景 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2016); Huang Xingtao 黃興濤, *Chongsu Zhonghua: Jindai Zhongguo “Zhonghua minzu” guannian yanjiu* 重塑中華：近代中國“中華民族”觀念研究 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2017).

known as *Yidi* 夷狄. With respect to cultural meaning, the concept “China” emerged in contrast with the cultures of other ethnic groups.²

The term *Yidi* must be understood in conjunction with *Zhuxia*; without reference to each other, the idea of “China” is obscure. Confucius (551–479 BCE) stated, “Even the barbarian states (*Yidi*) with their lords are not as civilized as those states of the middle plains (*Zhuxia*) without lords.”³ *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 also includes the passage: “It is through virtue that the people of the Middle State (*Zhongguo*) maintain peace and order; it is through punishments and coercion the surrounding wild tribes (*si Yi* 四夷) are kept in order.”⁴ Both passages clearly place *Zhuxia* and *Yidi* in opposition to each other.

It can be said that the opposition between *Zhuxia* and *Yidi* is a prerequisite for defining the concept “China”; however, the dynamic nature of the geographical space between them presents a problem. In the pre-Qin period, this elastic standard could accommodate changing circumstances. Confucius and Mencius (ca. 372–289 BCE) held quite different attitudes towards this issue. Confucius advocates weakening the boundaries between the two: *Yidi* and *Zhuxia* can mutually communicate and adapt, with *Yidi* progressing toward “China” and “China” regressing toward *Yidi*. Mencius, on the other hand, insists that most *Yidi* are intransigent, and that *Zhuxia* must civilize *Yidi* in a one-way process.⁵ The difference between Confucius and Mencius on the question of relations between *Yidi* and *Zhuxia* shows how the concept “China” is often suspended in an alternating, evolving state between self-isolation and openness to diversity. From the point of view of literature, during the early Qin, Song (960–1279), and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties, discussions of “China” largely excluded minority groups. Except for the Han (206 BCE–220 CE), Tang (618–907), Yuan (1279–1368), and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, most mainstream opinions on “China” remained bound up in the opposition between *Yidi* and

2 Wang Ermin 王爾敏, *Zhongguo jindai sixiang shi lun* 中國近代思想史論 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 371–2.

3 Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, *Lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義, coll. Gao Liushui 高流水 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 84. The English translation follows James Legge, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 3.5, <http://oaks.nvg.org/analects-legge.html>.

4 Hong Liangji 洪亮吉, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan gu* 春秋左傳詁, coll. Li Jiemin 李解民 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 323. The English translation follows James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Index* (London: Trübner, 1861–1872), <http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/saxon/servlet/SaxonServlet?source=xwomen/texts/chunqiu.xml&style=xwomen/xsl/dynaxml.xsl&chunk.id=d2.11&toc.depth=1&toc.id=0&doc.lang=English>.

5 Jiao Xun 焦循, *Mengzi zhengyi* 孟子正義, coll. Shen Wenzhuo 沈文倬 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 315–445.

Zhuxia. Particularly in the Song through Ming dynasties, the concept of “using *Zhuxia* to change *Yidi*” slowly evolved into a theory of Han assimilation. This theory is a model of interpretation centered on the history of the Han people. It posits that backwards “barbarians” could only be transformed (meaning civilized) with the help of *Zhuxia* rituals and civilization; influence in the opposite direction was impossible. Modern Han chauvinists have found it easy to make use of this inherited point of view.

Some scholars of the “New Qing History” in the United States distinguish the Qing dynasty from “China” by making use of an argument dating to the Song through Ming dynasties that *Yidi* and *Zhuxia* were mutually incompatible. Some of these scholars note that Manchu rule in the northeast and northwest was completely different from rule by Han-led dynasties. They argue that the Qing dynasty should be seen as a “Manchu empire,” and that “China” was only one part of it. It is undeniable, however, that this view of the Qing dynasty stemmed directly from the “China perspective” of Song through Ming dynasty Confucianism. Under the influence of the Song through Ming debates about *Yidi* and *Zhuxia*, some present-day Chinese scholars continue to use the concept of “Han assimilation” as a historical framework. During the Song through Ming, due to continued military pressure from northern, non-Han ethnic groups, the dynasty in the Central Plains did not achieve true “Great Unification” in the geographical and political domains. The senior official stratum of the School of Principle (*lixue* 理學) had no alternative but to shift to a position emphasizing “Chinese” identity, and to mobilize it in a spiritual appeal to resist the northern ethnic groups.

The psychological impasse caused by the mutual hatred between *Yidi* and *Zhuxia* was finally solved by the intervention of the Qing emperors. When discussing the relationship between *Huaxia* and *Yidi*, they paid homage to Confucius’ original position. The Qing emperors’ analysis of the contrast between *Yidi* and *Zhuxia* did not focus on whether it was about “Chinese” identity, but rather on proving the Confucian legitimacy of the Qing dynasty’s capture of “all-under-Heaven” from the perspective of “Great Unification.” It is worth noting that the Qing emperors rarely used the term “China”; even though the word “China” appears occasionally in official documents, it was usually formulated cautiously, from the perspective of a “unified” territory.

The Qing emperors used the name “China” not to prove that they possessed the kind of “Chinese” identity promoted by the Song through Ming scholars, but rather to highlight the Manchus’ historical achievement in uniting “all-under-Heaven.” When promulgating imperial edicts, they used the term “Great Unification” more frequently than “China”; their underlying consideration in using “China” as a regional designation was to oppose and revise

the Song through Ming scholars' view of *Yidi* and *Zhuxia*. Emperor Qianlong 乾隆帝 (r. 1736–1795) criticized Han people for “never having heard of the *Yidi*, who ruled ‘all-under-Heaven’ from the Central Plains.” He said directly, “‘All-under-Heaven’ belongs to the people of ‘all-under-Heaven’; no part is exclusive to the South, the North, the Central Plains, or to outsiders,” expressing his dissatisfaction with the interpretation that Han people were the sole occupants of “China.”⁶ From the tone of these statements, it can be inferred that the Qing emperors remained preoccupied with the lingering psychological shadow of the Han people's intentional monopolization of “Chinese” identity.

In the official records of the early Qing dynasty, the word *zhongguo* generally appears in relation to negotiating borders with foreign countries and drawing up treaties. When Emperor Kangxi 康熙帝 (r. 1662–1722) signed the Treaty of Nerchinsk with Russia, the text of the treaty consistently used the term *zhongguo* in parallel with “Russia,” indicating that the Qing dynasty possessed legitimate sovereignty. When promoting its governance and military accomplishments to domestic audiences, however, the Qing emperor preferred to use the concept of “Great Unification.” After the Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860), when the Qing emperors dealt with foreign countries, they would also occasionally use the word “China,” with the intention similar to that of the Kangxi period: to show that they held absolute sovereignty over a vast territory. Here, *zhongguo* was more like another way of saying “Great Unification.”⁷

The concept of *zhongguo* carries a particular implication of ethnic antagonism. As soon as we use it as a basic unit of analysis to study China's dynastic history, it immediately becomes tainted with the political philosophy of certain groups of thinkers, such as the New Confucians of the Song and Ming dynasties. Perhaps the concept “China” is only applicable to the interpretation of a particular historical period, but it remains difficult to explain the Qing dynasty's capture of the Central Plains as a non-Han regime, and the complex historical reasons for its succession to the throne. More recent scholars have held a similar view. For example, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) directly criticized the Song dynasty view. With respect to distinguishing *Yidi* and *Zhuxia*, he noted, “Subsequent generations have used the name *Yidi* to denote their geographical location and ethnicity; however, in *Chunqiu* 春秋, *Yidi* denotes their politics, customs, and behavior.” He states further that the Song interpretation of the

6 See Guo Chengkang 郭成康, “Qingchao huangdi de Zhongguo guan” 清朝皇帝的中國觀, in *Qingchao de guojia rentong: ‘Xin Qingshi’ yanjiu yu zhengming* 清朝的國家認同: “新清史”研究與爭鳴, ed. Liu Fengyun 劉鳳雲 and Liu Wenpeng 劉文鵬 (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue chubanshe, 2010), 236–7.

7 See Guo Chengkang, “Qingchao huangdi de Zhongguo guan,” 222.

meaning in *Chunqiu* as a “repulsion of the barbarians” is a misreading; he advocates returning to Confucius’ view that there could be a mutually influential relationship between *Yidi* and *Zhuxia*.⁸

Many researchers have pointed out that, historically, it has been difficult to fix the precise scope of “China” due to the constant movement of its boundaries – a movement reflected not only geo-spatially, but also in terms of change and adaptation in cultural psychology; consequently, it is difficult to draw general conclusions.⁹ In recent years, the Chinese academic world has developed several new interpretative methods. Some scholars have tried to bypass the old-fashioned framework of “connotation analysis” and blaze a path toward new interpretative perspectives. More influential views include “China from the periphery,” “*Huaxia* periphery theory,” and “East Asian association theory.”

As the chief proponent of “China from the periphery,” Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光 believes that the process of “China” becoming a “nation-state” began as early as the Song dynasty. Due to pressure from non-Han ethnic groups in the north, Song scholars gradually formed a clear sense of boundaries and a cohesive “feeling of cultural identity.” It was precisely because non-Han ethnic groups served as a point of reference as “others” that the Song dynasty took the first steps toward forming the spatial subjectivity implied by the modern concept of the nation-state.¹⁰ This discourse gave the Song dynasty’s “conception of China” a quality like the “nation-state,” but completely equating the boundary consciousness of ancient ethnic groups with the modern concept of the nation-state obviously seems anachronistic. After all, the “conflict between *Yidi* and *Zhuxia*” was not a conflict in the sense of conflict between modern nation-states.

Wang Mingke 王明珂, on the other hand, suggests that, in order to accurately answer the question “what does ‘China’ mean,” in-depth research is necessary on the “historical temperament” of minority ethnic groups. He attempts to reconstruct the historical memory and self-identification of the groups that were peripheral to *Huaxia* (mainly the Qiang ethnic group). In particular, he explores the implications of “China” in the memories of peripheral ethnic groups by tracing the transmission of myths of brotherhood and ancestry. Broadly speaking, this is also a “China from the periphery” perspective. Wang

8 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, *Liang Qichao quanji* 梁啟超全集, ed. Tang Zhijun 湯志鈞 and Tang Ren 湯仁 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2018), 250–1.

9 Luo Zhitian 羅志田, “Yi Xia zhi bian de kaifang yu fengbi” 夷夏之辨的開放與封閉, *Zhongguo wenhua* 中國文化, no. 2 (1996): 213–24.

10 Ge Zhaoguang, *Zhai zi Zhongguo*, 25–26.

has said the notion of a “circle” arose after an observer first saw a concrete circle, which only later formed the impression and understanding of an abstract “circle.” Using a concave or convex mirror as a metaphor, Wang describes how, by moving the mirror, observing the changes on its surface, and discovering the regularities of those changes, we can determine the nature of the mirror (such as whether it is concave or convex), as well as roughly determine the shape of the object under the mirror.¹¹ However, this method of observing a concave or convex mirror, although helpful for understanding the history of the formation of “the *Huaxia* periphery,” is no substitute for coming to grips with the unique, internal historical characteristics of “China.”¹²

Another perspective on “China” can be called the “East Asian theory” or “East Asian association theory.” This perspective manifests in three broad types. One type is the Confucian perspective, which unites China, the Korean peninsula, and Japan in a highly abstract way through the framework of “Confucianism” and demonstrates the universality of the fundamental Confucian values in this area. Its chief flaw, however, lies in removing Confucian values from their historical context to perpetuate a historical fantasy of China as the leader of East Asian civilization.

A second type views East Asia as a unique region that overtakes and opposes the West in its pursuit of modernization. In this line of thinking, “China” – a backward country – is drawn into an “East Asian modernization” order led by Japan, to become a “regional unit” of an East Asian community opposing the West. In this way, the narrative of “China” has been superseded by the concept of “East Asia.” The difficulty with this perspective is the question of who should represent East Asia. It conceals an ideological struggle over the right to lead the modernization of the region and can easily reawaken painful memories among Chinese people of Japan’s promotion of a “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” during its invasion of China in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945).

Relatedly, the third type of perspective on the “East Asian theory” is the traumatic memory of the war, which constitutes the psychological background of the discourse about East Asia as a whole. This perspective of “war memory” is scaffolded by the associative framework of the three nation-states China, Japan, and Korea (that is, the Korean Peninsula). This makes it impossible

11 Wang Mingke 王明珂, *Fansi shixue yu shixue fansi: Wenben yu biao zheng fenxi* 反思史學與史學反思：文本與表徵分析 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2015), 273.

12 Wang Mingke 王明珂, *Huaxia bianyuan: Lishi jiyi yu zuqun rentong* 華夏邊緣：歷史記憶與族群認同 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2006), 163–84.

to find the precise position of “East Asia” that stands closest to the history of “China” in our spiritual and ideological world. As a result, many concrete case studies lack a vector to translate effectively into an ideological resource for China’s intellectual community.¹³

2 The Problem of “All-under-Heaven”

Unlike “China,” at the time of its origin “all-under-Heaven” was mainly a geo-spatial concept. From this perspective, the scope of “all-under-Heaven” is broader than “China,” but because “China” is at the center, it has the implication of commanding everything around it and absorbing the resources of “all-under-Heaven.” What people commonly refer to as “all-under-Heaven” actually originates in the geo-spatial view evident in the “Yugong” 禹貢 section of “Xishu” 夏書 in *Shujing* 書經. “Yugong” is divided into descriptions of the nine provinces (*jiu zhou* 九州) and five domains (*wu fu* 五服). The boundaries of the nine provinces follow the patterns of natural geography, indicated by famous mountains and rivers, divided into nine major regions – namely, the nine provinces of Ji 冀, Yan 兗, Qing 青, Xu 徐, Yang 揚, Jing 荊, Yu 豫, Liang 梁, and Yong 雍. Among the five domains, the five hundred *li* 里 circumference of the royal capital is designated as the *dian* 甸 domain. A series of concentric circles, each spaced at a distance of five hundred *li*, form successively the *dian* domain (central governing district), the *hou* 侯 domain (the governing district of the feudal vassals), the *sui* 綏 domain (the pacified area), the *yao* 要 domain (the peripheral area), and the *huang* 荒 domain (the uncivilized area).¹⁴

The “all-under-Heaven” view of the world, based on the nine provinces, is a scholar’s idealized image of the surrounding world. By contrast, the five domains seem to be a political metaphor. Only by grasping the cultural implications contained within the five domains schema of concentric circles can we understand the deep meaning behind the geography of the nine provinces. The five domain system recorded in such sources as *Guoyu* 國語 is a kind of narrative framework for the space shared by *Zhuxia* and *Yidi*. In *Guoyu*, “Zhouyu” 周語 notes:

13 Sun Ge 孫歌, *Women weishenme yao tan Dongya: Zhuangkuang zhong de zhengzhi yu lishi* 我們為什麼要談東亞：狀況中的政治與歷史 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2011), 18–23.

14 Zhou Zhenhe 周振鶴, *Zhongguo lishi zhengzhi dili shiliu jiang* 中國歷史政治地理十六講 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), 78.

The system of the ancestral king was as follows: the land within the state was called the *dian* domain. The land outside the state was called the *hou* domain. From the *hou* domain to the defenses was called was called the *bin* 賓 domain. The *Yi* and *Man* 蠻 lands outside the *bin* domain were called the *yao* domain. And the *Rong* 戎 and *Di* lands outside the *yao* domain were called the *huang* domain. The feudal vassals of the *dian* domain shall supply offerings to the king for his grandfather and father. The feudal vassals of the *hou* domain shall supply offerings to the king for his great-great-grandfather and great-grandfather. The feudal vassals of the *bin* domain shall supply offerings to the monarch for his remote ancestors. The feudal vassals of the *yao* domain shall supply offerings to the monarch for the gods. The feudal vassals of the *huang* domain, for their part, shall have audiences with the monarch.¹⁵

It also emphasizes that the ruling order should expand concentrically from the monarch's capital. Clearly, what is being described is not actual administrative control, but rather closer and more distant degrees of cultural transmission.

The nine provinces geo-spatial view is also an imaginative schema for the study of the Confucian classics. Ancient classical studies had a quite different understanding of this than modern classical studies do. Modern classical studies recognize the territorial extent of the nine provinces as only 3,000 square *li*, which basically coincides with the territory of ancient "China." Ancient classical studies, by contrast, also included the territory of the four "barbarian" border tribes, for an extent of 10,000 square *li*.¹⁶ Compared with "China," the nine provinces and five domains geo-spatial concepts focus more on coexistence under a hierarchical structure than on confrontation and contention.

During the period from the Wei (220–265) and Jin (265–420) dynasties through the Song dynasty, the geographical and cultural boundary between *Hua* 華 and *Yi* 夷 was not in sharply differentiated confrontation. Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書 (1910–1998) has said that people in the Han dynasty called themselves *Hua* and regarded the Xianbei 鮮卑 people as "northern barbarians" (*hulu* 胡虜). Then the Xianbei in the Wei dynasty called themselves *Hua*, and regarded the Rouran 柔然 people as "eastern barbarians" (*yilu* 夷虜). Subsequently the Xianbei of earlier-established Qi regarded the Xianbei of later-origin Zhou as

15 Shang Xuefeng 尚學鋒 and Xia Dekao 夏德韜, trans. and annot., *Guoyu* 國語 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 5.

16 Watanabe Shinichiro 渡邊信一郎, *Zhongguo gudai de wangquan yu Tianxia zhixu: Cong Ri-Zhong bijiao de shijiao chufa* 中國古代的王權與天下秩序：從日中比較的視角出發, trans. Xu Chong 徐衝 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 52.

“northeastern barbarians” (*Yidi*). Then people in the Northern Qi dynasty (550–557) called themselves *Hua* and regarded those from the Southern Dynasties (420–589) as “eastern barbarians” (*Yi*). Afterwards, during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), northern people in the Jurchen Jin Dynasty (1115–1234) considered themselves *Hanjie* 漢節 or *Huafeng* 華風 when speaking to the Mongols, and so on.¹⁷

Before the Song dynasty, the understanding of ethnic relations was closer to the concept “all-under-Heaven” and did not give much weight to the connotations of “China.” This was because, in the eyes of different ethnic groups, the borders of *Huaxia* were in constant flux. Only when a ruler was unable to form a unified territory would he emphasize the central position of “China” and the Han people among all ethnic groups and strictly distinguish ethnic boundaries. In *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考, Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1254–1323) insisted that the scope of the “nine provinces” laid out in “Yugong” was within the Great Wall. The aim was to distinguish it from the Yuan dynasty concept of “Great Unification.” This was a covert, strained argument that, while the Song dynasty might have had a narrow territory, it possessed the legitimacy of moral authority. Zhang Tianfu’s 張天復 (1513–1578) *Huangyu kao* 皇輿考, Wang Shixing’s 王士性 (d. 1598) *Guangzhi yi* 廣志繹, Gu Yanwu’s 顧炎武 (1613–1682) *Tianxia junquo libing shu* 天下郡國利病書 and *Zhaoyu zhi* 肇域志, and Gu Zuyu’s 顧祖禹 (1631–1692) *Du shi fangyu jiyao* 讀史方輿紀要 all take this perspective.¹⁸

During Emperor Qianlong’s reign, following the Qing army’s pacification of the Dzungar, the territory was largely unified and the scope of the nine provinces began to be recast. In “Ti Mao Huang *Yugong zhinan liu yun*” 題毛晃《禹貢指南》六韻, Emperor Qianlong wrote,

Today the twelve provinces are all parts of China’s territory. Are there places outside China that are not included? ... Now, the frontier has expanded all the way to Ili, Yarkent, Kashgar – several times larger than the area in “Yugong.”¹⁹

17 Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書, *Guan zhui bian* 管錐編 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001), 4: 2310.

18 Wang Shixing’s understanding of the Ming dynasty’s territory was very realistic. He believed that, “The ancient and modern frontier was not large until the Han dynasty, was broadest in the Tang dynasty, then narrower again in the Song dynasty. The present dynasty exceeds the Song but does not reach the Tang in size.” Practically speaking, he admitted that the Ming dynasty did not possess the criterion of “Great Unification.” See Wang Shixing 王士性, *Guang zhi yi* 廣志繹, coll. Lü Jinglin 呂景琳 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 2.

19 *Yuzhi shi si ji* 御制詩四集, in *Siku quanshu, jibu* 四庫全書·集部 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2012), 1307: 17-533.

Emperor Qianlong believed that those geographical boundaries – which he called “places that have not been reached since ancient times, things that the people have never seen” – were outside of the imaginary scope of the ancient nine provinces. Given the vast territory controlled by the Qing dynasty, if one held to the “nine provinces view” inherited from the Song through Ming dynasties, the Qianlong Emperor continues,

It would defy the original meaning of “defining borders” to continue to use the borders of the “nine provinces,” given that so many more territories have been added – greater in number, in fact, than the original “nine provinces” themselves.²⁰

From this point of view, “all-under-Heaven” should have a broader geo-spatial extent than “China”; however, “all-under-Heaven” as an analytical unit also has some limitations, mainly because it still belongs to the pre-modern scholars’ idealized political and geographical conceptual framework, considerably removed from the actual historical picture.

3 What Is the Importance of the Concept “Great Unification”?

Compared to the continuous attention scholars have devoted to the concepts “China” and “all-under-Heaven,” “Great Unification” was absent from historical research for a time. In the past, individual and sporadic studies of “Great Unification” mainly concentrated on sorting out the context of the interpretation and ideological history of the classical texts, and rarely attempted a full analysis of the concept as a phenomenon of ancient political culture that combined the ideology of rule and the practice of governance.²¹

20 *Yudi kao* 輿地考, in vol. 269 of *Huangchao wenxian tongkao* 皇朝文獻通考, vol. 1. Cited in Zhao Gang 趙剛, “Zaoqi quanqihua beijing xia sheng Qing duominzu diguo de dayitong huayu chonggou – yi *Huangchao wenxian tongkao* ‘Yudi kao,’ ‘Siyi kao,’ ‘Xiangwei kao’ de jige wenti wei zhongxin” 早期全球化背景下盛清多民族帝國的大一統話語重構 – 以《皇朝文獻通考·輿地考、四裔考、象緯考》的幾個問題為中心, in *Xin shixue* 新史學, ed. Yang Nianqun 楊念群 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2011), 5: 32.

21 For example, Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎 wrote *Dayitong yu Rujia sixiang* 大一統與儒家思想. It provides a continuous account of the Confucian ideology of “unification” from its pre-Qin origins up to Kang Youwei’s 康有為 (1858–1927) contemporary classical scholarship and his “Great Unity” (*datong* 大同) ideology. He carefully analyzes the relationship between the concept of “Great Unification” and the various factions of Confucianism. Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎, *Dayitong yu Rujia sixiang* 大一統與儒家思想 (Beijing: Beijing Chubanshe, 2011).

The difference between “Great Unification,” on the one hand, and “China” and “all-under-Heaven,” on the other, is that “Great Unification” does not emphasize the opposition between *Zhuxia* and the four “barbarian” border tribes in the way that the view opposing *Yidi* and *Zhuxia* does, nor is it limited to imagining the ruling order of the ancient dynasties as the “nine provinces” and “five domains.” Instead, it integrates the governance of territory with the construction of the relationship between politics and religion, forming a more elaborate and profound political stance.

The Qin through Han dynasties were more apt to use “Great Unification” to clearly demonstrate the “legitimacy” of their dynasties. Li Si 李斯 (280–208 BCE) praises Emperor Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BCE), arguing, “It is entirely possible to annihilate all the feudal vassals, build the emperor’s great undertaking, and realize the ‘Great Unification’ of ‘all-under-Heaven.’ This was a unique moment in history.”²² Gathering all his ministers, the First Emperor of Qin says, “Everything within the four seas have become prefectures and counties, and only the emperor issues decrees.” In his reply, Li Si employs the political and geographical concept of “prefectures and counties”: “Now through His Majesty’s divine power, everything within the four seas has been unified and has become prefectures and counties.”²³ Li Si argues from the perspective of territorial governance. Jao Tsung-I 饒宗頤 (1917–2018) believed that: “The unified governance of ‘all-under-Heaven’ began in the Qin dynasty, therefore the geo-spatial sense of ‘Great Unification of all-under-Heaven’ may also originate in the Qin dynasty.”²⁴

This is similar to the “cardinal principles of righteousness” (*dayi* 大義) in *Chunqiu*. Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE) emphasizes that,

In *Chunqiu*, in the phrase *yi yuan* 一元 the character *yi* “one” means “the beginning of all things,” while the character *yuan* means “great.” Saying that “the beginning of all things” is “great” shows the beginning of greatness and aims to correct its source.²⁵

The fact that this passage explains the character *yuan* “great” in terms of the character *yi* “the beginning of all things,” and the character *yi* “the beginning of

22 *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 87.2540.

23 *Ibid.*, 6.239.

24 Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤 [Jao Tsung-I], *Zhongguo lishi shang zhi zhengtong lun* 中國歷史上之正統論 (Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe, 1996), 4.

25 *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 2502.

all things” in terms of the character *da* 大 “great,” it is best to view the meaning of legitimacy from a geo-spatial perspective.

Han dynasty Confucian esoteric literature (*weishu* 緯書) likewise regarded territorial jurisdiction as a prerequisite for “unification” (*yitong* 一統). *Yiwei qianzaodu* 易緯乾鑿度 states, “The sovereign is that which people of ‘all-under-Heaven’ return to, everything within the four seas is called ‘all-under-Heaven.’” It continues, “The ruler is above; the peoples of the four corners are each in their lands. The ‘five directions’ (East, West, South, North, and Center) conform to the current situation; the peoples conform to their natures.”²⁶ What appears on the mystical diagram – literally, a “river map” (*hetu* 河圖) – that the sage sovereigns of legend received when assuming the throne really was a map. The implication was that the new king should possess the geo-spatial orientation of “all-under-Heaven.”

Another important meaning of “legitimacy” is the “unification” of time, which comes out very clearly in *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳. In the section “Yin gong yuan nian” 隱公元年, there is a passage:

First year, spring, the monarch’s first month. What is the first year? It is the year in which the reign of the ruler of Lu begins ... Why does it first say “king” and then say “first month”? It is the first month of King Wen of Zhou’s 周文王 (ca. 1152–1056 BCE) royal calendar. Why does it say the “first month” of the [Zhou] royal calendar? To magnify the unified rule!²⁷

The main idea is that time is united by the monarch. Dong Zhongshu further develops this idea, and also explains that this “first month” marks the start of “legitimacy.”²⁸

The concept “Great Unification” frames the principles for the sovereign with respect to “all-under-Heaven” in, at a minimum, the following ways:

First, “Great Unification” is the starting point for the formation of political-religious relations in ancient China; one could say it is a forerunner in the elucidation of the “theory of legitimacy.” True “Great Unification” is the perfect

26 Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, eds., *Weishu jicheng* 緯書集成 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1994), 60.

27 Liu Shangci 劉尚慈, trans. and annot., *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan yizhu* 春秋公羊傳譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 1. English translation from Joachim Gentz, “Long Live the King! The Ideology of Power Between Ritual and Morality in the *Gongyang zhuan*,” in *Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China*, ed. Y. Pines, P. Goldin, and M. Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 10 (in unpaginated reprint).

28 Su Yu 蘇輿, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 7.193.

integration of space and time. “Great Unification” separately contains the two dimensions of “space” (heaven and earth) and “time” (ancient and present). The emperor not only commanded the vast natural geographical territory, but also ruled human society, and constructed a political-religious order by stipulating the beginning of time and the criteria for its functioning.

Second, the “Great Unification” advocated the ideal of universal sovereignty (*wangzhe wuwai* 王者無外, lit. “nothing outside the sovereign”). By creating the “theory of the three ages” (*sanshi shuo* 三世說), it put *Zhuxia* and *Yidi* into a theoretical framework of dynamic evolution. In this way, it broke through the ethnic dividing line which “distinguishing *Huaxia* and *Yidi*” had established. *Gongyang zhuan* inherited Confucius’ view that *Yidi* and *Zhuxia* could mutually adapt. Although this idea was born in the chaos of the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), it created for the future world a roadmap to unify “all-under-Heaven.” This concept was brilliantly promoted and developed through He Xiu’s 何休 (129–182) elaboration of “theory of the three ages in *Gongyang zhuan*.” He Xiu’s “theory of the three ages” describes a “hearsay age” (*chuanwen shi* 傳聞世) as an “age of disorder” (*juluan shi* 據亂世); a “heard age” (*suowen shi* 所聞世) as an “age of increasing peace-and-equality” (*shengping shi* 升平世); and a “seen age” (*suojian shi* 所見世) as an “age of complete peace-and-equality” (*taiping shi* 太平世).²⁹ Through the gradual evolution of these three ages, the relationship between *Zhuxia* and *Yidi* gradually becomes open and welcoming. In the age of disorder, the scope of Zhou rule was internal, and the surrounding *Huaxia* tribes were external; during this time, the Zhou royal house managed internal affairs. In the age of increasing peace-and-equality, the surrounding *Huaxia* tribes were internal, and the other surrounding ethnic groups were external;³⁰ during this time, “China” and *Yidi* were strictly distinguished and were on an enemy footing. During the age of complete peace-and-equality, by contrast, the phase of universal sovereignty and ethnic integration (*Yidi jin yu jue* 夷狄進於爵, lit. “*Yidi* are ennobled”). Finally, the ideal state of “Great Harmony” (*datong* 大同) was realized.

In some discourses, the discourse of “Great Unification” overlaps with that of “the view of all-under-Heaven.” According to the schema of the “theory of

29 The English translation follows Chen, A. H. Y., “The Concept of ‘Datong’ in Chinese philosophy as an expression of the ideal of the Common Good,” Conference Paper, 2011. http://www.ssm.com/link/U-Hong_Kong-LEG.html, cited in <https://www.slideshare.net/qiaokate/the-great-unity-da-tong-draft-2014-01-02bilingual>.

30 Wang Kaiyun 王闓運, *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan jian* 春秋公羊傳箋, coll. Huang Xunzhai 黃巽齋 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2009), 149.

three ages,” the long-term vision for bringing “all-under-Heaven” into “Great Harmony” is the achievement of “Great Unification.” The perspective of “Great Unification” broke through the interpretive logic that placed “China” in confrontation with *Yidi*. The historical programmatic schema presented in the “theory of the three ages” also far exceeded the temporal and spatial scope of the expression “China.” At the same time, all the political-cultural concepts related to “China” were also incorporated into the interpretive framework of “Great Unification,” which became the starting point and prerequisite for discussing the relationship between politics and religion.

Third, the concept “Great Unification” contains the connotation of spatial and territorial expansion, while emphasizing that any military expansion must have sufficient moral legitimacy. This clarifies the difference between “Great Unification” (*dayitong*) and “Great Unity” (*da tongyi* 大統一), and distinguishes benevolent rule (*wang dao* 王道, lit. “the way of the king”) from despotic rule (*ba dao* 霸道, lit. “the way of the hegemon”). Although the Qin dynasty achieved the goal of “Great Unity” by integrating vast territory, it quickly fell from power due to its lack of sustaining moral integrity. Consequently, it is often cited as an example of a dynasty that lost “legitimacy.”

There are also those who distinguish different situations in which there is legitimacy but not unification, unification but not legitimacy, neither legitimacy nor unification, and so on. Correspondingly, the Ming dynasty, as well as the Han through Tang dynasties, featured “both unification and legitimacy.” Other regimes, such as the Yuan dynasty, possessed only “unification,” but not “legitimacy.” Regimes that insisted on “unification” often depended on “power” (*shi* 勢), while those that emphasized the principle of “legitimacy” mostly relied on “reason” (*li* 理).

Of course, the understanding of “Great Unification” varied from one dynasty to another, and there were often changes in norms. If some people were accustomed to distinguishing “unification” and “separatism” based on ethnic identity, others attached more importance to expanding territory and maintaining its integrity as the first condition for “unification.” Still others emphasized the crucial role of moral cultivation in the formation of “Great Unification.” Yet others subdivided the basic idea of “rule” (*tong* 統) into “five types of rule” (*wu tong* 五統): “legitimacy” (*zhengtong* 正統), “hegemony” (*batong* 霸統), “usurpation” (*jiantong* 僭統), “residual legitimacy” (*yutong* 余統), and “illegitimacy” (*bian-tong* 變統). They respectively identified the Han, Tang, and Ming dynasties with “legitimacy”; the Qin dynasty with “hegemony”; the Jin, Sui (581–617), and Song dynasties with “usurpation”; the Later Han (25–220), Eastern Jin (317–420), and Southern Song (420–479) dynasties with “residual legitimacy,” and the Yuan

dynasty with “illegitimacy.” Other “separatist” dynasties were excluded from the “five types of rule.”³¹

After the Song through Yuan dynasties, the idea of subdividing the concept of legitimacy with *Huaxia* at its center became pervasive in the discourse of some Ming dynasty scholars. For example, Wang Tingxiang 王廷相 (1474–1544) discussed the “legitimacy” of the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties as follows: in his view, the unification of *Huaxia* and *Yidi* might be called “Great Unification” (*datong* 大統), but there was a distinction between “legitimacy” (*zheng* 正) and “illegitimacy” (*bian* 變). Only such ruling houses as the Three Dynasties – that is, the Xia (ca. 2070–1600 BCE), Shang (ca. 1600–1046 BCE), and Zhou – as well as the Han, Tang, and Ming dynasties, could be characterized as “orderly, legitimate” (*shun ye, zheng ye* 順也, 正也) because “they ruled the four barbarian border tribes on the basis of China.” As for the Yuan Dynasty, because it was from the northern lands that it “entered China to rule the four barbarian border tribes” it was “disorderly” (*ni ye* 逆也) and should be classified as “illegitimate”. In a different case, the Song dynasty coexisted with Liao, Jin, and other *Yidi* ethnic groups in the same space; since “it did not fully rule China but ruled together with *Yidi*,” the Song dynasty can be characterized as having “lesser legitimacy” (*xiao zhengtong* 小正統).³² Another Ming dynasty literary figure, Zhong Yuzheng 鐘羽正 (ca. 1561–1636), however, recognized only the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties as legitimate. In his view, Duke Wen of Eastern Zhou 東周君 (d. 249 BCE), Liu Bei 劉備 (161–223) of the Shu Han 蜀漢 (221–263), Emperor Yuan of Jin 晉元帝 (r. 317–323), and Emperor Gaozong of Song 宋高宗 (r. 1129–1162) were “legitimate but not unified” (*zheng er bu tong* 正而不統). The First Emperor of Qin, Emperor Wu of Jin 晉武帝 (r. 265–290), and Emperor Wen of Sui 隋文帝 (r. 581–604) were “unified but not legitimate” (*tong er bu zheng* 統而不正).

Compared with Ming dynasty scholars, Qing scholars tended to focus their writings on the size and scale of “unification” and treated whether or not the ruling house had occupied a vast territory as a basic principle of “legitimacy.” Qing scholars believed that there was only one core criterion for “Great Unification”:

31 Xu Shizeng 徐師曾, “Shitong jinian xu” 世統紀年序, in *Lidai zhengtonglun baijian: Rao Zongyi guoshi shang zhi zhengtonglun shiliao bufen zengbu* 歷代正統論百篇: 饒宗頤國史上之正統論史料部分增補, ed. Chen Fukang 陳富康 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2020), 55.

32 Wang Tingxiang 王廷相, “Shenyan” 慎言, in *Lidai zhengtonglun baijian*, 50.

Only he who annexes the myriad states and rules them as sovereign can be called a monarch. The monarch achieves the “Great Unification”; otherwise, each state breaks off and sets up its own regime, each contenting itself with a portion of territory.³³

This view was quite common in the discourse of Qing scholars. For example, one scholar stated:

Whoever unifies all of China’s territory, acquiring it in an appropriate manner and governing it continuously for a long time, can be unquestionably called “legitimate.” Other ruling houses that contented themselves with a portion of territory, like the Shu Han, might have been legitimate, but we only call the Shu Han one of the “Three Kingdoms.” States that broke off and set up their own regimes, even starting with a good time as the “Prosperity of Yuanjia” (*Yuanjia zhi zhi* 元嘉之治), would still end like the Southern Qi and Liang dynasties. They all can be called “illegitimate.”

The author is clearly using the Southern Song dynasty as a paradigm for “partial unification” (*piantong* 偏統), comparing it to the “Great Unification” of the Qing dynasty.³⁴

What cannot be overlooked is that the Qing emperors’ emphasis on the “unification” of spatial territory does not mean that they ignored the need to uphold the concept of “Confucian legitimacy” (*daotong* 道統). For example, a portion of the Emperor Qianlong’s commandment quoted by Qing scholars states:

People born under Heaven, whether you are a sage or a fool has no relation to region, as long as your character is virtuous, you can rule “all-under-Heaven.” If an emperor’s legitimate son is unfit to succeed to the imperial throne, a sage can be chosen from among his illegitimate sons to inherit his legitimate rule. China is the emperor’s legitimate son; foreign *Yi* are his illegitimate sons. My dynasty has virtue, and I should be called lord of “all-under-Heaven.” Even if it originated among the eastern barbarians, is there any taboo?³⁵

33 Fang Junyi 方澹頤, “Sanguo biannian wenda” 三國編年問答, in *Lidai zhengtonglun baipian*, 199.

34 Wang Ruxiang 王汝驥, “Du Wei Shuzi Zhengtonglun” 讀魏叔子正統論, in *Lidai zhengtonglun baipian*, 123.

35 Xu Qi 許起, “Shengjin kaihuo” 聖襟開豁, in *Lidai zhengtonglun baipian*, 256.

This passage clearly states that, although the ethnic-Manchu emperor is *Yidi*, compared with sovereigns from ethnic-Han areas, his status is like the difference within a family between legitimate and illegitimate sons. It is not a case of irreconcilable ethnic hatred because Manchus are also entitled to succeed to the “Great Unification.”

Fourth, “Great Unification” is not simply a pure manifestation and expression of ideology, but also a complex process of political practice. It is the implementation of a whole set of techniques for governance and the practice of rule. Therefore, we cannot be limited to discussing the intrinsic meaning of ideological history, but rather must simultaneously explore in depth the specific, practical activities that externalize the concept and how they manifest it.

The Manchu ruling group achieved the reunification of the northern and southern territories by integrating military expeditions with keeping tight control of vassals. Their understanding of the meaning of “Great Unification” was completely different from that of the ethnic-Han dynasties. In Emperor Qianlong’s reign, the Qing dynasty’s occupation and practical control of the frontier area demonstrated an unprecedented element of performance. Emperor Qianlong summarized this as the “Ten Great Achievements of Military Force” (*shi quan wu gong* 十全武功).

The Qing dynasty’s achievements in frontier governance were consistently beyond the reach of their predecessors. Its expeditions to the frontier areas were clearly different from the colonial conquest of Western imperialism. After the Qing court completed occupation of the land, it carried out a mixed strategy of rule that combined administrative infiltration with respect for local customs. The Qing emperors tended to have dual secular and religious identities, and they also established diversified exchange mechanisms, such as annual imperial audiences, that had cultural and symbolic meanings. The Forbidden City was once the capital city of an ethnic-Han dynasty; the fact that the Qing emperor ascended to the throne and ruled from there symbolized an unbroken inheritance with the previous ethnic-Han regime. In addition, at their summer residence the Qing emperors received the reverence of the Mongolian aristocrats and the lamas of the ethnic-Tibetan areas, which demonstrates that Manchu emperors had frequent and intimate interactions with other ethnic minority groups outside of China proper (*guanwai* 關外, lit. “beyond the passes”). What emerged was the system of “court-garden dual government” without precedent in previous dynasties. This was clearly something that could not be replaced or covered by the quite unique function of the Forbidden City.

From the perspective of governing practice, “Great Unification” was also a set of techniques for text construction and historiography. During the “High

Qing” reigns of the Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng 雍正, and Qianlong (combined r. 1683–1799), the dynasty consciously molded the norms for political writing on the basis of text compilation, through a series of activities to compile local records and ancient classics such as *Shengjing tongzhi* 盛京通志, *Huang Qing kaiguo fanglüe* 皇清開國方略, *Manzhou yuanliu kao* 滿洲源流考, and *Manzhou shilu* 滿洲實錄. By transforming the significance of compiling local records, they transformed documents characterized by local historical styles and accounts into universal records that conformed to the expressive framework of the “Great Unification” discourse.

The Emperor Qianlong convoked the whole state’s elite literati to compile *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, while also translating the voluminous Chinese Buddhist canon *Da zangjing* 大藏經 into Manchu. This project was carried out almost simultaneously with the compilation and revision of *Siku quanshu*. The compilation of this work and the Manchu translation of the canon were both part of a holistic attempt to build a multi-ethnic political-cultural community. This illustrates that the establishment of the “view of legitimacy” in China proper (*neidi* 內地) and the feudatory region (*fanbu* 藩部) were largely synchronized. In addition, the Emperor Qianlong personally composed his *Yupi tongjian gangmu* 御批通鑒綱目, evaluated all kinds of historical figures, and established a unified standard historical evaluation. The compilation of local gazetteers for each locality was gradually regularized in content and form. These measures were important steps in implementing a literary and governing policy based on “Great Unification.”

The Qing dynasty concept of “Great Unification” not only had its unique characteristics, but also, like a huge magnetic field, possessed an almost irresistible attractive force to collect, compile, and edit all kinds of competing opinions in the intellectual world. It not only constructed the Qing dynasty’s higher political order and local governance model, but also shaped the everyday psychological state of the Chinese people. This influence has endured despite the violent shock of the late Qing revolution in 1911.

The “Great Unification view” not only forged a cognitive mindset in which Chinese people attached too much importance to overall political stability and neglected individual freedom, but also became the most reliable ideological resource for modern nationalists against the West. It is worth considering why only “Great Unification” possesses such a superior capacity to discipline people in institutional, physical, and psychological senses. Up to the present day, “Great Unification” remains the most useful slogan for Chinese people to inspire and consolidate nationalist sentiments or carry out social mobilization. This is quite different from the ideological model on which Western nationalist

social mobilization relies. Its successes and failures certainly require our serious reflection.

Translated by Brook Hefright

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China under Western Aggression: Discourse Transformations, Identity Shifts, and National Reconstruction

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Abstract

Following the Opium Wars, traditional notions of China as encompassing “all under heaven” (*tianxia* 天下) and the “Sino-barbarian dichotomy” (*huayi* 華夷) could no longer be sustained. Under the pressure and intimidation of the Great Powers’ advanced warships and fire power, the Qing government signed the unequal treaties and China was forced to adopt Western conceptual reasoning, discursive language, and rules of conduct. Western knowledge and lexicon was successively translated into Chinese, affecting transformations in local discourse and society. As part of this process, Japanese texts, which contained a great volume of Chinese characters, became an important medium for the transmission of Western epistemology. During the first Opium War between China and England, the cultural and political hegemony of the Great Powers were demonstrated through debates over interpretations of the Chinese character *yi* 夷. During the Late Qing, Chinese intellectuals drew on their foundations in traditional Chinese lexicon to understand and adopt the foreign-derived words *zhongzu* 種族 (race) and *minzu* 民族 (nation). This process reflects both shifts in how Chinese people regarded collective identity and the various presumptions underlying state-building visions.

Keywords

translating discourse – race – nation – collective identity – state-building

Arnold J. Toynbee counts thirty-four civilizations among the many rich, resplendent, and long-standing civilizations that have existed from ancient

times to the present.¹ Those which have made it into popular discourse include the ancient civilizations of Babylon, Egypt, Greece, and Rome; Christian civilization, Arab civilization, Indian/Hindu civilization, the Sinitic civilization of the East Asian mainland, and so forth. Some of these ancient civilizations perished amidst competition and confrontation and others were fortunate enough to survive. In any case, the survivors underwent massive transformations in both form and content, adapting to the ever-changing world order and developments abetted by inter-cultural exchanges. The organizing principles of political power and society within them were also reformed, sometimes even to the point of becoming unrecognizable to their forbears.

Spurred on by the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment, the Christian states of Western Europe were the first to undergo the transition from feudal societies to modern nation-states. Anthony Smith's idea of a "civic model of the nation" came, in fact, from the 17th- to 18th-century Western European notion of a "national polity" characterized by a political identity founded on civil liberties and a representative government, and boundaries defined by shared culture and land.² The nationalist movements which subscribed to this pushed to establish new identity formations and bodies of national governance. Taking the Peace of Westphalia (1648) as a signal, they reshaped the nature of the European nation, rewriting the international order. The political transformation undergone by each spurred on transformation of their economy. New manufacturing processes were established and production limits removed, leading to rapid developments in Western European industry and technology. In the meantime, the social structures, ideology, and cultural discourse in European countries were reshaped and updated. Thus, one after another, they entered the new age of industrial civilization.

As European powers strengthened and prospered, they began to set their sights on the rest of the world. Faced with their aggression, the fate of native sovereignty in the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America took each down different historical paths. The Ottoman Empire was dissolved. The Mayan and Incan civilizations met with destruction and annihilation.³ European colonies spread across the globe, bringing about irrevocable changes to the political

1 Lu Fanzhi 魯凡之, *Zhongguo fazhan yu wenhua jiegou* 中國發展與文化結構 (Hong Kong: Jixian she, 1998), 26.

2 The four signs of a "Civil ethnic polity" include: 1. territory forged by historical circumstance; 2. a unified legal and governmental body; 3. legal and political legal rights; 4. shared culture and awareness. See Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 11.

3 "... twelve major civilizations, seven of which no longer exist (Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Cretan, Classical, Byzantine, Middle American, Andean) and five which do (Chinese, Japanese,

and cultural map of the world. In East Asia, neither the Qing government nor Japan could avoid the impact of the powerful, expanding colonial domain of the west.

1 Modern China Forced to Adopt Western Conceptual Reasoning, Discursive Language, and Rules of Conduct

Out of lands and environments vastly different from those of distant China, the European countries developed distinct cultural traditions and political systems. From this, arose two contrasting centers of civilization: the Mediterranean and East Asia.⁴ Cultural exchange between China and Europe can be traced back to Catholic missionary activities. In 1583, Jesuit missionaries from the Vatican such as Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) entered China via Macau. Ricci collaborated with Xu Guangqi 徐光啟 (1562–1633) to translate key texts in science and technology such as Euclid's *Jihe yuanben* 幾何原本, *Celiang fayi* 測量法義, and *Tongwen suanzhi* 同文算指.⁵ Such translations constituted the first systematic introduction of Western astronomy, mathematics, geography, and medicine to the Chinese people. From the late Ming (1368–1644) to the late Qing (1644–1911), foreign missionaries who lectured on Western civilization would translate certain Western terms into Chinese as part of their talks. This spurred on both translation activities in China and cultural exchange between China and the West. However, the introduction of China to Western political thought, social theory, and constitutional law would not occur until around 1840, the time of the first Opium War.

Beginning with the first Opium War (1839–1842), the Qing government suffered defeat after defeat in wars against foreign nations, ceding territory and paying indemnities. In its dealings with Western countries, China steadily lost the power to self-determine and was forced, instead, to accept Western conceptual reasoning, discursive language, and rules of conduct. Facing the imminent threat of annihilation, the Chinese people had no choice but to abandon traditional notions of China as “all under heaven” (*tianxia* 天下) as

Indian, Islamic, and Western).” See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 45.

4 Zhan Zhonghe 湛中和, “Dizhonghai wenhuaquan yu xifang wenming dutixing de genyuan” 地中海文化圈與西方文明獨特性的根源, *Hunan shifan daxue shehui kexue xuebao* 湖南師範大學社會科學學報, no. 4 (2010): 128–31.

5 Xiao Zhiqin 肖志欽 and Xiao Jian'an 肖建安, “Limadou jiqi dui Zhongguo fanyi shi de gongxian” 利瑪竇及其對中國翻譯史的貢獻, *Loudi shizhuan xuebao* 婁底師專學報, no. 4 (2003): 33–35.

well as the ethnic order based on a distinction between the central *hua* 華 and frontier *yi* 夷 peoples. Instead, they began to adopt European worldviews and principles of international relations.

On the surface, the Great Powers extolled notions of “equality” and “international law;” however, following the First Opium War and Second Opium War (1856–1860), the conditions under which the Qing government signed the peace treaty were completely devoid of “equality” or “parity.” When it came to foreign relations with China, the Great Powers consistently interfered in affairs concerning China’s frontier regions and affairs between local groups. Examples of this include Tsarist Russia recognizing the legitimacy of Yaqub Beg’s (1820–1877) rule in Kashgar, Xinjiang in 1872, and Britain forcibly opening the commercial port of Yadong 亞東, Tibet in 1888. Thus, the Great Powers used diplomatic pressure and military threats, and even occasional military intervention,⁶ to undermine the authority of the Chinese central government, replacing it, instead, with Western interpretations and language.⁷ They sought to alter the legal statuses of these regions under international law in order to stake a claim in Chinese frontier regions as either their colonies or their protectorates.

At the same time, diplomatic envoys, merchants, missionaries, and geographers from the Great Powers paid visits to every part of the Chinese frontier regions, building churches, organizing socials, opening schools, starting newspapers, and even developing writing systems for the oral languages of certain ethnic groups.⁸ These visitors worked to infiltrate every level of frontier society,

6 It would seem that, after unsuccessful attempts at opening trade routes with Tibet, British troops – invaded Tibet in 1903, occupying Lhasa and finally, in 1906, forcing the Qing government to sign the “Sino-British Convention on British and Tibetan Relations.” See Zhang Zhirong 張植榮, *Guoji guanxi yu Xizang wenti* 國際關係與西藏問題 (Beijing: Lüyou jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), 42–44.

7 Western ideas of “sovereignty (*zhuquan* 主權)” and “suzerainty (*zongzhuquan* 宗主權)” and the distinctions between them do not exist in Sinitic traditions. At the Simla Conference of 1913, England suggested dividing Tibet into “inner Tibet” (to include Qinghai the Kham region) and “outer Tibet” (consisting of Ü-Tsang), with the central Chinese government holding suzerainty, but not sovereignty, over the latter. See Zhang Zhirong, *Guoji guanxi yu Xizang wenti*, 62.

8 From the end of the 19th century to the 1930s, missionaries active in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan provinces preached to ethnic minorities. Around that time, they devised and published on several ethnic minority orthographies. The British Methodist missionary Sam Pollard devised Old Miao script. The British James O. Fraser of the Inner China Mission developed Old Lisu script with Sara Ba Thaw, a preacher of the Karen peoples of Myanmar. Missionaries of the American Baptist Mission Society such as Josiah Nelson Cushing and O. Hanson devised Singpho writing. Vincent M. Young of the American Baptist Convention developed both the Lahu and Wa scripts. Australian missionary Gladstone Porteous devised

meddling in local affairs and inciting inter-ethnic conflict. Western powers sought to promote an image of the Qing dynasty as a country of multiple nations existing side-by-side. Starting with such labels as “Tibetan nation” and “Mongol nation,” Western languages introduced discourses of “nation,” “national self-determination,” and “national identification” to the elites of the many peoples – namely, the Manchu, Han, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan – in China.⁹ Slowly but surely, from the concepts and meanings behind these new Western-derived labels, would emerge new forms of political and cultural identity.

The actions of Western imperialist powers inevitably impacted inter-group relations and affected discursive shifts in the various jurisdictions of the Qing government. The elites of the various Chinese ethnic groups began to use Western discourse to describe not only the world outside of China, but also recent Chinese political history as well as shifts within and between Chinese ethnic groups across the dynasties. This was the start of a comprehensive discursive shift within Chinese society.

As China endured its passive and humiliating role in foreign diplomatic negotiations, its political system based on traditional notions of ruling “all under heaven” and identifying according to the so-called “Sino-barbarian distinction” (*yixia zhibian* 夷夏之辨) was replaced by one based on the forcibly imported idea of a “nation-state.”¹⁰ Chinese people had much to reconsider: how to refer to those strange ocean-crossing peoples; how to refer to the surrounding tributary states of the Qing empire; how to refer, collectively, to the subjects of the Qing dynasty; how to refer to those groups governed by the Qing government, but with their own administrative bodies as well as ethnic origins, languages, religions, and ways of life that were wholly distinct; and, finally, how to maintain or rebuild the political entity known as China?¹¹

Yi script. See Chen Jianming 陳建明, “Chuanjiaoshi zai xinan shaoshu minzu diqu de wenzhi chuangzhi huodong” 傳教士在西南少數民族地區的文字創制活動. *Zongjiaoxue yanjiu* 宗教學研究, no. 4 (2010): 142–49.

9 “Even the terms ‘Manchu’ and ‘Han’ referring to ethnicities is very modern it wasn’t until the post–1900 hostility broke out between loyalists and revolutionaries that the Manchu-Han conflict came to a head. However, the concept of ‘Han ethnicity’ was also being re-invented.” See Sun Longji 孫隆基, *Lishixue jia de jingxian* 歷史學家的經線 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2004), 17.

10 “Imperial China ... at the end of the Qing dynasty was forced into the straightjacket of a ‘nation-state.’” Sun Longji, *Lishixue jia de jingxian*, 21.

11 The Qing government pursued a “diverse empire” where each district administered itself via the principle of “governing according to customary practice” (*yin su er zhi* 因俗而治). See Wang Ke 王柯, *Zhongguo, cong “tianxia” dao minzu guojia* 中國，從“天下”到民族國家 (Taipei: Zhengda chubanshe, 2014), 101.

To begin with, the Qing government officials used terms associated with frontier peoples, such as *manyi* 蠻夷 (barbarians), to refer to Europeans. The British, for instance, were called “red haired barbarians” (*hongmao yi* 紅毛夷 or *hongmao fan* 紅毛番). However, as European nations exerted their power in China, “foreign barbarians” (*waiyi* 外夷) became the neutral “countries” (*bangguo* 邦國). According to Sinitic tradition, diplomatic envoys from foreign countries were usually called “tributary envoys” (*gongshi* 貢使). However, in the case of Europe, that, too, changed to simply “envoy” (*gongshi* 公使). European envoys were permitted to reside in the capital. Instead of adhering to the traditional ritual of kowtowing in audience with the emperor, the envoys were, at their request, required only to bow respectfully.¹² The “tribute address” (*gongbiao* 貢表) which foreign envoys at court had previously had to present upon arriving at court was renamed “official document” (*guoshu* 國書). The word for agreements signed with foreign nations changed from *mengshu* 盟書 (alliance pacts) to *tiaoyue* 條約 (treaties). These gradual shifts in terminology signaled a thorough collapse of the traditional Chinese imperial order.

At the time, Chinese people who remained clear-headed observed that the Qing government was losing its authority over frontier lands and peoples to Western colonization. They saw how the existing social order and cultural logic was being thoroughly overturned, and how the Great Powers would cause rifts between different groups within a nation in order to conquer and enslave them.¹³ Those in the know considered how to “defend the race and nation,” how, against the tides of discursive shifts, to form their own interpretations of the new lexicon.¹⁴ Only by doing so could they reestablish a coherent identity among China’s people and keep the fragmentation and violence of in-fighting from breaking out across China’s vast territory.

12 Mao Haijian 茅海建, *Jindai de chidu: liangci Yapien Zhanzheng junshi yu waijiao* 近代的尺度：兩次鴉片戰爭軍事與外交 (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhishi sanlian shudian, 2011), 250.

13 “The British conquest of India was an act of urging Indian people to kill Indian people.” See Yang Du 楊度, “Youxue yibian’ xu” “遊學譯編” 叙, in *Xinhai geming qianshinian jian shi lun xuan ji* 辛亥革命前十年間時論選集, ed. Zhang Nan 張枬 and Wang Renzhi 王忍之 (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhishi sanlian shudian, 1960), 1: 251.

14 *Datongbao* 大同報, a newspaper created by Chinese and Manchu bannermen studying in Japan, strongly promoted “Equality between Manchu and Han people and unity of Manchu, Han, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan people as citizens of one great nation.” See Huang Xingtao 黃興濤, *Chongsu Zhonghua: jindai Zhongguo “Zhonghua minzu” guannian yanjiu* 重塑中華：近代中國“中華民族”觀念研究 (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2017), 101–2.

2 Translating Terms between Western Languages and Chinese during the 19th Century

Western discourses and concepts that were brought into China by the Great Powers in the mid-nineteenth century had only recently emerged and become popular in Europe. The seventeenth century Enlightenment advanced innovation in philosophy, ethics, political science, economics, history, literature, and the natural sciences. The subsequent wave of new concepts and related terms that were born from new political beliefs, social movements, and developments in technology transformed existing words and phrases in the languages of European countries.

The word “nation” serves as an apt example. It stems from the Latin word “natio,” which has multiple meanings. According to the earliest and most widespread understanding, it “referred to a group of people who share a place of birth and are placed in the same category that is larger than a family but smaller than a clan; also, a people.”¹⁵ French encyclopedists Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Jean le Rond d’Alembert (1717–1783) reframed “nation” as “a collective word used to denote a considerable quantity of those people who inhabit a certain extend of country defined within certain limits, and obeying the same government.”¹⁶ The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens of the French Revolution* elevated the idea of “nation” to include ideas of sovereignty, stating that “the principle of sovereignty resides essentially in the nation.” The British historian Eric Hobsbawm (d. 2012) writes that “the modern sense of the word is no older than the eighteenth century (...).”¹⁷ Elie Kedourie (d. 1992) writes on the “doctrine” of European nationalism at that time: “(...) that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government.”¹⁸ Thus, the central position of modern European nationalism is that every nation has the right to establish its own government.

The process by which Western concepts were transmitted to China was anything but direct. At first, Chinese people attempted to use existing Chinese words and phrases to translate Western words. Such words and phrases were

15 Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1960.), 12–13. For further discussion on the evolution of the term “nation,” see Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4–8.

16 Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 14.

17 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.

18 Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 9.

inevitably informed by traditional Chinese worldviews and rational concepts that differed greatly from that of the Western concepts they were meant to represent. Therefore, Chinese scholars who first attempted to translate Western texts into Chinese could only do so by either using barely passable Chinese terms or coining new terms. In Lin Zexu's 林則徐 (1785–1850) *Sizhou zhi* 四洲志, a late 1830s Chinese translation of a work on world geography, the term for government officials from England (which is rendered *yinjili guo* 英吉利國) is translated using the traditional Chinese term for officials, *zhi-guan* 職官.¹⁹ Similarly, the government and its departments are translated as *yamen* 衙門, their navy translated as *shuishi* 水師, banks translated as *yinhao* 銀號, and expenditures translated as *suiyong* 歲用. The titles of government officials were rendered phonetically with annotations in Chinese. For instance, Lin translated the title of government official into *libulai afuxi'er* 律布來阿付西爾 with *guanyin guan* 管印官 (official in charge of seals) as an annotation.²⁰ Another example of this is Yan Fu's 嚴復 (1853–1921) translation of “empire” as *yinbai'er* 英拜兒.²¹

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, it was very difficult to translate Western concepts and discourses using the Chinese that was available. When translating Thomas Henry Huxley's (1825–1895) *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*, Yan Fu once mentioned the difficulty of adhering to the three principles of translation: reliability (*xin* 信), accuracy (*da* 達), and style (*ya* 雅).

It is already difficult to remain true to the ideological content of the source text; however, if one were to produce an indecipherable text based on a correct understanding of the source text, there would be no point in the translation. Thus, it is very important to take care with expression.... (The translator must) gain masterful understanding of the substance of the entire text; only then can the translation gain a natural smoothness. If the writing and content of the source text is abstract and difficult to understand, then one must do the work of laying the foundation and finding the correct resonances in the sections of the translated text that both precede and follow. In this way, one can better express its intended meaning. These methods are all meant to enhance the expressive power

19 The original text renders *Yinjili guo* with the characters 英咭喇国, showing that the transliteration of names of countries continued to undergo revision and reconsideration. See Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, *Wan Qing wenxuan* 晚清文選 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuxue chubanshe, 2002), 4.

20 Lin Zexu 林則徐, *Sizhou zhi* 四洲志 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2002), 114–17.

21 Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity – China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 360.

of the translated text. Only by achieving a smooth translation can one remain true to the source text.²²

This passage highlights the difference between Chinese and Christian cultures while also reflecting how difficult it was for Chinese people to understand Western texts and to select the right words and phrases to convey them. Yan Fu, the pioneer of translating Western texts into Chinese, met with multiple hardships when using old Chinese words to translate the new foreign phrases.

One can see many examples in works of translation by Chinese translators that illustrate Yan's emphasis on "choosing the word that best fits the meaning" (*ji yi ding ming* 即義定名). When translating Western names, place names, names of countries, occupations, and ranks of nobility, one must feel one's way through the process, testing and adjusting along the way. Fu Lei 傅雷 (1908–1966) translated the title of Honoré de Balzac's (1799–1850) *Le Cousin Pons* as *Bangsi jiujiu* 邦斯舅舅 (Uncle Pons), while Mu Mutian 穆木天 (1900–1971) translated it as *Congxiong pengsi* 從兄蓬斯 (Cousin Pons). To convey the five hereditary title ranks of the European nobility, Chinese translators used the Zhou dynasty's (1050–221 BCE) five feudal ranks: *gong* 公, *hou* 侯, *bo* 伯, *zi* 子, and *nan* 男.²³ Lin's *Sizhou zhi*, based on Hugh Murray's (1779–1846) *Encyclopaedia of Geography*, transliterates the names of countries in ways that differ from how they are translated today. For example, Egypt is rendered *Yiji* 依揖 instead of *Aiji* 埃及, and Persia *Bashe* 巴社 rather than *Bosi* 波斯. Chapters seven and twenty-seven of *Sizhou zhi* are both called "*Duluji guo* 都魯機國 (the Turkish country)," though they refer separately to the European and Asian parts of the Turkish Ottoman Empire.²⁴ Because Chinese knowledge of world geography was very limited at the time, *Sizhou zhi* was a work of translation that described the world to Chinese people and broadened their political and geographical knowledge. At the same time, this work also contains vestiges of the bewilderment faced and explorations pursued by Chinese translators as they sought to grasp the concepts and discourses of Western epistemologies.

22 Yan Fu 嚴復, *Tiannan lun* 天演論 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2002), 10.

23 In 1884, Japan put into practice a new peerage system and granted old high-ranking imperial officials, those with an established reputation, and those who had contributed notably to the Meiji reformation the rankings of *gong*, *hou*, *bo*, *zi*, and *nan*. It is unclear whether European aristocrats were first referred to using the same ranks in Chinese translated texts or if this translation practice was borrowed from Japanese translators who had borrowed the ancient Chinese feudal ranks for both European and Japanese nobles.

24 Lin Zexu, *Sizhou zhi*, 114–17.

3 Japanese Terms as a Key Medium through Which Western Discourse Was Introduced into China

Japan's translations played a unique role in facilitating the translation and acceptance of Western knowledge in China. During the Meiji Reformation, Japanese scholars systematically translated Western knowledge into Japanese, which effectively pushed forward modern developments in Japan's educational and industrial sectors. After the Qing government's loss in the First Sino-Japanese War, many members of the Chinese elite sought to learn from Japan's experience of "reformation" and "leaving Asia to join Europe" as a way to save China. Those studying abroad in Japan eagerly studied and consumed Western ideas through Japanese publications. Thus, Japanese became an established means for introducing Western knowledge into China. From the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, China set off on a course of book translation. Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) said that "translating books is truly a most pressing matter of today. Every day, those in China who understand the times talk constantly of reformation.... if we do not engage in the translation of foreign writings with haste, then reformation will become nothing but empty talk."²⁵ In 1905, the Qing government established a Western-style primary school where the history textbook was actually translated from Japanese educational materials.²⁶ The first Chinese version of *The Communist Manifesto* was also a 1919 translation from Japanese.²⁷

In "Gezai Zhong-Xi zhijian de Riben – xiandai hanyu zhong de riyu 'wai lai yu' wenti" 隔在中西之間的日本 – 現代漢語中的日語“外來語”問題, published in the eighth issue of *Shanghai wenxue* 上海文學 in 1998, Wang Binbin 王彬彬 indicates that "of the specialized terminology we currently use in the humanities and social sciences, about 70% comes from Japan."²⁸ In another recent article, "Hunshen fama: bu jiang 'Riben hanyu' jiu buneng shuohua" 渾身發麻: 不講“日本漢語”就不能說話, Pei Yu 裴鈺 states, "During the Late Qing and Early Republican era, Chinese intellectuals also translated many terms

25 Liang Qichao 梁啟超, "Chunqiu Zhongguo yidi bian xu" 春秋中國夷狄辨序, in *Yin-bingshi heji: Wenji* 飲冰室合集: 文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 2: 57.

26 Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, "Zhongguo benbu' yi ming jiying feiqi" "中國本部" 一名極應廢棄, *Yishibao* 益世報, January 1, 1939.

27 At the end of 1919, Chen Wangdao 陳望道 translated the Japanese version of *The Communist Manifesto* into Chinese. Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 and Li Dazhao 李大釗 proofread it. It was published in August of 1920 by the Shanghai Socialist Research Publishing Company.

28 Wang Binbin 王彬彬, "Gezai Zhong-Xi zhijian de Riben – xiandai hanyu zhong de riyu 'wai lai yu' wenti" 隔在中西之間的日本 – 現代漢語中的日語“外來語”問題, *Shanghai wenxue* 上海文學, no. 8 (1998): 71–80.

of the modern Western humanities and natural sciences. What is surprising, however, is that, pitted against the Chinese characters Japanese translators had used in their terms, the ones that Chinese scholars came up with always lost.²⁹ One can observe this where the terms Chinese scholars came up with in translations of *Sizhou zhi* and other texts around the time were quickly overtaken by those used in Japanese translated texts. For “sociology,” Yan Fu had come up with “*qunxue* 群學;” however, the Chinese characters from the Japanese term, “*shehui xue* 社會學,” came to be commonly used. Other such instances include the term for economics, rendered *zisheng xue* 資生學 by Chinese scholars and *jingji xue* 經濟學 by Japanese scholars, and philosophy, rendered *zhixue* 智學 by Chinese translators and *zhexue* 哲學 by Japanese translators.³⁰

Indeed, Japanese texts and terminology played an influential role in the establishment of modern thought in Chinese society. Following the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Chinese scholars were in agreement about looking to Japanese texts to learn about Western civilization. In 1897, Liang Qichao and others pooled the capital to start the Datong Translation Bureau (*Datong yishu ju* 大同譯書局). Their translated texts would “focus on Japanese, with some attention to Western languages, and prioritize political studies, followed by the arts ... in order to save China from impending crisis.”³¹ In 1900, the late Qing scholar Gu Mingfeng 顧鳴鳳 declared that China should look to Japan as a model for self-strengthening because of the difficulty of learning Western languages. “From the time of the (Meiji) Reformation,” he wrote, “all manner of useful texts on Western politics and art had already been translated into Japanese.... Since China and Japan share one writing system, learning Japanese should take half the effort it would for a Chinese person to learn Western languages and character systems.”³²

At the time Western knowledge and discourse was being translated into Chinese via their Japanese versions, educational reform and the vernacular movement in China were also underway. In the case of educational reform, China was “retiring the imperial examination system to uplift new learning.” The change brought about by Western political, social, and cultural ideas completely shook the foundations of traditional Chinese epistemology and political discourse. The resulting impact this had on Chinese writing style, grammar, punctuation, and conceptual language was historically monumental.

29 Pei Yu 裴鈺, “Hunshen fama: bu jiang ‘Ribei hanyu’ jiu buneng shuohua” 渾身發麻：不講“日本漢語”就不能說話, *Lianhe zaobao* 聯合早報, Feb. 9, 2009.

30 Liang Qichao, “Lun xue Ribeiwen zhi yi” 論學日本文之益, in *Yinbingshi heji*, 4: 80.

31 Liang Qichao, “Chunqiu Zhongguo yidi bian xu,” 2: 58.

32 Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Zhai zi Zhongguo: Chongjian youguan “Zhongguo” de lishi lunshu* 宅茲中國：重建有關“中國”的歷史論述 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 186.

4 Confrontation and War Due to Differing Interpretations of the Character *Yi* 夷

Within the traditional worldview of China as the center of “all under heaven,” the *yi-xia* 夷夏 distinction was an important concept that differentiated Chinese peoples from the central plains from those on the frontiers. However, the terms Chinese people used to refer to Westerners changed greatly throughout the course of their interactions. In Lin Zexu’s 1838 “Chouyi yanjin yapien zhangcheng zhe” 籌議嚴禁鴉片章程折, he referred to European countries as “foreign countries” (*waiyang* 外洋). Just one year later, in his “Yu geguo yiren chengjiao yantu gao” 諭各國夷人呈繳煙土稿, he referred to them as *yi*. In the *Sizhou zhi*, which Lin took charge compiling from 1839 to 1840, the British are referred to as *man* 蠻.³³ Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857) referred to European countries as “Western *yi*” (*xiyi* 西夷) in his 1842 *Haiguo tuzhi xu* 海國圖志敘, but added that one should not take the traditional attitude of superiority towards these particular *yi*. From this, it is apparent that *yi* was commonly used at the time with regard to Westerners. By 1858, *yi* was no longer used to refer to the British. However, then provincial administrator of Jiangsu Deng Huaxi 鄧華熙 (1826–1916) still used “foreign *yi*” (*waiyi* 外夷) in reference to the Great Powers in an edict to the Guangxu Emperor (r. 1875–1908).

It is precisely because of the gulf between cultural norms and language usage, as well as the resulting mistranslations of words and concepts, that serious diplomatic conflicts, even some leading directly to war, have arisen between China and the West. In August 1834, the English-language newspaper *Chinese Repository* published a translated order from Lu Kun 盧坤 (1772–1835), the governor-general of Guangxi and Guangdong, to the Hong merchants in which the term *yimu* 夷目 (foreign leader) was translated as “barbarian eye,” causing great anger amongst British officials. On September 8, 1834, Lord Napier (1786–1834), British overseer of trade in China, taking personal offense at “barbarian eye,” declared war on the Qing government. Indeed, it could be said that “the first British military action in China was occasioned by neither opium nor trade,” but instead, “Napier’s determination to vindicate the honor of the government of His Britannic Majesty.”³⁴

As the use of *yi* was so central to Sino-British conflict, the Treaty of Tianjin signed in 1858 included an Article 51 in Chinese which read, “It is agreed that, henceforward, the character ‘Y 夷 (barbarian) shall not be applied to

33 Lin Zexu, *Sizhou zhi*, 114.

34 Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 63–65.

the Government or subjects of Her Britannic Majesty in any Chinese official document issued by the Chinese Authorities either in the Capital or in the Provinces.”³⁵ With the official censoring of *yi*, the character’s use in such words as *yixing* 夷行, referring to foreign trade, and *yiwu* 夷務, referring to foreign affairs, was replaced by *yang* 洋.

As Lydia Liu has pointed out, the legal banning of *yi* by the Treaty of Tianjin was responsible for “forcing the Chinese word to refer its signified ... onto the English word ‘barbarian.’”³⁶ Additionally, “... *yi/barbarian* articulates a particular vision of sovereignty at the meeting ground of the British and Qing empires.”³⁷ In discussions on the matter, Chinese officials continually emphasized that *yi* did not have negative connotations, that “Mencius himself said, ‘King Shun was an eastern *yi* and King Wen was a western *yi*.’”³⁸ Yet, when it came to this word, which has been in use throughout China’s thousands of years of history, it was not the Chinese understanding that mattered for how it was interpreted, but the British understanding. The nineteenth century Sino-British debate over *yi* was an interesting case of how Westerners firmly took hold of power over Chinese language, including the unilateral power to arbitrate on its interpretation.

5 Adoption of Terms Such as *Zhongzu* and *Minzu*

In today’s China, *minzu* 民族 has long become a commonly used key term in everyday life as well as lawmaking and justice systems. However, its current meanings do not stem from traditional Chinese culture or thought but came into China during the late Qing. Its nuances and usages are still widely discussed and the debates around them are deeply informed by modern Chinese history. As such, the terms associated with it are critical to understanding how modern Chinese people have forged a new sense of identity and established a new thread of focus in modern Chinese thought.

35 Ibid., 70–71.

36 Ibid., 35.

37 Ibid., 34.

38 Ibid., 43. This passage appears in the following passage from *The Mencius*: “Shun was born in Zhu Ping, moved to Fu Xia, and died in Ming Tiao. He was a man of the Eastern *yi* lands. King Wen was born in Qi Zhou and died in Bi Ying. He was a man of the Western *yi* lands. The distance between the two lands was over a thousand *li*. The two men lived over a thousand years apart. But when it came to realizing their wishes in the central plains, the two were as one. Both the former and the latter are sages; both stood by the same principles.” See Jiao Xun 焦循, *Mengzi Zhengyi* 孟子正義, annot. Shen Wenzhuo 沈文倬 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 537–40.

5.1 “Minzu” in Traditional Chinese Texts

Notable scholar Ya Hanzhang 牙含章 (1916–1989) has written the entry “Minzu” for the *Zhongguo da baike quanshu* 中國大百科全書:

The term *minzu* in Chinese appears rather late period-wise. In ancient texts of China, the word *zu* is often used as is *min* 民, *ren* 人, *zhong* 種, *bu* 部, *lei* 類 as well as *minren* 民人, *minzhong* 民種, *minqun* 民群, *zhongren* 種人, *buren* 部人, *zulei* 族類 and so forth. However, the combination of *min* with *zu* as a single word occurred later. Although there are some scholars who believe that *minzu* was already in use in premodern Chinese society, it is difficult to confirm that it maintained a distinct orientation and stable meaning as a concept from premodern times to the present.³⁹ It is even harder to connect its meanings to that of our current usage as they originate in different epistemologies. In 1903, Liang Qichao introduced to China the German-Swiss political theorist and law scholar J.K. Bluntschli’s ideas about ethnicity and nation. Thus, use of the word spread, and its meanings are often confused with the concept of race or nation. This confusion is inseparable from the influence of the Western European ideas.⁴⁰

5.2 *Minzu and Zhongzu in 19th Century Chinese Sources*

As the Western ideological system gradually made its way across China in the mid-19th century via translated texts, Chinese scholars from the late Qing onward inevitably adopted newly imported terms such as race, nation, religion, sovereignty, and citizen when discussing Chinese history, society, and culture.⁴¹ *Minzu* and its associated concepts was used not only to describe different groups of people residing in China from the late Qing to Republican (1912–1949) period; it, along with the other new terms, was also used to interpret and describe Chinese society of earlier periods.

39 “With careful research into various examples of *minzu*’s usage in premodern China, it is not hard to realize that its meaning is not clear, seeming to encompass many definitions, and is largely used to express ‘*minzhi zushu* 民之族属 [people’s clan affiliation]’ or ‘*minzhi zulei* 民之族类 [people’s clan].’ Its meaning is very similar to *zulei*.” See Huang Xingtao, *Chongsu Zhonghua: jindai Zhongguo “Zhonghua minzu” guannian yanjiu*, 70.

40 Ya Hanzhang 牙含章, ed., “Minzu juan” 民族卷, in *Zhongguo da baike quanshu* 中國大百科全書 (Beijing: Zhongguo da baike chubanshe, 1986), 302.

41 Liang Qichao emphasized in particular the difference between traditional and modern notions of state (*guojia* 國家): “The state refers to the nation as the private property of a group. The premodern idea of the state necessarily began with the family ... and referred to the nation as the public property of its citizens.” Liang Qichao, “Datong yishu ju xuli” 大同譯書局敘例, in *Yinbingshi heji*, 2: 56.

According to scholarly research, the first use in Chinese of *minzu* in its modern sense appeared in Prussian missionary Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff's (1803–1851) *Jiushizhu Yesu Jidu xinglun zhi yaolue zhuan* 救世主耶穌基督行論之要略傳: “Preach to the multiple *minzu* both Chinese and foreign to repent one's sins and lay oneself open to the teachings of our savior Jesus Christ.”⁴² The fact that a European person used the Chinese *minzu* to translate “nation” undoubtedly influenced Chinese scholars. Westerners invented the concept of “race” and introduced it to China. It was a Westerner who, in 1892, translated into Chinese and published an essay which includes in-depth discussion on how to use skin color to racially differentiate humans.⁴³ The Dutch scholar Frank Dikötter has noted that the introduction of literary Darwinism to China in the nineteenth century by Yan Fu led to an abandonment of the traditional Chinese focus on culture as the most important standard by which groups of people were differentiated and its replacement by race.⁴⁴ This was a major shift from how group and political identity traditionally operated in China.

The shifts in framework occurring within the Chinese academic world can further be observed through shifts in Liang Qichao's language usage as one of the most influential thinkers of the Late Qing to Republican periods. From 1896 to 1901, undoubtedly influenced by Yan Fu, Liang used *zhongzu* in reference to groups of people. In 1896, he discussed “racial conflict” (*zhongzu zhi zheng* 種族之爭) in “Bianfa tongyi” 變法通議, arguing that “reforming China must necessarily start with equality between Manchu and Han races.”⁴⁵ In 1897, he mentioned in “Chunqiu Zhongguo yidi bian xu” 春秋中國夷狄辨序 that “when later generations say ‘yi’ and ‘di,’ they are referring to their districts as well as race.”⁴⁶ In 1899, he argued in “Lun Zhongguo yu Ouzhou guoti yitong” 論中國與歐洲國體異同 that “the Xirong, Lairong, Luhunrong, Qiangrong, Huaiyi, Chidi, Baidi, Changdi and other races all live among one another in the hinterlands.”⁴⁷ When referring to different groups who have appeared in Chinese history, Liang uses the term “race” (*zhongzu*).

42 Huang Xingtao, *Chongsu Zhonghua: jindai Zhongguo “Zhonghua minzu” guannian yanjiu*, 72.

43 See “Ren wu fen lei shuo” 人五分類說 in *Gezhi huibian* 格致彙編 7.2 (1892) cited in Frank Dikötter 馮克, *Jindai Zhongguo zhi zhongzu guannian* 近代中國之種族觀念 (*The Discourse of Race in Modern China*), trans. Yang Lihua 楊立華 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1999), 52.

44 Dikötter, *Jindai Zhongguo zhi zhongzu guannian*, 63.

45 Liang Qichao, “Bianfa tongyi, lunyi shu” 變法通議·論譯書, in *Yinbingshi heji*, 1: 77.

46 Liang Qichao, “Chunqiu Zhongguo yidi bian xu,” 2: 48.

47 Liang Qichao, “Lun Zhongguo yu Ouzhou guoti yitong” 論中國與歐洲國體異同, in *Yinbingshi heji*, 4: 64.

5.3 *Minzu as Race and also as Nation*

Wang Ke argues that “of essays about nationalism written by Chinese thinkers at the start of the twentieth century, nearly all were without exception derived from Japan.” He believes that the idea of *minzu* received by late Qing Chinese was “a misunderstanding that came from Japan.”⁴⁸ In Japan, Wang says, the English word “nation” was first translated into Japanese with the Chinese characters 國民 (*guomin/kokumin*). Further, “prior to the Meiji, the concept the Japanese now commonly express using the characters 民族 (*minzu/minzoku*) did not yet exist.”⁴⁹ In 1888, the geographer Shiga Shigetaka 志賀重昂 (1863–1927), in introductory remarks for the magazine *Nihonjin* 日本人, makes mention of the “Yamato race” (*Yamato minzoku* 大和民族). Wang writes, “the fact that *minzu* would emerge and become widely used in as racially homogenous a country as Japan is because it strengthens the idea of ‘one race as one nation’ for Japanese people.”⁵⁰ In other words, as a new group identity formation, the emergence of the “Yamato race” discursively establishes a theoretical foundation for a modern Japanese state based on ethnicity. In 1896, the word *minzu* appeared in an article published in the Chinese newspaper *Shiwu bao*’s 時務報 “Dongfang baoyi” 東方報譯 section, dedicated to translating content from Japanese newspapers. Chinese intellectuals immediately took notice, due largely to the fact that, following the First Sino-Japanese War, members of the Chinese elite of various ethnic backgrounds had been studiously learning from Japan lessons on national strengthening.

In 1898, Liang Qichao traveled to Japan and began engaging with Japanese texts. That year, he wrote, “It is my hope that, from now on, the Chinese nation (*minzu*) may once again come into the light and exist in the world freely and independently.”⁵¹ At the time, he used *minzu* to refer to the many different groups residing within China. In 1901, Liang discussed in his work *Zhongguo shi xulun* 中國史敘論 the first instances where different groups in China used the word *minzu* across Chinese history. He also pointed out the extremely complex changes experienced by these groups who split up and rejoined as they continued into the present. He felt that using current names of ethnic groups to describe related ethnic groups he had found mentioned in the textual sources would be too simplistic. In the same essay, he also brings attention to

48 Wang Ke 王柯, *Minzu zhuyi yu jindai Zhongri guanxi* 民族主義與近代中日關係 (Hong Kong: Xianggang Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2015), 45 and 54.

49 *Ibid.*, 54.

50 *Ibid.*, 60–61.

51 Jin Guantao 金觀濤 and Liu Qingfeng 劉青峰, *Guannian shi yanjiu: Zhongguo xiandai zhongyao zhengzhi shuyu de xingcheng* 觀念史研究：中國現代重要政治術語的形成 (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 2009), 242.

a valence of *minzu* that is close to *guozu* 國族 (nation): “The final years of the Qianlong reign saw the most intense period of widespread conflict between Chinese *minzu* and other Asian *minzu*, as well as China and Asia.” He goes on to say, “The Asia of today is in a period where imperialism is being replaced by nationalism (*minzu zhuyi* 民族主義).”⁵² Here, Liang uses *minzu* to mean both “nation” and to refer to the various races and ethnicities that make up China. In 1902, Liang manifestly introduces the term *Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族 (Sinitic/Chinese nation) in his work, *Lun Zhongguo xueshu sixiang bianqian zhi dashi* 論中國學術思想變遷之大勢.⁵³ In the same year, he writes in “Xin shi xue” 新史學 of the need for China to “unify the nation in order to exclude other nations.”⁵⁴ These examples begin to shed light on the relationship between *minzu* and the concept of nation.

5.4 Constructing “China”: Does Guozu Include All Chinese People or Refer Only to the Ethnic Han?

Under the influence of foreign discourse, ethnic groups such as the Manchus, Han, Mongols, Hui, and Tibetans came to be known as *minzu*. As this was the case, Liang Qichao attempted to put forth two frameworks for group identification in order to better distinguish *minzu* from *guozu*. In his 1903 essay, “Zhengzhixue dajia Bolun zhili zhi xueshuo” 政治學大家伯倫知理之學說, he writes, “when speaking of *minzu* in China, we must encourage big nationalism over small nationalism. Small nationalism refers to the ethnic Han and other peoples in China whereas big nationalism unites the multiple ethnicities in China against foreign races.”⁵⁵ Here, “big nationalism” refers to *guozu* as including all Chinese peoples, whereas “small nationalism” maintains the by then popularized practice of referring to different groups within China as *minzu*. Liang emphasizes the importance of the former due to the dire circumstances of the times.

In his 1903 personal account *Geming jun* 革命軍, Zou Rong 邹容 (1885–1905) referred to “the two hundred and sixty years after the royal Han (*Huanghan*

52 Liang Qichao, “Zhongguo shi xulun” 中國史敘論, in *Yinbingshi heji*, 4: 6, 11, and 19.

53 “齊, 海國也。上古時代, 我中華民族之有海思想者厥惟齊。” Liang Qichao, “Lun Zhongguo xueshu sixiang bianqian zhi dashi” 論中國學術思想變遷之大勢, in *Yinbingshi heji*, 7: 21. Shen Songqiao 沈松橋 renders “nation,” “nationalism,” and “nation-state” as “國族,” “國族主義,” and “國族-國家,” respectively. See “Wo yi wo xie jian Xuanyuan – Huangdi shenhua yu wan Qing de guozu jiangou” 我以我血薦軒轅 – 皇帝神話與晚清的國族建構, *Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan* 台灣社會研究季刊 28 (1997): 1–77.

54 Liang Qichao, “Xin shi xue” 新史學, in *Yinbingshi heji*, 9: 11.

55 Liang Qichao, “Zhengzhixue dajia Bolunzhili zhi xueshuo” 政治學大家伯倫知理之學說, in *Yinbingshi heji*, 13: 75–76.

minzu 皇漢民族) lost their country,” including himself as one of the “royal Han.” He connected the ethnic Han with the Ming dynasty and considered the Yellow Emperor as an ancestor. At the same time, he grouped Mongol (as well as Manchu) people as a “Siberian race” rather than a Chinese race and suggested “eliminating those over five million peoples who wear animal furs on their bodies and horns on their heads.”⁵⁶ In his preface to Zou’s work, Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1868–1936) wrote that “driving away those foreign peoples would restore our lands to the glorious times of old. Since the China of today has already fallen to foreign invaders, what we should strive for is not revolution, but the restoration of what was.”⁵⁷ In his 1903 work “Jingshi zhong” 警世鐘, Chen Tianhua 陳天華 (1875–1905) used the terms “Han race,” “Han people,” and “ethnic Han” interchangeably.⁵⁸ This reflects the fact that, although the foreign-derived concepts of “race” and “nation” were beginning to gain traction at the time, people’s understandings of these terms were hardly consistent or uniform. Zou Rong, Chen Tianhua, and Zhang Taiyan, for instance, produced intensely narrow-minded Han nationalist discourse based on these concepts.

In 1905, Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925) discussed nationalism, civil rights, and citizens’ welfare in the introductory remarks of the *Minbao* 民報.⁵⁹ In 1906, in “Zhongguo Tongmenghui geming fanglüe” 中國同盟會革命方略, he juxtaposed nationalism conceptualized as “for the nation (*minzu*)” versus “for the people (*guomin*),” highlighting the importance of “treating a country’s people as the basis of nationalist movement” – hence, the concept of *guozu*.⁶⁰ Under the post-Xinhai Revolution order, Sun officially cast aside the provincial Han nationalist position of “driving away Dalu peoples in order to restore China,” instead adopting the nation-building ideal of “uniting the five races” especially championed in northern China. In January of 1912, in “Linshi Dazongtong xuan-yanshu” 臨時大總統宣言書 he clarified that “combining the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan lands as one country and bringing together the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan races as one people is what is meant by national unification.”⁶¹ For Sun, the *minzu* in *Zhonghua minzu* refers to but

56 Zou Rong 邹容, *Gemingjun* 革命軍 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2002), 5, 7, 37, and 42.

57 Ibid., 1–4.

58 Chen Tianhua 陳天華, *Jingshi zhong, Meng huitou* 警世鐘·猛回頭 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2002).

59 Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 [Sun Yat-sen], “*Mingbao fakan ci*” 《民報》發刊詞, in *Sun Zhongshan quanji* 孫中山全集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 1: 288.

60 Sun Zhongshan, “Zhongguo tongmenghui geming fanglüe” 中國同盟會革命方略, in *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, 1: 311.

61 Sun Zhongshan, “Zai Nanjing Tongmenghui huiyuan jianbiehui de yanjiang” 在南京同盟會會員錢別會的演講, in *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, 2: 2.

one unit that comprises the *minzu guojia* 民族國家, or “nation state.” In 1923, Sun stated in the “Zhongguo guomindang xuanyan” 中國國民黨宣言 and “Zhongguo guomindang danggang” 中國國民黨黨綱 that “(we should) unite the various ethnic groups in the country to achieve a great Chinese nation.”⁶² During the first of the new “Sanmin zhuyi” 三民主義 talks a year later, he asked, “What is nationalism? Based on the various scenarios in the history of Chinese society ... nationalism is *guozu zhuyi*.”⁶³ Additionally, “everyone joins together to form a great national group.”⁶⁴ Sun’s words all speak to the nationalism he sought, one which inherently casts the inclusion of all Chinese peoples as the change that will lead to a “great Chinese nation.”

5.5 Applications of Concepts of Minzu to the Studies of Chinese History

As *minzu* had by the late Qing entered discourses on relationships between different groups in China as well as been used to refer to those different groups, it was inevitable that the modern term would make it into the vocabulary of scholars who were, at the time, researching inter-ethnic relationships in Chinese history. Here, also, it is possible to observe in the diction of such scholars the indelible mark of Japanese influence.

In his 1928 publication, *Zhongguo minzu shi* 中國民族史, Wang Tonglin 王桐齡 (1878–1953) indicates, “Based on historical observations of events, there was only one *minzu* in the Far East. Historical sources refer to that race as the Eastern *yi*.”⁶⁵ Wang’s book is one of the first published works on the history of race and ethnicity in China. Applying concepts of *minzu* to describe the peoples of ancient China probably reflects his experience as an overseas student in Japan.

Many subsequent works sharing the title of Wang’s books followed in his application of *minzu*. One example is Lü Simian’s 呂思勉 (1884–1957) 1934 book which contains a passage on the characteristics of the ethnic Han: “As for the Han ... the more *minzu* are absorbed into their population, the vaster the nation’s lands shall be.”⁶⁶ Lin Huixiang 林惠祥 (1901–1958) writes in another eponymous book of 1936, “The history of *minzu* in China is a narrative of the changes undergone by China’s multiple *minzu* from past to present.

62 Sun Zhongshan, “Zhongguo guomindang xuanyan” 中國國民黨宣言, in *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, 7: 3.

63 Sun Zhongshan, “Sanmin zhuyi” 三民主義, in *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, 9: 184–85.

64 *Ibid.*, 242.

65 Wang Tonglin 王桐齡, *Zhongguo minzu shi* 中國民族史 (Changchun: Jilin chuban jituan, 2010), 9.

66 Lü Simian 呂思勉, *Zhongguo minzu shi* 中國民族史 (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1996), 3.

More specifically, it is a discussion of the origins of each, the evolution of their nomenclature, distinctions between their subgroups, their rises to and falls from power, cultural shifts, and issues concerning their interactions and intermingling.⁶⁷ Thus, *minzu* came to be adopted and widely used to describe different peoples throughout Chinese history.

6 Concluding Remarks

Looking back at China's interactions with Western powers around the time of the Opium Wars, it is evident that Western colonizers employed a double standard in their dealings with China. In the eyes of Europeans, the difference between "civilized" and "barbaric" people was a matter of racial essentialism. This is why the Great Powers of Europe applied a different moral and legal standard in diplomacy with one another versus when engaging the nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Without understanding this point, it is very possible to accept the universal value of Western concepts and discourse.

The Opium Wars represented a turning point in Chinese history. The arrival of Western political concepts and language overturned the Chinese cultural order and group dynamics that had traditionally been based on the ideas of a Chinese empire encompassing "all under heaven" and the "Sino-Barbarian dichotomy." In the new context of Western dominance, the Chinese people had little choice but to try to learn, understand, and adopt the foreign lexicon while also struggling to find ways to preserve the nation and its people despite the humiliating conditions.

Having now arrived at the international stage of the twenty-first century, broadly maintaining relations with many other nations is of utmost importance. While doing so, it is also important to communicate using language and concepts that are understandable and acceptable to others. The Western concepts and discourses that entered China during the modern period and which have since been adopted as part of the Chinese lexicon are now a necessary tool for building such relationships. However, it is precisely for this reason that researchers must remain cautious on two counts.

Firstly, many foreign concepts contain meanings which are incompatible with traditional Chinese worldviews; thus, we cannot unilaterally apply Western concepts to the understanding of ancient China, even less so to

67 Lin Huixiang 林惠祥, *Zhongguo minzu shi* 中國民族史 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1998), 2.

reductive interpretations of China today. To do so would be to risk the procrustean error of “maiming one’s feet to fit too-small shoes.” Thus, when discussing group dynamics in ancient China, we would do well to avoid using such modern Western conceptual terms as “nation” and “ethnic group.” Terms such as *chao* 朝 (dynasty) and *guo* 國 (state) have their own nuances and characteristics within the context of Chinese history. They are not interchangeable or discursively compatible with words used elsewhere in the world such as “empire,” “kingdom,” or, more recently, “nation-state.”

Secondly, we must carefully untangle the exact route by which these core concepts came into China and analyze the cultural background informing the different ways Chinese people understood these concepts in different time periods. After building concrete scenarios of how these foreign concepts were used in Chinese society during and after the Opium Wars, we must give them clear definitions. Since it is possible that Chinese people’s understandings of these concepts were partially different from their original definitions, it is necessary to add attributive or conditional words and explanations. Research in the fields of conceptual history and sociology of knowledge are essential to Chinese-foreign intellectual and cultural exchange. What we are facing are two completely different paths of historical development, two sets of fundamental concepts and language systems that arose from different political, economic, and cultural environments. Only with a strong foundation in conceptual historical studies can one open up mutual dialogue rooted in the essence of things and, gradually, actualize deep understanding between the two sides.

We must systematically work through all the Western political and cultural ideas accepted into China over the past two hundred years, acknowledge the gap between the two sides when engaged in comparative analysis of traditional China, seek out possible points of similarity, and analyze the reasons for the differences. Only by doing so can we truly recognize, through comparison, the Western world and, in turn, gain a deeper understanding of China and Chinese society. In terms of participating in international politics and cultural exchanges, Chinese people strive towards deep awareness of world civilizations, including those of the West. We should also try to understand more deeply the political and cultural traditions of the many peoples in China. From there, it may be possible to gain political and cultural self-awareness.

When the alternative to learning from Western countries is to perish as a nation, there is no choice but to do so. Only after grasping the rules of the West’s games – even drawing on knowledge passed down from Chinese ancestors to exhibit skill on an international stage – can the Chinese people start to take the initiative and begin to restore China’s cultural confidence. In order

to do so, they must position themselves firmly in the present world stage and, from its highest institutions of knowledge, learn to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of all the civilizations of humanity, including Western, Islamic, Indian civilizations as well as the Sinitic civilization. At the same time, they must master the ability to communicate cross-culturally and develop skills to facilitate harmonious interaction between different cultural groups, perhaps even merging them. To this end, the wisdom their ancestors maintained across thousands of years of Chinese civilization is an incomparable resource.

Translated by Casey Lee

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The Earliest “China”: The Concept of *Zhongguo* during the Xia, Shang, and Western Zhou Dynasties

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Abstract

The inscription of “He Zun” 何尊 and the “Zicai” 梓材 in *Shangshu* 尚書, both of which record events during the early Western Zhou dynasty, are historical texts containing the earliest appearance of the term *zhongguo* 中國. The *zhongguo* in those texts was a concept which was extremely rich in meaning. It does not refer specifically to the Luoyang 洛陽 region, which was then considered the heart of the Chinese kingdom, but rather refers to the capital in a geographical sense as well as the state in a political sense. When *zhongguo* first appeared in writing, it did not refer to China and Chinese culture yet. It was neither a racial concept which referred specifically to the Chinese race, nor a cultural concept which referred to Chinese culture. When *zhongguo* first appeared in writing during the early Zhou dynasty, it was a written record of the concept of *zhongguo* which was already in wide circulation in society at that time. In fact, the concept of *zhongguo* probably originated even before the early Western Zhou dynasty. Noting the origins of concepts such as *zhong* 中 and *dizhong* 地中 (the center of the land), some archaeologists have concluded that *zhongguo* first appeared during the Taosi 陶寺 period, the Miaodigou 廟底溝 period, or the Erlitou 二里頭 period. Studying these archaeological findings in conjunction with recounts regarding *zhongguo* in historical texts, it is probably historically accurate to date the earliest appearance of the concept of *zhongguo* to the founding of the Xia dynasty.

Keywords

Xia – Shang – Western Zhou – China and the concept of *zhongguo*

Just what does *zhongguo* 中國 refer to? When did *zhongguo* first appear, and what was its meaning? Notwithstanding the fact that several scholars have expounded on this topic,¹ owing to discrepancies in textual sources and varying interpretations, these questions have remained points of contention in scholarly debate. In view of this ongoing debate, we offer our views here in hopes of eliciting further discussion.

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- 1 Scholarly works discussing the concept of *zhongguo* in ancient China include: Chen Dengyuan 陳登原, *Guoming shugu* 國名疏故 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936); Yu Xingwu 于省吾, “Shi zhongguo” 釋中國, in *Zhonghua xueshu lunwenji* 中華學術論文集, ed. Zhonghua shuju bianjibu 中華書局編輯部 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1981); Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 and Wang Shumin 王樹民, “Xia’ he ‘zhongguo’ – zuguo gudai de chenghao” “夏” 和 “中國” – 祖國古代的稱號, in *Zhongguo lishi dili luncong* 中國歷史地理論叢, ed. Shi Nianhai 史念海 (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe 1981), 1; Wang Ermin 王爾敏, “Zhongguo mingcheng suyuan jiqi jindai quanshi” 中國名稱溯源及其近代詮釋, *Chinese Cultural Renaissance Monthly* 中華文化復興月刊 (Taipei), 5/8 (1973); Yu Rongchun 于溶春, “Zhongguo’ yici de youlai, yanbian jiqi yu minzu de guanxi” “中國” 一詞的由來、演變及其與民族的關係, *Neimenggu shehui kexue* 內蒙古社會科學, no. 2 (1986); Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, “Lishi shang de zhongguo he zhongguo lidai jiangyu” 歷史上的中國和中國歷代疆域, *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu* 中國邊疆史地研究, no. 1 (1991); Chen Liankai 陳連開, “Zhongguo, huayi, fanhan, zhonghua, zhonghua minzu” 中國·華夷·蕃漢·中華·中華民族, in *Qitong chujie: Chen Liankai xueshu lunwenji* 求同初階: 陳連開學術論文集 (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2008); Zhang Huanzhou 張環宙, “Shilun ‘zhongguo’ hanyi de fazhan” 試論 “中國” 含義的發展, *Huzhou shizhuan xuebao* 湖州師專學報, no. 2 (1995); Luo Zhitian 羅志田, “Xianqin de wufuzhi yu gudai de tianxia zhongguoguan” 先秦的五服制與古代的天下中國觀, in *Xueren* 學人, ed. Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, Wang Shoutang 王守堂, and Wang Hui 汪暉 (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1996), 10; Hu Axiang 胡阿祥, *Weizai siming – “zhongguo” gujin chengwei yanjiu* 偉哉斯名 – “中國” 古今稱謂研究 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001); He Zhihu 何志虎, “Zhongguo’ chengwei de qi yuan” “中國” 稱謂的起源, *Renwen zazhi* 人文雜誌, no. 5 (2002); Hu Yaohua 胡耀華, “Dui ‘zhongguo’ gainian yanbian ji diyuan neihan de fenxi” 對 “中國” 概念演變及地緣內涵的分析, *Jiangxi shifan daxue xuebao* 江西師範大學學報, no. 5 (2004); Chen Yuping 陳玉屏, “Lue lun zhongguo gudai de ‘tianxia’, ‘guojia’ he ‘zhongguo guan’” 略論中國古代的 “天下”、 “國家” 和 “中國觀”, *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究, no. 1 (2005); Ge Zhaoguang 葛兆光, *Zhai zi Zhongguo: Chongjian youguan “Zhongguo” de lishi lunshu* 宅茲中國: 重建有關 “中國” 的歷史論述 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011).

1 The Earliest Appearance of *Zhongguo* in Writing and Its Meaning

There is a general consensus in scholarly circles that the term *zhongguo* first appeared in writing in the inscription of “He Zun” 何尊 and the “Zicai” 梓材 in *Shangshu* 尚書, both of which date to the early Western Zhou dynasty (1045–256 BCE).

Unearthed at Jiacun 賈村 Plateau, Baoji 寶雞 City, Shaanxi Province, in 1965, “He Zun” was a bronze vessel dating to the early Western Zhou dynasty. There are 122 characters inscribed on the inner surface of its base (known as the inscription of “He Zun”) which record King Cheng’s 成王 lectures to his junior clansmen during the Western Zhou dynasty. Specifically, the inscription tells us about historical events such as the overthrowing of the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE) by King Wu 武王 of Zhou and his subsequent construction of the city of Cheng Zhou 成周 (at modern day Luoyang 洛陽). According to it, after King Wu of Zhou overthrew the Shang dynasty, he announced to the heavens, “*Zhongguo* (central territory) is where I shall dwell; it is also from here that I shall rule the people.” According to Ma Chengyuan’s 馬承源 (1927–2004) interpretation, the term *zhongguo* in the inscription refers to “the heart of the known world, that is, Luo city at the confluence of the Yi 伊 and Luo 洛 rivers.”² Similarly, Li Xueqin 李學勤 (1933–2019) has proposed that *zhongguo* in this inscription refers to *tuzhong* 土中 (in the earth) in “Shaogao” 召誥 in *Shangshu*, “meaning the heart of the known world.” Since “the Zhou people saw the Chengzhou region as the heart of the known world,” they referred to the Chengzhou/Luoyang region as *zhongguo*.³ Sun Qingwei 孫慶偉 has offered an alternative explanation, arguing that the character *zhong* 中 in the term *zhongguo* in “He Zun” does not denote a specific geographical location, but refers to “the center” in a politico-cultural sense.⁴ Hu Axiang 胡阿祥 has also argued that “the earliest meaning of *zhongguo* was a castle or plot of land situated in a central location,” that “the inscription of ‘He Zun’ tells us in no uncertain terms that *zhongguo* first referred to Luoyang” and that “Chengzhou was synonymous with *zhongguo*.”⁵ Li Kejian 李克建 has wrote that “*zhongguo* first referred

2 Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, “He zun mingwen chu shi” 何尊銘文初釋, *Wenwu* 文物, no. 1 (1976).

3 Li Xueqin 李學勤, “He zun xinshi” 何尊新釋, *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物, no. 1 (1981).

4 Sun Qingwei 孫慶偉, “Chuanshuo shidai yu zuizao zhongguo” 傳說時代與最早中國, *Yichan* 遺產, no. 1 (2019).

5 Hu Axiang 胡阿祥, “Zhongguo conghe erlai” 中國從何而來, *Weishi* 唯實, no. 5 (2016).

to the region with Luoyang at its heart.”⁶ Li Xinwei 李新偉 has also stated that “the earliest reference to *zhongguo*” refers to “the Central Plains with the confluence of the Yellow River 黃河 and the Luo River at its heart.”⁷ Conversely, He Zhenpeng 何振鵬 has argued that “*zhongguo* in the He bronze vessel refers to the eastern regions under Shang control.”⁸ Xu Jiangwei 徐江偉 went a step further by discussing the form of the character *zhong* in the inscribed text *Zhaizi zhongguo* 宅茲中國 (meaning “dwell in *zhongguo*”). Building on this discussion, he argued that the term *zhongguo* in bronze inscriptions referred to “the most revered tribal state of the highest standing,” and that *zhongguo* was “the state among states” with the ability to command numerous tribal states.⁹

Another text in which *zhongguo* made an early appearance was the “Zicai” in *Shangshu*, which quotes King Cheng of Zhou as claiming, “the heavens has bestowed upon the house of Zhou the mandate to govern the people of *zhongguo*.” When Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) of the Tang dynasty (618–907) penned his commentary of *Shangshu*, he explained that *zhongguo* in this instance meant *zhongguo* of *jiuzhou* 九州 (nine provinces), which in turn referred to the entire region under the direct and indirect rule of the Western Zhou dynasty. Later generations have interpreted this in various ways. Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) and Wang Shumin 王樹民 (1911–2004) have argued that “the expressions *zhongguo min* 中國民 and its *jiangtu* 疆土 (territory) refer to the state of Zhou itself and her people.”¹⁰ They have also argued that the expressions *zhongguo min* and its *jiangtu* refer to the tangible concept of *quxia* 區夏 (the region inhabited by the Chinese race).¹¹ Chen Yuning 陳育寧 has also argued that “*zhongguo* in this sentence refers to ‘the state,’ which is certainly not confined to the capital or the area east of the Hangu Pass 函谷關; rather, it includes the entirety of the Western Zhou kingdom.”¹² Cao Yin 曹音 has argued that the phrase “*huangtian jifu zhongguo min*”

6 Li Kejian 李克建, “Tianxia’ yu ‘yitong’: renshi zhongguo gudai guojiaguan de jiben weidu” “天下”與“一統”: 認識中國古代國家觀的基本維度, *Guangxi minzu daxue xuebao* 廣西民族大學學報, no. 4 (2015).

7 Li Xinwei 李新偉, “Zuichu de zhongguo’ zhi kaoguxue rending” “最初的中國”之考古學認定, *Kaogu* 考古, no. 3 (2016).

8 He Zhenpeng 何振鵬, “He zun mingwen zhong de ‘zhongguo’” 何尊銘文中的“中國”, *Wenbo* 文博, no. 6 (2011).

9 Xu Jiangwei 徐江偉, “Qiguai de jinwen ‘zhong’ zi” 奇怪的金文“中”字, *Wenming qiyuan tansuo* 文明起源探索 (blog, WeChat account), September 21, 2020.

10 Gu Jiegang and Wang Shumin, “Xia’ he ‘zhongguo’ – zuguo gudai de chenghao,” 8.

11 Wang Shumin 王樹民, *Shu’an wenshi xulu* 曙庵文史續錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 104.

12 Chen Yuning 陳育寧, *Zhonghua minzu ningjuli de lishi tansuo* 中華民族凝聚力的歷史探索 (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1994), 90.

皇天既付中國民 in *Shangshu* means that “the heavens have bestowed the people and land of the Yin kingdom upon our deceased king,” suggesting that he interpreted *zhongguo* in this instance as “the people and land of the Yin kingdom.”¹³ Luo Bei 羅蓓 et al. have similarly argued that “in the eyes of the Zhou people, the earliest appearance of *zhongguo* referred to the lost lands of the Shang, while *zhongguoren* 中國人 referred to the Shang people.”¹⁴ Tian Guanglin 田廣林 and Zhai Chao 翟超 have argued that *zhongguomin* and its *jiangtu* “undoubtedly refers to the people previously subjected to Shang rule and the lost lands of the Shang,” and that *zhongguo* “referred to the Shang state.”¹⁵ In contrast, Zhang Guoshuo 張國碩 has argued that “*zhongguo* in this instance refers to a specific region, probably the heartlands of the Shang kingdom.”¹⁶ Chen Liankai 陳連開 has pointed out that *zhongguo*, according to the records of *Shangshu*, can be cross-referenced with *zhongguo* in “He Zun,” and that “*zhongguo* clearly refers to the region with Luoyang at its heart.”¹⁷ Ma Manli 馬曼麗 et al. have argued that “*zhongguo* in this instance refers to the territories surrounding the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, with Luoyang at its heart.”¹⁸ Ge Jianxiong 葛劍雄 has further argued that “the *guo* 國 (capital city) where the son of heaven resides was situated in a central location, so it was naturally referred to as *zhongguo*” and that “following the overthrow of the Shang by King Wu of Zhou, he thought that the heavens bestowed him with the mandate to rule *zhongguo* because he occupied the Shang capital,” thus interpreting *zhongguo* as “the capital city.”¹⁹

In fact, *zhongguo* in “He Zun” and *Shangshu* was already rich in meaning. First, it could refer to the Luoyang region at the heart of the known world, that is, the Central Plains. As mentioned earlier, most scholars agree with the interpretation of *zhongguo* from the phrase *zhai zi zhongguo* in “He Zun” as

13 Cao Yin 曹音, *Shangshu, Zhou shu shiyi* 尚書·周書釋疑 (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanlian shudian, 2015), 64.

14 Luo Bei 羅蓓 et al., eds., *Zhongguo chuantong wenhua tonglun* 中國傳統文化通論 (Chengdu: Xinan jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2015), 6.

15 Tian Guanglin 田廣林 and Zhai Chao 翟超, “Cong duoyuan dao yiti de zhuanzhe: wudi sanwang shidai de zaoqi zhongguo rentong” 從多元到一體的轉折：五帝三王時代的早期“中國”認同, *Shaanxi shifan daxue xuebao* 陝西師範大學學報, no. 1 (2008).

16 Zhang Guoshuo 張國碩, “Yetan zuizao de zhongguo” 也談最早的中國, *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物, no. 5, (2019).

17 Chen Liankai, “Zhongguo, huayi, fanhan, zhonghua, zhonghua minzu: yige neizai lianxi fazhan beirenshe de guocheng,” 498.

18 Ma Manli 馬曼麗, ed., *Zhongguo xibei bianjiang fazhanshi yanjiu* 中國西北邊疆發展史研究 (Harbin: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), 8.

19 Ge Jianxiong 葛劍雄, *Tongyi yu fenlie – zhongguo lishi de qishi* 統一與分裂—中國歷史的啟示 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2013), 20.

“the region with Luoyang at its heart.” Specifically, they believe that *zhongguo* in “He Zun” denotes the center of the known world. Luoyang was at the center of the known world, and was thus referred to as *zhongguo*. At the same time, they also agree that *zhongguo* in *Shangshu* means the center of the known world. Such an understanding seems to have become the consensus in academic circles, with little if any controversy.

Second, *zhongguo* could refer to the capital at the heart of the country. Some scholars have posited that “He Zun” recorded historical events relating to the construction of Chengzhou (Luoyang) during the early years of the Western Zhou dynasty. It thus follows that *zhai zi zhongguo* really means *zhai yu chengzhou* 宅於成周, or rather, the construction of houses in Chengzhou (Luoyang). While Chengzhou was not the capital of the Western Zhou dynasty, it was its secondary capital and could thus be referred to as one of the kingdom’s capitals. Hence, *Chengzhou zhongguo* in this instance also means “the capital of *zhongguo*.” In fact, the expression *zhai yu Chengzhou* in “He Zun” refers to the intention of King Cheng of Zhou to “dwell in Chengzhou,” while *zhai zi zhongguo* refers to the proclamation of King Wu of Zhou to the heavens. Thus, to equate these two expressions with each other would be a gross simplification. The capital of the Zhou kingdom during King Wu’s reign was not Chengzhou but rather Fenghao 豐鎬 (that is, Haojing 鎬京, present-day Xi’an 西安 in Shaanxi province). The construction of Chengzhou city mentioned in “He Zun” occurred during the reign of King Cheng. “He Zun” might have been the transcription of a lecture issued by King Cheng to a junior aristocrat He at Chengzhou, but it does not mention that King Wu also made his proclamation to the heavens at Chengzhou. The “Zhou Benji” 周本紀 in *Shiji* 史記 records that following the overthrow of the Shang dynasty by King Wu of Zhou, he held a grand ceremony to worship the heavens at the state altar in the former Shang capital of Zhaoge 朝歌. This seems to imply that King Wu of Zhou did not issue his proclamation to heaven at Chengzhou, but rather at the former Shang capital of Zhaoge. There seems to be no indication of King Wu’s intention to move the capital to Chengzhou from the expression *zhai zi zhongguo* in his proclamation to the heavens. If this hypothesis can indeed be proven, then *zhongguo* in “He Zun” certainly does not refer to Chengzhou, but rather the former Shang capital of Zhaoge or the Western Zhou capital of Haojing. It thus follows that the term *zhongguo* refers to the capital. Usage of the term *zhongguo* to refer to the capital is common in historical sources of the Western Zhou dynasty. The Mao’s 毛 commentary of the poem “Minlao” 民勞 found in the “Daya” 大雅 in *Shijing* 詩經 mentions “love the common people of *zhongguo*, so that the kingdom is at peace,” and also “love the common people of

the capital, so the kingdom is at peace."²⁰ In this poem, *zhongguo* and *jingshi* 京師 (capital city) were mentioned in parallel with each other, suggesting that they were identical in meaning. Hence, Mao Heng 毛亨 of the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) explained that "*zhongguo* refers to the capital city, while *sifang* 四方 refers to the Chinese civilization."²¹ When Kong Yingda of the Tang dynasty penned his annotations of *Chunqiu* 春秋 and *Zuozhuan* 左傳, he also wrote that "*zhongguo* refers to the capital city and *sifang* refers to the Chinese civilization,"²² clearly stating that *zhongguo* refers to the capital city.

Third, *zhongguo* could refer to the Shang dynasty, the Shang people, or the territories under Shang rule, or the Western Zhou people or the territories under Western Zhou rule, and thus refer to the state. The expression *huangtian jifu zhongguo min* in *Shangshu* means that the heavens bestowed the land and people of the Shang kingdom upon the King of Zhou and gave him the mandate to rule over them.²³ The use of *zhongguo min* to refer to both the Shang people in general and Shang loyalists is evident in this case. It is also conceivable that *zhongguo* in "He Zun" refers to the lands under Shang control. The term *zhongguo* in "He Zun" was used by King Wu of Zhou in his proclamation to the heavens following his conquest of the Shang. According to the "Zhou Benji," after King Wu conquered the Shang, he once held a grand ceremony to worship the heavens and inaugurate the new dynasty, thus proclaiming the formal establishment of the Western Zhou dynasty in place of the Shang. Tian Guanglin et al. are of the opinion that this record and the record in "He Zun" mentioning King Wu's conquest of the Shang, his worshipping of the heavens, and his prayers to the heavens "I shall dwell in *zhongguo*" all refer to the same event. Comparing both accounts, *zhongguo* is mentioned in parallel with the Shang, so it seems likely that the term refers to the Shang dynasty.²⁴ In other words, when *zhongguo* first appeared in writing, it also referred to the Shang state.

The term *zhongguo* was also used to refer to the state in other historical sources from the Western Zhou dynasty. According to the Mao school's commentary of the "Xiaoya" 小雅 in *Shijing*, the Kunyi 昆夷 tribe from the West

20 "Minlao" 民勞, in *Maoshi zhushu* 毛詩注疏, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980) 17.548.

21 Ibid., 548.

22 *Chunqiu Zuochuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 49.2095.

23 Chen Liankai, "Zhongguo, huayi, fanhan, zhonghua, zhonghua minzu: yige neizai lianxi fazhan beirensi de guocheng," 498.

24 Tian Guanglin and Zhai Chao, "Cong duoyuan dao yiti de zhuanzhe: wudi sanwang shidai de zaoqi zhongguo rentong."

and Xianyun 玁狁 tribe from the north frequently invaded *zhongguo* during the reign of King Wen 文王 of the Western Zhou kingdom. Under orders from the son of heaven, King Wen led expeditions “to defend *zhongguo*.”²⁵ During the reign of King Wen, the Zhou kingdom was still a vassal state of the Shang. The term “son of heaven” in the expression mentioning King Wen’s receiving of the “orders of the son of heaven” to lead an expedition against the Kunyi and Xianyun likely refers to the Shang king (or the Yin king) and not King Wen of Zhou. King Wen followed the Shang king’s orders to lead an expedition against the Kunyi and Xianyun mainly to defend the Shang state. Therefore, *zhongguo* in the term “to defend *zhongguo*” mainly refers to the Shang state.

Of course, King Wen of Zhou followed the Shang king’s orders to lead an expedition against the Kunyi and Xianyun not only to defend the Shang state, but also to defend Xiqi 西岐, that is, the Western Zhou state, which was a vassal of the Shang. Hence, *zhongguo* in this instance not only refers to the Shang state, but also to the Western Zhou state. Based on the expression *huangtian jifu zhongguo min* in *Shangshu*, we know that since the heavens bestowed upon the deceased king of Zhou the mandate to rule over the Shang people (*zhongguo min*) and the territories under Shang control (*jiangtu*), the Shang loyalists (*zhongguo min*) and the Shang territories thus became an integral part of the people and territories of the Western Zhou kingdom. It follows that the Western Zhou state had become the ruler of *zhongguo*, and that *zhongguo* naturally refers to the Western Zhou people and the lands ruled by the Western Zhou state. This point was also reflected in the relevant historical sources from the Western Zhou period. According to the Mao school’s commentary of the “Xiaoya” in *Shijing*, all the hallmarks of culture including poetry and song were abandoned, leading to successive invasions by the barbarians, causing *zhongguo* to be weakened.²⁶ During the reign of King You 幽王 (r. 782–771 BCE) of Western Zhou, the ethnic minorities from the west and the east (*Xirong* 西戎 and *Dongyi* 東夷) invaded *zhongguo* successively.²⁷ At that time, the ethnic minorities along the entire periphery of the kingdom rebelled against *zhongguo*, leading to continuous warfare in the border regions.²⁸ Undoubtedly, *zhongguo* in all of the instances above refer to the Western Zhou state. When Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (1848–1908) of the Qing dynasty (1616–1911) wrote explanatory notes for *Mozi* 墨子, he claimed that “*Zhongguo* during the early Zhou

25 “Caiwei” 采薇, in *Maoshi zhushu*, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 9.412–13.

26 “Liuyue” 六月, in *ibid.*, 10.424.

27 “Shaozhihua” 苕之華, in *ibid.*, 15.500.

28 “He cao bu huang” 何草不黃, in *ibid.*, 15.501.

referred to the Shang and Xia kingdoms, while *zhongguo* during the late Zhou referred to the Shang and Zhou kingdoms."²⁹ By interpreting *zhongguo* as the Shang and Xia kingdoms during the early Zhou and interpreting it as the Shang and Zhou kingdoms during the late Zhou, Sun effectively meant that *zhongguo* referred to the state.

Thus, it can be seen that when *zhongguo* first appeared in writing in "He Zun" and *Shangshu*, it not only referred to the Luoyang region at the heart of the known world, but in fact had multiple meanings, and mainly referred to the capital city in the geographical sense and the state in the political sense. It seems that when *zhongguo* first appeared in writing, it did not yet refer to Chinese civilization and culture. It was neither an ethnic concept which referred to the Chinese race, nor a cultural concept which referred to Chinese culture. *Zhongguo* only referred to the Chinese race and culture from the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE) and the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) onwards.

2 The Emergence of the *Zhongguo* Concept Predates Its Appearance in Writing

Although scholars disagree on the meaning of *zhongguo* in "He Zun" and *Shangshu*, there is consensus on the fact that they are the two earliest appearances of *zhongguo* in writing. Yu Xingwu 于省吾 (1896–1984) concluded, on the basis of meticulous research, that "the characters *huo* 或 and *guo* 國 did not exist in Shang oracle bone script."³⁰ Pointing out that the expression *zhongguo* did not exist before the Western Zhou period, and that "He Zun" and *Shangshu* were both written during the reign of King Cheng of the Western Zhou dynasty, suggesting that King Wu and his son King Cheng both used the expression *zhongguo*, Yu further argued that *zhongguo* became a standard expression no later than the early Western Zhou period. Yu Xingwu's argument that *zhongguo* first appeared in writing during the early Western Zhou period has been accepted by scholars and has become the consensus even among the general public.

The fact that *zhongguo* first appeared in writing during the early Western Zhou period does not mean that the concept of *zhongguo* also emerged only during the early Western Zhou period. This is because written records typically

29 Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Mozi jiangou* 墨子閒詁 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 14.309.

30 Yu Xingwu, "Shi zhongguo," 6.

appear after a certain concept has been transmitted by word of mouth in society over a period of time.

Based on the above hypothesis, several scholars have proposed that the term *zhongguo* originated from the Shang dynasty. For instance, Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣 (1911–1995) argued that the Shang dynasty was also referred to as the *zhongshang* 中商, “and it was from here that the term *zhongguo* originated.”³¹ Tian Qianjun 田倩君 has also argued that *Dayishang* 大邑商, the alternative name of the Shang, also referred to *zhongguo*; hence, “the term *zhongguo* certainly originated from the Shang.”³² Similarly, Tian Guanglin and Zhai Chao have opined that “the term *zhongguo* was already in popular use in Zhou society,” and that “given its popular usage by the Zhou period, it must have been preceded by a long period of circulation and passing down across the ages; hence, the upper limit of its period of circulation can naturally be traced to before the early Zhou period, and seems to have been the Shang period, which preceded the Western Zhou.”³³

It is indeed true that the *zhongguo* was already in circulation in society long before it first appeared in writing during the Western Zhou period, and that the term might have originated even before the Shang period, or that the concept of *zhongguo* originated during the Xia dynasty (ca. 2070–1600 BCE), which preceded the Shang. According to *Mengzi* 孟子, after the mythical emperor Yao 堯 died, Shun 舜 mourned his death for three years, after which he hid in seclusion “south of the Southern River” to dispel speculation regarding his intention to fight with Yao’s son Danzhu 丹朱 for the throne. It was only after the masses supported his ascension to the throne that he assumed the title of “the son of heaven” after arriving at *zhongguo*. Citing Pei Yin 裴駰 of the Song of the Southern dynasties (420–579), who in turn cited Liu Xi 劉熙 of the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), Sun Shi 孫奭 (962–1033) of the Song dynasty (960–1279) wrote in his annotation of *Mengzi*, “because the capital city where the kings and emperors reside was referred to as *zhong*, the capital city came to be known as *zhongguo*.”³⁴ Although *zhongguo* in this instance was derived from an account of the past by Mencius during the Warring States period, it seems to have been based on fact rather than

31 Hu Houxuan 胡厚宣, “Lun wufang guannian ji zhongguo chengwei zhi qi yuan” 論五方觀念及中國稱謂之起源, in *Jiaguxue shangshi luncong chujī* 甲骨學商史論叢初集 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1989), 4.

32 Tian Qianjun 田倩君, “Zhongguo’ yu ‘huaxia’ chengwei zhi xunyuan” “中國”與“華夏”稱謂之尋原, *Dalu zazhi* 大陸雜誌, 31.1 (1966).

33 Tian Guanglin and Zhai Chao, “Cong duoyuan dao yiti de zhuanzhe: wudi sanwang shidai de zaoqi zhongguo rentong.”

34 *Mengzi zhushu* 孟子注疏, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 9b.2737.

Mencius's fabrication or imagination. If this is indeed true, then the concept of *zhongguo* should have come into existence by the reigns of Yu 虞 and Shun during the Xia dynasty and was used to refer to the capital city at the heart of the kingdom. According to *Mengzi*, during Yao's reign, the land was "ravaged by floods" and the harvest was poor, leading to famine among the people of *zhongguo*. Yu the Great 大禹 was then entrusted by Yao to tame the waters, "so that (the people of) *zhongguo* may have food to eat."³⁵ *Zhongguo* in this instance probably includes the land "ravaged by floods" or the territories ruled by the Xia state. If this is indeed true, then the term *zhongguo* used by Mencius in this instance ought to refer to the Xia state. Furthermore, when Kong Yingda of the Tang dynasty wrote his annotation of the passage "Tan Gong shang" 檀弓上 in *Liji* 禮記, he claimed that Yu the Great expanded the boundaries of *zhongguo* via his flood control project, and therefore named a musical piece "Da Xia."³⁶ The term *zhongguo* in the instances above all refer to the Xia state. Although this interpretation of *zhongguo* was proposed by Kong Yingda who lived during the Tang dynasty, he was recounting the context in which the musical piece "Da Xia" got its name, including the taming of the floods by Yu the Great. Hence, his account should reflect some historical events and mythology from the Xia dynasty and constitute a generally accurate portrayal of the early Xia period. If this is indeed true, then it proves that the concept of *zhongguo* already existed during the Xia dynasty. This also suggests that the Xia people had begun to use to term *zhongguo* to refer to the capital city at the heart of the kingdom, as well as the Xia state.

The fact that the term *zhongguo* is absent in oracle bone script, and that the character *zhong* 中 appeared in multiple instances, suggests that the concept of *zhong* was already in wide circulation in society before the term *zhongguo* appeared. According to Yu Xingwu, the character *zhong* in oracle bone script was derived from "a flag with streamers."³⁷ In contrast, He Nu 何鷺 argues that the character *zhong* was derived from the character *gui* 圭 (jade), and posited that the fact that *gui chi* 圭尺 (jade rulers) were unearthed in the Taosi archaeological excavation sites suggests that the concept of *dizhong* 地中 (the center of the land) already existed by then and should rightly be considered "the earliest appearance of *zhongguo*."³⁸ Regardless of scholars' differing

35 Ibid., 5b.2705.

36 *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 7.1281.

37 Yu Xingwu, "Shi zhongguo," 6.

38 He Nu 何鷺, "Taosi gui chi 'zhong' yu 'zhongguo' gainian youlai xintan" 陶寺圭尺 "中" 與 "中國" 概念由來新探, *Sandai kaogu* 三代考古, ed. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo Xia Shang Zhou kaogu yanjiushi 中國社會科學院考古研究所夏商周考古研究室 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2011), 4: 85–119.

interpretations of the form of the character *zhong*, this proves that the concept of *zhong* already existed during the Xia dynasty, or even as early as the pre-Xia period. This is also corroborated by the relevant textual records. For instance, according to *Lunyu* 論語, Yao once counselled Shun to win the trust of the people by adhering to the principle of *yunzhi qizhong* 允執其中 (to be fair and impartial). Shun, in turn, counseled his successor Yu with essentially the same message *yunzhi juezhong* 允執厥中, that is, to be fair in his governance. *Shiji* also records that Di Ku 帝嚳 ruled over his subjects in a benevolent manner akin to the irrigation of the land, which was characterized by the application of principles such as equality and fairness throughout the land.³⁹ This suggests that by the reigns of Yao, Shun, and Yu, or even the earlier Di Ku, not only had the concept of *zhong* already appeared, but multiple meanings such as *zhongzheng* 中正 (fairness and justice), *gongyun* 公允 (fairness), *pingdeng* 平等 (equality), *zhongyong* 中庸 (adherence to the mean), *dazhongzhidao* 大中之道 (the path of the great mean) had been associated with the term.

These meanings of *zhong*, however, are probably not the earliest meanings of the character. The concept of *zhong* seems to have referred to such concepts as the middle, the center, the middle of the known world, and the middle of the earth. According to *Zhouli* 周禮, the duties of the administrator of land (*da situ* 大司徒) included “measuring the depth of the soil using jade tools and determining the middle of the known world (*dizhong*) by observing shadows.”⁴⁰ The term *dizhong* in this case has various meanings including *tuzhong* 土中, *zhongtu* 中土 (the middle of the earth), *tiandi zhi zhong* 天地之中 (between heaven and earth) or *tianxia zhi zhong* 天下之中 (the middle of the known world), so the expression *qiu dizhong* 求地中 should mean determining the middle of the known world. Although the expression *qiu dizhong* in *Zhou Li* was used in reference to events which occurred during the Western Zhou dynasty and it cannot be proved that the concept of *qiu dizhong* existed by the Xia dynasty, records mentioning Shun’s *qiu zhong* and *dezhong* have been found in a passage titled “Bao Xun” 保訓 in the Qinghua bamboo slips in recent years. Scholars have proposed differing interpretations of the character *zhong* found in these bamboo slips. Some have interpreted it as *tuzhong*, *dizhong*, *zhongdao* 中道 (the middle path) or *gongping zhengyi* 公平正義 (fair and just), while others have interpreted it as *xin* 心 (the heart), arguing that *qiu zhong* 求中 refers to concepts such as self-reflection.⁴¹ In fact, *zhong* in this instance

39 *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 1.14.

40 *Zhouli zhushu* 周禮注疏, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 10.704.

41 Cf. Feng Shengjun 馮勝君, “Ye shuo Qinghuajian ‘baoxun’ pian de ‘zhong’” 也說清華簡《保訓》篇的“中”, in *Chutu wenxian yanjiu* 出土文獻研究, ed. Zhongguo wenhua yichan yanjiuyuan 中國文化遺產研究院 (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuju, 2017) 16: 26–27.

should carry multiple meanings. If we analyze Shun's *qiuzhong* in conjunction with *qiu dizhong* mentioned in *Zhouli*, it seems that Shun's *qiuzhong* also encompassed *qiu dizhong*. If this is indeed true, then we can conclude with certainty that the concepts of *dizhong*, *tuzhong* and *tianxia zhizhong* already existed by the time of Yao and Shun. If we consider that the original meaning of *zhong* existed before its derived meaning came into use, and that the historical accounts above contain records about Di Ku's *zhizhong*, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the concepts of *dizhong*, *tuzhong*, and *tianxia zhizhong* 天下之中 denoted by the character *zhong* existed even before Di Ku's reign.

Following the emergence of the concepts of *dizhong*, *tuzhong*, and *tianxia zhizhong* denoted by the character *zhong*, as well as the establishment of the state in *dizhong*, *tuzhong*, as well as *tianxia zhizhong*, the concept of *zhongguo* came into being. To the ancients, the term *guo* could refer to either the state or the capital city. In fact, both meanings of *guo* – whether the capital city or the state – were closely linked to each other, because concepts such as “capital city”, “central authority”, and “city in the middle of the kingdom” could only appear after the establishment of the state. According to *Shangshu*, when King Cheng of Zhou visited Luo Yi 洛邑 and toured *tuzhong* (that is, Luo Yi or present day Luoyang in Henan province), Zhou Gong 周公 recommended that he build Cheng Zhou city at *tuzhong* to bring peace and order to the region.⁴² *Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書 also stated that Zhou Gong “built a large city named Cheng Zhou at *tuzhong*.”⁴³ All the accounts above refer to Cheng Zhou and Luo Yi (present day Luoyang) as *tuzhong* and refer to Zhou Gong's building of Cheng Zhou and Luo Yi as *zuo dayi yu tuzhong* 作大邑於土中 and *zuo dayi Cheng Zhou yu tuzhong* 作大邑成周於土中. If we study this written record in conjunction with the expressions *zaiyu Cheng Zhou* and *zhaizi zhongguo* in “He Zun,” *tuzhong* in this instance can be taken to mean *zhongguo*. This suggests that the emergence of the concept of *zhong* constituted the foundation for the emergence of the concept of *zhongguo*. As mentioned earlier, the concept of *zhong* appeared even before Di Ku's reign, but the state had not yet been established in *dizhong* and *tuzhong* at that time; therefore, the concept of *zhongguo* still did not exist. The concept of *zhongguo* only formally took shape after the establishment of the Xia state.

Some archaeologists have argued that, based on archaeological findings, “the earliest *zhongguo*” already emerged during the Xia dynasty or earlier, but they have yet to reach a consensus. Others have pointed out that the lack of

42 *Shangshu zhushu* 尚書注疏, in *Shisanjing zhushu*, 15, 212.

43 Zhu Youzeng 朱右曾, *Yi Zhou shu jixun jiaoshi* 逸周書集訓校釋 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 5-77.

consensus among archaeologists regarding when “the earliest *zhongguo*” or “the first *zhongguo*” appeared can be explained by their differing interpretations of *zhongguo*. Therefore, they propose understanding “the earliest *zhongguo*” or “the first *zhongguo*” according to their interpretation of *zhongguo*. Zhang Guoshuo has proposed five interpretations of *zhongguo*, namely, *zhongguo* in the geographical sense, *zhongguo* in the sense of a capital city, *zhongguo* in the sense of a tribal civilization, *zhongguo* in the sense of a state, and *zhongguo* in the context of archaeology and culture. On this basis, he has advocated determining “the earliest *zhongguo*” according to the different interpretations of *zhongguo*, and argued that if we understand “the earliest *zhongguo*” in that context (he seems to mean *zhongguo* in a cultural sense), then it should refer to the state in the Taosi civilization.⁴⁴ Han Jianye 韓建業 has argued that “the earliest *zhongguo*” in a cultural sense ought to refer to the civilization which emerged during the Miaodigou period around 4000 BCE.⁴⁵ Sun Qingwei has argued that “the earliest *zhongguo*” on the cultural level ought to refer to the civilization which took shape around the time when Huangdi 黃帝 (The Yellow Emperor) and his tribes appeared.⁴⁶

The fact that scholars have advocated establishing a standard for *zhongguo*, that is, discussing “the earliest *zhongguo*” according to a certain meaning of *zhongguo*, and that most of them are in favor of discussing “the earliest *zhongguo*” based on a cultural interpretation of *zhongguo*, is certainly most meaningful. However, we should pause for a moment: not only did the earliest appearance of *zhongguo* in writing not carry any cultural meaning, even according to the views of some of the aforementioned scholars, there is also no consensus regarding the use of a certain meaning of *zhongguo* (most are in favor of using *zhongguo* on the cultural level) to discuss “the earliest *zhongguo*.” Admittedly, the term *zhongguo* carries numerous meanings in ancient China. We should not establish a certain meaning of *zhongguo* as the standard for discussing “the earliest *zhongguo*,” but should discuss “the earliest *zhongguo*” by adopting a broader or more inclusive standard which includes any one meaning of *zhongguo*. In other words, the emergence of any given meaning of *zhongguo* should be regarded as “the earliest *zhongguo*.” Interpreting “the

44 Zhang Guoshuo, “Yetan zuizao de zhongguo.”

45 Han Jianye 韓建業, “Zuizao zhongguo: duoyuan yiti zaoqi zhongguo de xingcheng” 最早中國：多元一體早期中國的形成, *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物, no. 5 (2019); Han Jianye 韓建業, *Zaoqi zhongguo: zhongguo wenhuaquan de xingcheng he fazhan* 早期中國：中國文化圈的形成和發展 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2015); Han Jianye 韓建業, “Miaodigou shidai yu ‘zaoqi zhongguo’” 廟底溝時代與“早期中國”, *Kaogu* 考古, no. 3 (2012).

46 Sun Qingwei, “Chuanshuo shidai yu zuizao zhongguo”; Sun Qingwei 孫慶偉, “Zuizao de zhongguo’ xinjie” “最早的中國”新解, *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物, no. 5 (2019).

earliest *zhongguo*” through this lens, we believe that it is perfectly acceptable to regard the Erlitou civilization, the Taosi civilization, the Liangzhu 良渚 civilization, the Hongshan 紅山 civilization, the Miaodigou civilization, and the Huangdi period as cultural vestiges of Chinese history, since all of the regions in question belong to the *zhongguo* of later ages and are undoubtedly part of China. However, how can scholars prove the emergence of the concept of *zhongguo*, which is made up of the two individual characters *zhong* and *guo*? Since there was no writing at that time, and hence no written records or textual recounts to serve as evidence, combined with the fact that the earliest appearance of *zhongguo* in writing did not yet refer to Chinese civilization and culture, these opinions have yet to be supported with archaeological findings. However, our dating of the earliest emergence of the concept of *zhongguo* to the establishment of the Xia dynasty, based on recounting of *zhongguo* in texts narrating Shun’s arrival at *zhongguo* to assume the throne, seems to be perfectly logical. Weng Dujian 翁獨健 once pointed out, the concept of *zhongguo* probably first emerged during the Xia dynasty. The character *xia* 夏 means *daguo* 大國 (large state) and *zhongtu* (central territory). During the Xia and Shang, *zhongguo* refers to the capital cities of both dynasties, meaning “the center of numerous states,” in addition to “large state.” By the Zhou dynasty, besides meaning “the center of numerous states” and “the center of the earth,” the term had also come to refer to the Xia race or the Chinese race.⁴⁷ Although Weng Dujian did not expound on this point, his opinion that the concept of *zhongguo* emerged during the Xia dynasty seems to be historically accurate.

In conclusion, studying archaeological data and textual accounts on the Xia dynasty being *zhongguo*, we can certainly conclude that the concept of *zhongguo*, based on the concept of *zhong*, emerged by the Xia dynasty at the latest. Following the development of the *zhongguo* concept during the Shang dynasty, the term *zhongguo* formally made its appearance in writings dating to the early Western Zhou dynasty. The earliest appearance of the *zhongguo* concept could be taken to mean the center of the known world or the center of the state, that is, encompassing meanings such as “capital city” and “the central city”. Because the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties all established their respective states in the center of the known world, the term *zhongguo* also came to mean the states of Xia, Shang, and Zhou.⁴⁸ By the later years of the Western Zhou dynasty, the

47 Weng Dujian 翁獨健, ed., *Zhongguo minzu guanxishi gangyao* 中國民族關係史綱要 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000), 5–6.

48 British scholar Anthony Giddens classified states into traditional states, absolutist states (which emerged in 16–17th century Europe), and modern nation states according to their state of historical development. See Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). I propose to classify states into three categories: ancient states, modern states, and contemporary states. The various ethnic-based

term *zhongguo* came to refer to the heart of the known world or the capital city situated in the middle of the state; hence, the use of *zhongguo* to refer to the states of Xia, Shang, and Zhou entered the lexicon of the people at the time. Although the concept of *zhongguo* already had multiple meanings by the Xia, Shang, and Western Zhou dynasties, it did not yet include a cultural dimension. This proves that “the earliest *zhongguo*” was neither a racial concept used to refer to the Chinese race, nor a cultural concept used to refer to Chinese culture; rather, it was a concept which was used to refer to the capital city at the center of the state as well as the state at the center of the known world. As for the use of *zhongguo* to refer to the Chinese civilization and culture, that would have to wait till the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period.

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regimes established in ancient China and represented by their dynastic titles already “classified their citizens by region,” accomplished “the establishment of public authority,” and possessed the form of the state. Hence, although they were different from modern nation states, they can be referred to as ancient states. Ancient states in China mostly belonged to the dynastic state model. Hence, this article refers to the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties as states.

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Using Ancient Maps to Examine Historical Changes in China's Territory and Concept of Territory

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Abstract

When using maps to study China's historical concept of itself, we find that the research can be divided into two schools: the “Map of the Traces of Yu” (*Yu ji tu* 禹跡圖) system and the “Unification Map” (*yitong tu* 一統圖) system. There are also two major classifications for the type of map used: the “China Proper” type and the type that includes the outlying areas. These competing concepts of what constitutes China reflect the different modes of life that have existed alongside each other throughout China's long history, namely the agrarian and the nomadic lifestyles. The relationship between these two economic modes has alternated between peaceful and hostile and this tumultuous relationship has influenced who are considered “real” Chinese and who are the outsiders. This paper explores the evolution of what is considered China's territory and what is not.

Keywords

cartography – Chinese maps – territory – national-identity

The earliest surviving maps that reflect, on a national scale, ancient people's understanding of the geographical space in which they lived were made during the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). Naturally, these Northern Song maps also inherited geospatial perceptions, experiences, and territorial conceptions from the Tang dynasty (618–907) and even earlier. The earlier the era, the fewer are the ancient maps that have survived to the present day. This study discusses selected, representative ancient maps from the Northern Song

dynasty through the Qing dynasty (1636–1912). Correlating these maps with the records of the geography sections and local gazetteers in the official dynastic histories, it discusses changes in China's territory and concept of territory, as well as related questions that emerge from China's territorial issues in history. In the present author's view, ancient maps are the best source for ancient people's unique conceptions of their own territory. They are the most important material for understanding the national territory and concept of territory of ancient people. Ancient maps possess a kind of immediacy lacking in written records: they concentrate direct spatial experience. By using maps to explore ancient people's concept of territory, we can sidestep the inherent vagueness of official documents.

Through study and interpretation of ancient maps, the present author discovers a very interesting phenomenon: the production of these maps reveals the existence of two "systems" for conceiving the "territory of China." These systems are both interrelated and distinct. They are both about the perception and experience of the "territory of China," but they are also inconsistent with each other. This inconsistency is not about changes in the geographical area controlled by the dynasty; rather, there have existed different perceptions of the "territory of China" itself. Geographically, the domains they depict are not the same. We can call one the "Map of the Traces of Yu" (*Yuji tu* 禹跡圖) system; the other, the "Unification Map" (*yitong tu* 一統圖) or "Great Unification Map" (*da yitong tu* 大一統圖) system. The territory depicted in the "Map of the Traces of Yu" system is more or less equivalent to the domain of the "Nine Provinces" (*jiuzhou* 九州) or the "Red Territory and Divine Land" (*chixian shenzhou* 赤縣神州) – that is, the expanse of the East Asian continent south of the Great Wall and east of the Hengduan Mountains 橫斷山. The "Unification Map" system, by contrast, added nomad territories north of the Great Wall, as well as the broader western territories, including the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau 青藏高原. The former system has formed the core territory of China since the Qin and Han dynasties. For the sake of convenience, we will tentatively call this "core China" (*benbu Zhongguo* 本部中國). We will tentatively call "peripheral China" (*zhoubian Zhongguo* 周邊中國) the additional territory in the latter system which surrounds "core China." In the wake of the Qing dynasty and the modern nationalist movement, "peripheral China" has gradually been integrated into "core China" and has taken on equal sovereign significance with it in the national map. As a result, China evolved from a dynastic state with a "tributary order" (*chaogong zhixu* 朝貢秩序) into a modern nation-state – that is, modern China. We will return to this later. The basic point of this paper is to propose a historical system of orthogonal perceptions of "the territory of China" and to analyze the historical content and rich cultural implications

of these two perceptions, with the goal of advancing a new interpretation of “the territory of China” in scholarship.

1

The ancient maps depicting the territory of “core China” most worthy of discussion are: *Map of the Traces of Yu* (*Yu ji tu* 禹跡圖), drawn during the Northern Song dynasty from the third year of the Yuanfeng 元豐 period (1080) to the first year of the Shaosheng 紹聖 period (1094); *Map of the Magistracies of the Nine Regions* (*Jiuyu shouling tu* 九域守令圖), on a stele re-erected by Rongzhou 榮州 provincial inspector (*cishi* 刺史) Song Changzong 宋昌宗 in the third year of the Xuanhe 宣和 period (1121); *Geographic Map* (*Dili tu* 地理圖), drawn by Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) geographer Huang Shang 黃裳 (1146–1194), engraved by Wang Zhiyuan 王致遠 (1193–1257) in the seventh year of the Chunyou 淳佑 (1247); *Map with Postscript by Yang Ziqi* (*Yang Ziqi ba yu ditu* 楊子器跋與地圖), drawn during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in the seventh to eighth years of the Zhengde 正德 (1512–1513); and *Map with Marks by Wang Pan* (*Wang Pan tizhi Yudi tu* 王泮題識輿地圖), published during the Ming dynasty in the twenty-second year of the Wanli 萬曆 period (1594) and copied and amended by an anonymous Korean cartographer.¹

The titles of these maps reveal their connection to a deep geographical and historical tradition. They transcend the temporality of any one dynasty, and so imply the permanence of this geographical space. The phrase “Traces of Yu” (*Yu ji* 禹跡) alludes to the travels of the legendary Yu the Great 大禹 – scaling mountains and fording streams, dredging and channeling floodwaters, demarcating administrative divisions, and fixing territory. Over millennia of transmission, the deeds of Yu the Great left a deep impression, and people living on this land worshipped him as a god. Yu’s “traces” represented the common

1 The stele with *Map of the Traces of Yu* is preserved in the Shaanxi Provincial Museum 陝西省博物館; a rubbing of the original map is held in the Beijing Library 北京圖書館. The original stele of *Map of the Magistracies of the Nine Regions* is preserved in the Sichuan Museum 四川博物館; a rubbing of the original map is held in the Beijing Library. The original stele of *Geographic Map* is preserved in the Suzhou Inscription Museum 蘇州碑刻博物館. *Map with Postscript by Yang Ziqi* is preserved in the Lüshun Museum 旅順博物館. *Map with Marks by Wang Pan* or *The Korean Reproduction and Annotation of Map with Marks by Wang Pan* (*Wang Pan tizhi Yudi tu Chaoxian mohui zengbuben* 王泮題識輿地圖朝鮮摹繪增補本) is preserved in the Paris Library, and the Beijing Library has photocopies. One can refer to the ancient maps above in *Zhongguo gudai dituji* 中國古代地圖集 published by Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社. Unfortunately, the printed copies are much smaller than the original size, which may cause some inconvenience.

identity of the territory's people. Apart from its political implications, it is appropriate to consider its cultural importance. The phrase “magistracies of the Nine Regions” (*jiuyu shouling* 九域守令) held a similar significance. “Nine Regions” (*jiuyu* 九域) refers to the territory of the “Nine Provinces” (*jiuzhou* 九州) that Yu the Great demarcated. Entitling the map “magistracies of the Nine Regions” implied that its function was to safeguard this aspect of Yu's legacy. Similar maps transmitted from the Song dynasty (960–1279) were called *Map of the Territorial Boundaries of the Nine Provinces in “Yugong”* (*Yugong jiuzhou jiangjie tu* 禹貢九州疆界圖), *Map of the Nine Regions in the Yuanfeng Period of the Present Dynasty* (*Shengchao Yuanfeng jiuyu tu* 聖朝元豐九域圖), *Map of the Nine Provinces of Emperor Ku* (*Di Ku jiuzhou zhi tu* 帝嚳九州之圖), and so on.² Allusions like “traces of Yu” and “Nine Regions” to designate territory show that history, culture, and geographical activity were already tightly bound up in people's geographical conceptions even in this early period. The geographical territories that they designated were widely recognized.

Map of the Traces of Yu is exquisite. The cartographer used an illustrative scale of horizontal and vertical gridlines to show the distance between any two locations. Up until the Qing dynasty, few maps depicted river systems so well. But there are no indications of mountain ranges, few place names, and the Great Wall is missing. Just as the map's name suggests, its geographic content is more detailed in places with “traces of Yu”; wherever “traces of Yu” are absent, content is brief or nonexistent. The map's grid is made up of 72 squares on the vertical axis and 68 squares on the horizontal axis. At the northern end is the region of the Great Bend of the Yellow River (*Huanghe hetao* 黃河河套). Because “Yugong” 禹貢 mentions “weak water” (*ruoshui* 弱水) and “black water” (*heishui* 黑水), the western end of the map reaches as far as Guazhou 瓜州 and Liusha 流沙. In the southwest, the only label is “Black Water Mouth” (Heishuikou 黑水口), which seems to flow south. These regions were full of the geographical traces of peripheral ethnic groups; however, the cartographer ignored them totally, and the northern, western, and southwestern ends of the map are completely blank except for river courses and a few place names. We can only assume these omissions were intentional. Since Chinese (*Zhuxia* 諸夏) people were not active in these territories which did not belong to the “territory of Yu” (*Yu yu* 禹域) and lay beyond “the traces of Yu,” they were ignored. The cartographer's territorial conception refers clearly to the “territory of Yu” and his goal was simply to provide a visual representation of it.

2 See Cao Wanru 曹婉如, Zheng Xihuang 鄭錫煌, Huang Shengzhang 黃盛璋, Niu Zhongxun 鈕仲勳, Ren Jincheng 任金城, and Ju Deyuan 鞠德源, ed., *Zhongguo gudai dituji: Zhanguo – Yuan* 中國古代地圖集 • 戰國—元 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990).

Map of the Magistracies of the Nine Regions, drawn in the Xuanhe 宣和 period of Emperor Huizong 徽宗帝 (r. 1119–1125), is more elaborate. The drafter did not use the grid method to represent scale, but rather borrowed from Chinese landscape painting to represent the shape of mountain ranges and superimposed curves to show the waves at sea level. The shapes of the Liaodong Peninsula 遼東半島 and Hainan Island 海南島 are closer to reality than they are in *Map of the Traces of Yu*; drawn among the waves in the South China Sea is a sailboat heading west, which seems to reflect the lively trade with Southeast Asia at that time. The smallest administrative unit shown on the map is the county (*xian* 縣), which number as many as 1,125; there are 242 provinces (*zhou* 州), ten sub-prefectures (*cifu* 次府), and four capital prefectures (*jingfu* 京府). This map has the most place names of jurisdictions at various levels of any map from the Song dynasty.³ However, the concept of territory that the map reflects is the same as in *Map of the Traces of Yu*. *Map of the Nine Magistracies* is one of the rare ancient maps with clearly marked borders. In the north and northwest of the map, there is a distinct line demarcating the border of the Northern Song dynasty with the state of Liao 遼, as well as with the state of Xia 西夏. In the west and southwest there is a distinct line demarcating the Northern Song dynasty from various parts of Tubo 吐蕃 and the state of Dali 大理. Beyond the border, the map only indicates mountain ranges, forests, and plains; there are no names of states or localities. This clearly marked border reflects the Song people's strong ethnic sentiment, which caused them to identify more closely with the territory under their administrative control. In historical comparison, the Song dynasty was a weakly unified dynasty. It was surrounded by powerful neighbors ready to attack and suffered their bullying. It craved unity but lacked the capacity to achieve it, so the border between internal and external territory was unusually clear. The representation of “core China” in *Map of the Magistracies of the Nine Regions* only illustrates the territory within the dynasty's actual control under specific historical circumstances; it does not indicate any change in the geographical perception of “core China.”

Geographic Map provides complementary evidence. Huang Shang produced this map during the Southern Song dynasty in Pucheng county 普成縣, Longqing prefecture 隆慶府, Eastern circuit 東路, Li province 利州 (present-day Jiange County 劍閣縣, Sichuan Province 四川省). Huang's place of origin was on the front line of the Southern Song dynasty's confrontation with the state of Jin 金 and his goal in creating the map and offering it in tribute was to allow future emperors to contemplate reconquering ancestral territory that

3 Zheng Xihuang 鄭錫煌, “Jiuyu shoulingtu yanjiu” 九域守令圖研究, in *Zhongguo gudai dituji: Zhanguo – Yuan*.

had fallen into the hands of other ethnic groups. This is not an ordinary map, but a map of “traumatic memories.” The Southern Song dynasty and the state of Jin were separated by the Huai River 淮河; however, this is neither a map of the Southern Song dynasty’s territory, nor of the Southern Song and the state of Jin, for it depicts the entirety of Southern Song territory but only part of Jin territory. There is no border between the two states, and the part of Jin that is shown was Song territory that had fallen into enemy hands. The map reminds the monarch never to forget this grievous loss of ancestral territory, and never to lose faith in the struggle to reconquer the homeland. The level of artistry in *Geographical Map* is not particularly high. Although the rendering of the mountains according to the methods of landscape painting is quite realistic, the map is too dense, the river courses are drawn too crudely, and the coast is highly distorted. In terms of cartographic technique, *Geographical Map* is not equal to *Map of the Traces of Yu* or *Map of the Magistracies of the Nine Regions*; however, it is more strongly cognizant of the “Central Plains” and the “Nine Regions” as Chinese territory.

Compared with the Song dynasty, the maps of the Ming dynasty take a haughtier view of China’s neighbors, but the concept of “core China” remains constant. At first glance, *Map with Postscript by Yang Ziqi* seems to belong to the “Unification Map” system, since it includes the vast lands of the north and the northwest. This would be the wrong conclusion, however. First, the proportion used for “core China” is starkly different from that used for the peripheral areas. Due to limited geographic knowledge and cartographic technique, it was normal for a single map to use inconsistent scales; this is the case for all ancient maps. The difference in scales in *Map with Postscript by Yang Ziqi* is extreme, however, and too large to attribute to a lack of geographic knowledge. The map is densely covered with the names of the “barbarian” (*yiman* 夷蠻) countries in all directions. The labels in the southeast and the southwest are all placed in the sea; only names are indicated, and territory is not depicted. The names in the north and the northwest are either densely concentrated or evenly distributed, such that the geographical significance is lost. This can only be interpreted as a symbolic depiction of “the four barbarian border tribes paying tribute at court” (*si Yi lai chao* 四夷來朝) – an idealization which lacked any geographic reality. Second, the map shows a distinct border between core and peripheral territories. In the east, this line starts from the Shanhai Pass 山海關. In the north, it runs along the Great Wall. In the northwest, however, it circles around the entire Hexi Corridor 河西走廊, and from Songpan 松潘 south it circumvents the southwest zone to end in the sea. In the entire area enclosed by the boundary line – that is, the territory of the Ming dynasty’s thirteen provinces (*si* 司) and two capitals (*jing* 京) – the depiction of mountain

ranges, lakes, and river courses is very clear. There are borders between each of the provinces (*shengsi* 省司), and the depiction of administrative divisions – prefectural capitals (*fusi* 府司), jurisdictions known as “guards” and “battalions” (*weisuo* 衛所), and county seats (*xianzhi* 縣治) – is very detailed. This level of detail does not carry over to the peripheral territory, however, very clearly demonstrating the cartographer’s concept of territory. The lesson is that it is not possible to interpret a map’s concept of territory based solely on the amount of the geographic space that it depicts, and we can conclude that *Map with Postscript* by Yang Ziqi belongs to the “core China” system. *Map with Marks* by Wang Pan is similar. If we disregard the far east of the map, the original Ming dynasty section forms a square. In the north part, the Great Wall is absent, and an almost straight mountain range marks the border. In the northwest, there is a “great desert” (*da liusha* 大流沙) that nearly reaches the sea in the southwest. The Ming dynasty lies within this “world” (*tianxia* 天下, lit. “all-under-Heaven”) surrounded by the sea, the mountains, and the desert. The blank space in the upper part of the map lists the names of 184 jurisdictions known as “guards” (*wei* 衛) and 20 known as “battalions” (*suo* 所) in the Nurgan Regional Military Commission. The map also includes the names of all Ming dynasty administrative units in impeccable detail down to the level of “guards,” “battalions,” and counties (*xian* 縣). Ren Jincheng 任金成 and Sun Guoqing 孫果清 have compared each entry in the map and concluded, “The map’s main purpose seems to have been to represent the main political units in the country, such as administrative regions at all levels and urban settlements. It is essentially an administrative map.”⁴ Precisely because it is an administrative map, wherever “administration” reaches, the map is exhaustive, but wherever “administration” does not reach, it is sparse. On this map, “administration” reaches only to “core China.” The map backgrounds the contrast between core and periphery, as well as the relationship between the geographical spaces occupied by the Ming dynasty and the “four barbarian border tribes” (*si Yi* 四夷).

2

In the history of cartography, there is a second system of maps of China’s territory: the “Unification Map” system. They are impressive, delimiting territory

4 Ren Jincheng 任金城 and Sun Guoqing 孫果清, “Wang Pan tizhi Yudi tu Chaoxian mohui zengbuben chutan” 王泮題識輿地圖朝鮮摹繪增補本初探, in *Zhongguo gudai dituji: Mingdai* 中國古代地圖集·明代, ed. Cao Wanru 曹婉如, Zheng Xihuang 鄭錫煌, Huang Shengzhang 黃盛璋, Niu Zhongxun 鈕仲勳, Ren Jincheng 任金城, Qin Guojing 秦國經, and Hu Bangbo 胡邦波 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1995), 112.

based on the principle of “Great Unification” (*dayitong* 大一統). They foreground the relationship between Chinese (*Huaxia* 華夏) and the so-called “four barbarian border tribes” in the geographic space of the East Asian continent. The scope of their depiction goes beyond “core China” to embrace the historical and geographical activities of the peripheral non-Han ethnic groups. In the history of cartography, maps of this “Unification Map” system parallel those of the *Map of the Traces of Yu* system: each has its own origins, each has its own system, and the two systems run in parallel without interference. This type of map reveals a competing concept of “the territory of China”: the concept of “Great Unification” which includes within China all the territory that successive dynasties achieved. Maps that reflect this concept of territory include: *Map of the Hua and Border Territories* (*Hua-Yi tu* 華夷圖), in the Southern Song dynasty; *Great Ming Comprehensive Map* (*Da Ming hunyi tu* 大明混一圖), in the Ming Dynasty; *The Imperial Household’s Confidential Map of Unified Territory, A Combination of Manchu and Han* (*Man-Han hebi Neifu yitong yudi mitu* 滿漢合壁內府一統與地秘圖) in the Kangxi 康熙 period (1661–1722) of the Qing dynasty; and *Thirteen Copperplate Maps of Qianlong* (*Qianlong shisanpai tongban ditu* 乾隆十三排銅版地圖) in the Qianlong 乾隆 period (1735–1796).⁵ The geographical space depicted in these maps is much larger than those of the “Map of the Traces of Yu” system. They focus not only on “core China,” but also complicated geographical activities of the core and periphery and the relations between Chinese (*Zhuxia*) and “barbarians” (*si Yi*).

Textual scholarship indicates that *Map of the Hua and Border Territories*, engraved in stone in the sixth year of the Shaoxing 紹興 period (1131–1162) during the Southern Song dynasty, is a reduced version of *Map of the Hua and Border Territories within the Four Seas* (*Hainei Hua-Yi tu* 海內華夷圖) by Jia Dan 賈耽 (729–805) in the Tang dynasty.⁶ The original is doubtless a great work in the history of cartography, but it is no longer extant, and the version that survives is about 79 cm long and 78 cm wide – much smaller than the original. The present author believes that, in the process of reduction from the original or through transmitted versions, much important content and subtle points of Jia Dan’s original work were lost. However, the map’s most important feature

5 The stele of *Map of the Hua and Border Territories* is preserved in the Shaanxi Museum; a rubbing of the original map is held in the Beijing Library. *Great Ming Comprehensive Map* is preserved in Beijing at the First Historical Archives of China 中國第一歷史檔案館. Prints of *The Imperial Household’s Confidential Map of Unified Territory, A Combination of Manchu and Han* and *Thirteen Copperplate Maps of Qianlong* are held in the Beijing Library.

6 Cao Wanru 曹婉如, “Youguan Hua-Yi tu wenti de tantao” 有關華夷圖問題的探討, in *Zhongguo gudai dituji: Zhanguo – Yuan*.

has been preserved – its concept of territory. The original map was titled *Map of the Hua and Border Territories within the Four Seas*; clearly Chinese (*Huaxia*) and “barbarians” (*si Yi*) formed a complete world within the four seas. *Hainei* is a “world” which Chinese (*Huaxia*) and “barbarians” (*si Yi*) built together. The Southern Song *Map of the Hua and Border Territories* that survives is centered on “core China” with no surrounding borders; in addition to peripheral political entities and place names, it includes seventeen notes, more than any other map. The notes briefly describe the history of each ethnic group and their relationships over time – including ethnic groups that inhabited the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze River and the upper reaches of the Xi River 西江 systems. There are accounts of all the peripheral groups whose ethnic activities had historical links with Chinese (*Huaxia*). Clearly, the map is not focused on the administrative divisions of “core China,” but rather on the relationship between the Chinese (*Huaxia*) and “barbarians” (*si Yi*). The present author thinks it is reasonable to infer that *Map of Hua and Border Territories* was unable to depict the geographical activities of the peripheral ethnic groups. Perhaps the drafters’ cartographic skill was too limited to illustrate the information in two-dimensional space, so they used textual narration instead. Or perhaps reducing Jia Dan’s original or transmitted versions left so little space that the drafters had to resort to text instead of illustration. The latter is more likely than the former. Although the details differ slightly, the Southern Song *Map of the Hua and Border Territories* presents a geographical view in which Chinese (*Huaxia*) and “barbarians” (*si Yi*) jointly belong to one world within the four seas.

The production of the Ming dynasty *Great Ming Comprehensive Map* is somewhat mysterious. The map is large and impressive: it was painted in color on a silk scroll 347 cm long and 453 cm wide. It starts in the east from the Korean Peninsula and Japan, extends west to the Middle East and the South Asian Peninsula, and in the north includes almost the entire territory of Mongolia. However, the cartographer is not known. The large geographic space that the map depicts exceeds the Ming people’s experience of geography. Although it includes the usual variation in scales, the full work clearly shows two areas densely populated by ethnic groups: “core China” and the South East Asian Peninsula. By incorporating much of the Mongols’ experience conquering the Asian continent, *Great Ming Comprehensive Map* transcends the concept of “Great Ming Unification” itself. For us, it crystallizes collective experience and memory: the idea of “unification” based on territory. Even while it recognizes the limits of the dynasty’s domain in terms concrete territory, it remains flexible enough to recognize the scope of the dynasty’s power.

The Qing Dynasty is regarded as possessing full imperial grandeur. Although it conducted its domestic administration and foreign diplomacy in the style of an empire, its concept of territory foreshadowed the modern nation-state. In many cases, the way the dynasty recognized its territory and established its boundaries verged on modern concepts and practices. The present author believes that this is due to the deepening of international exchange. For example, this period saw the first border dispute with a major country outside the tributary order, Russia, which the dynasty could only resolve through negotiation and consultation. This resulted in the Treaty of Nerchinsk in the 28th year of Kangxi's reign (1689). On the other hand, improvements in surveying and mapping techniques made it possible for the first time to accurately measure territory and demarcate borders. It seems that dynasties before the Qing did not maintain specialists in cartography or map printing. The maps that survive were all commissioned by officials or scholars with special interest or skills, to be given as gifts or used in education. Although the drafting and printing of territorial maps is intimately linked to politics and education, there was still some separation between cartography and the activities of the state. By the Qing dynasty, however, land surveying and mapping became an organized state activity. During the High Qing era, Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng 雍正, and Qianlong (combined r. 1661–1796) commissioned unprecedented surveying and mapping expeditions.⁷ In the Qing dynasty, cartography reached its height and map printing was exquisite. Naturally, the dynasty also benefited from the new survey techniques brought by Western missionaries. The development of an ideology of national sovereignty and its realization in surveying and mapping work was also important.

In the 47th year of his reign (1708), Emperor Kangxi dispatched missionaries Joachim Bouvet 白晉 (1656–1730), Jean-Baptiste Régis 雷孝思 (1664–1738), Pierre Jartoux 杜德美 (1669–1720), Xavier Fridelli 費隱 (1673–1743), Francisco Cardoso 麥大成 (n.d.), and others to every province to conduct surveys and draft a complete map of the country. The map was completed after ten years of arduous work in the 57th year of Kangxi's reign (1718). The missionaries used triangulation for on-site measurements, and produced the map in a trapezoidal projection, using a longitude and latitude grid for the first time. The map

7 Qin Guojing 秦國經 and Liu Ruofang 劉若芳, "Qingchao yutu de huizhi yu guanli" 清朝輿圖的繪製與管理, in *Zhongguo gudai dituji: Qingdai* 中國古代地圖集·清代, ed. Cao Wanru 曹婉如, Zheng Xihuang 鄭錫煌, Huang Shengzhang 黃盛璋, Niu Zhongxun 鈕仲勳, Ren Jincheng 任金城, Qin Guojing 秦國經, and Wang Qianjin 汪前進 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997).

preserved in Mukden Palace in Shenyang is called *The Imperial Household's Confidential Map of Unified Territory (A Combination of Manchu and Han)*, while the map preserved in the Palace Museum in Beijing is called *Map Giving a Full View of the Imperial Territory (Huangyu quanlantu 皇輿全覽圖)*. It is a milestone in the history of cartography, as well as in the historical evolution of the concept of the "territory of China." This map has two noteworthy aspects. First, there is a clear concept of borders. For example, in row 7, number 4, which depicts Yunnan's 雲南 border with Myanmar, the Myanmar portion is blank, while the Yunnan portion is labeled in detail, and the border is indicated by a dashed line. When a river course forms the boundary, the river is indicated. Although in row 6, number 6, there is no dashed line between Tibetan areas and India, the mountains serve as a boundary, and the borderlands on the Indian side are blank. Second, the place names on the map for "core China" are in Chinese, while those for the surrounding areas of Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Qinghai, and Tibet are in Manchu. The present author believes this is the reason why the map uses the phrase "A Combination of Manchu and Han" (*Man-Han hebi 滿漢合璧*) in its title. It is no accident that core and peripheral place names on the map are in different languages. When the Qing dynasty once again brought non-Han ethnic groups to settle in the Central Plains, they accelerated the process of regional integration. Ethnic groups and lifestyles in the two places deeply influenced each other while remaining different. From the rulers' perspective, the traditional methods for governing each place were different, as well. The different languages in which place names were inscribed reflected both the existence of a distinction between "core China" and "peripheral China," as well as the gradual process of integration. When Emperor Qianlong pacified Dzungar and Altishahr, he dispatched people to survey the areas of Xinjiang and Tibet that Kangxi had not been able to survey. The result was *Thirteen Copperplate Maps of Qianlong*, in which all the place names are in Chinese. The change symbolizes, at least in a geopolitical sense, that "core China" and "peripheral China" had now been completely integrated. A national political entity had been firmly established, with a vast territory including Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet surrounding the Central Plains.

Before the Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE) and Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), the Chinese (*Zhuxia*) people carried out their cultural activities within the boundaries of "core China," represented by the Yellow River and Yangtze River basins. After thousands of years, the result of this geopolitical activity was the development and crystallization of the concept of the "Nine Provinces." After the Qin and Han dynasties, the Chinese (*Zhuxia*) people had no choice but to exist in a wider geographical space, and in this space to clash and merge with surrounding ethnic groups, thus developing the concept of "peripheral China."

For more than 2,000 years, as the Han and peripheral nationalities repeatedly conquered and assimilated each other, this concept of “peripheral China” deepened and sedimented until it fully merged within a single territorial political entity. Ancient maps that reflect people’s geographical and cultural activities clearly depict this by turns tragic and joyful historical development on the East Asian continent. The development and crystallization of the concept of “China” is the result of these kinds of geopolitical activities in the more than 2,000 years since the Qin and Han dynasties.

3

From the above, we have seen that there are two conceptual systems concerning the territory of China – namely, the “core China” system and the “peripheral China” system – and we have discussed the historical evolution of these concepts. What is the historical content behind this unique concept of territory? In other words, what stable historical factors promoted the evolution of this concept of territory? If a concept of territory is only the result of people’s historical activities, what is its cause?

To make the historical image clearer, we must push our time horizon back to before the Qin and Han dynasties. Chinese civilization originated in the Yellow River and Yangtze River basins, a vast area suitable for agriculture. In the early stage of civilization, there emerged city-states, feudal fiefdoms, and tribal settlements with different degrees of civilization, scattered along the Yellow River and the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze river. Generally speaking, areas with superior natural environments, such as the middle plain of the Yellow river, the Wei River 渭河 plain, the Yangtze River plain, the Jiaodong Peninsula 膠東半島, the Sichuan Basin 四川盆地, the Xiang River 湘江 basin, and regions around the Lake Tai 太湖, were socially more highly developed than their hinterlands, and therefore accumulated more political and economic power. Rising state powers inevitably consolidated the weaker powers around them and incorporated them into their spheres of influence. The process of integration involved the merging of the ethnic groups, the re-establishment of political power, and the re-accumulation of economic wealth. From the dawn of civilization through the many millennia leading up to the “Great Unification” of the Qin and Han dynasties, this process of integration was sometimes fast and sometimes slow, but it never stopped. With the passage of time, weaker independent powers were incorporated into stronger powers. A cruel drama of “dog eat dog” geopolitics played out on the historical stage. From documentary sources, we can see the basic evolutionary trend:

the number of states steadily declined. The present author believes that the fundamental force shaping the integration of ethnic and political powers is the degree of potential complementarity of methods of production on this piece of land. The complementarity of soils, rivers, temperature, humidity, and rainfall meant that, at the level of the productive capacity of the time, the most productive use of the land was agriculture. Agricultural methods of production and lifestyles spread in tandem with this process of integration. The conflict between pastoralist and agriculturalist powers was not primary, but secondary, to this basic tendency toward ethnic integration and state annexation. The primary force was the consolidation and expansion of the cultivable zone. This consolidation and expansion constantly sought the limits of its geographic possibilities. By observing the change in the meaning of the word “China” (*Zhongguo* 中國), we can see one aspect of this consolidation and expansion. In the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE), “China” was equivalent to *Wangji* 王畿, and the geographic space to which it referred was limited to the capital city (*jingshi* 京市).⁸ In the Spring and Autumn period (ca. 770–476 BCE), however, “China” meant *Zhuxia*, the geographic space of which extended to subject vassal states encompassing the entire Yellow River basin and the North China 華北 plain. During the Warring States period (ca. 475–221 BCE), “China” was synonymous with the “Nine Provinces,” and its geographic space reached the Yangtze River basin. At this time, the only thing “China” lacked was a centralized, unified dynasty that could end the fragmentation and chaotic warfare of the Seven Warring States (*Qixiong* 七雄). In the third century BCE, Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BCE) accomplished this and established a unified dynasty.

Interestingly, the process of regional political integration in East Asia did not stop with the establishment of the “Great Unification” dynasty; instead, it just launched the process of regional integration on a larger scale. Just looking at the territorial map of the Qin dynasty, we see that the expansion of agricultural powers in the northeast, north, and northwest had already reached the limits imposed by geography, climate, and the productive capacity of the time. The fact that the Great Wall serves as the border is an indicator of these kinds of limits. Beyond the Great Wall (*saiwai* 塞外) is an even vaster territory, a zone with ethnic groups of different origins, suitable for nomadic or small-scale oasis agriculture. In the wake of millennia of integration, however, the territory beyond the Great Wall had developed sophisticated, advanced farming techniques, and developed a cultural identity on this basis. A “Great Unification”

8 See Mao Heng 毛亨, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, and Kong Yingda 孔穎達, comm., *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Beijing: Zhonghu shuju, 1980), 548.

dynasty provided the region with durable and reliable political guarantees. By way of comparison, the territory within the Great Wall (*sainei* 塞内) was densely populated, the economy was developed, and people had plenty of food. Beyond it, the population was scarce, the climate was harsh and cold, it was difficult to earn a living, and it was especially difficult to accumulate wealth. These were two entirely different worlds; however, neither geography nor the defensive measures of the time could separate them completely. An imbalance in needs perpetuated conflicts and connections between the two worlds. In terms of economics, the interior needed little from the exterior, while the exterior was dependent on the interior for essential goods such as grain, textiles, tea, pottery, and copper and iron products. At the economic level of the time, these basic needs were difficult to satisfy through the development of free trade. It was the attractiveness of the interior's wealth that caused it to perceive an urgent security threat from the exterior. In terms of security, the exterior could exist independent of the interior because the interior needed nothing from it. Conversely, however, the interior was dependent on the exterior to establish a security order: it needed to secure the exterior's submission or assurances to guarantee its own security. In the immature political order of the time, it was not realistic to place one's hope entirely in rational peace. Economically and politically more powerful parties always used two-pronged, carrot-and-stick methods to meet their needs. The overall tendency in the dynasties after the Qin and Han, albeit with fits and starts, was to incorporate peripheral ethnic groups over an ever-greater territory into their historical activities. Through harsh methods like dispatching punitive expeditions and garrisoning troops, or gentle methods like tribute, marriage alliances, ennoblement, and trade, the peripheral ethnic groups and powers were brought within the dynasty's sphere of influence. In this way, the dynasty's strong political power extended even to remote areas. In terms of ethnic integration, the "Great Unification" of the Qin and Han dynasties marked a fundamental change. Before the Qin and Han, there was a slow advance in cultivated territory, with occasional conflicts between agriculturalists and pastoralists. Afterwards, by contrast, there was conflict between politically unified agricultural powers and pastoralist powers, with gradual expansions in cultivated territory. This was mainly apparent in the southwest. Due to geographic and climatic constraints, the conflict between agricultural and pastoralist powers occurred not as a slow advance, but as a seesaw struggle. This kind of seesaw conflict continued through every dynasty after the "Great Unification."

The world of the agriculturalists had no choice but to actively confront the pastoralist civilization. The vastness of the pastoralist world and its many ethnic groups made it impossible for the agriculturalist world to conquer it

completely; victories were only ever temporary. As soon as pastoralists grew strong, they would invade and harass the agriculturists. Moreover, due to the lack of support from economic and religious interests, sending a punitive expedition against pastoralist forces was a last-ditch measure that only solved the immediate crisis. Over successive dynasties, conquest was not the preferred strategy. The more desirable strategy was to seek political submission or allegiance from the “barbarian” states (*Yiman zhi guo* 夷蠻之國). In fact, the method of military conquest was a tool in service of this consistent strategy. The agriculturalist world lacked the ambition to seize others’ land; it was gained easily and lost easily. When the dynasty used military force against pastoralist powers, it was more like adults teaching children to obey. Once the opposing side expressed submission, hostilities ceased, and the troops withdrew. In the more than two millennia following the Qin and Han dynasties, military force was used repeatedly on the frontier, and there were countless deaths and injuries, but the frontier never advanced. If it had not been for the Mongol and Manchu invasions south into the Central Plains, the forces of “core China” would never have been able to cross the Great Wall. The western region, which historically had the deepest ties to “core China,” was garrisoned throughout successive dynasties. These garrisons’ basic purpose was not colonial conquest, but to ensure the dynasty’s own security by extending the Gansu 甘肅 corridor and dividing the pastoralist forces in the north and northwest, to isolate them from each other and prevent them from joining forces.⁹ In the face of a vast and formidable pastoralist world, ancient people used their economic and political advantages to develop a method of incorporating peripheral forces into their own sphere of influence. They called this method “loose reign” (*jimi* 羈縻, lit. “bridle and halter”), and used it unaltered over successive dynasties.¹⁰ This “loose reign” was simply a strategy of relations based mainly on political, economic, and cultural inducements, backed by the threat of military conquest. Under the “loose reign” strategy, the goal – whether pursued through economic, cultural, or military means – was always political subordination. Clearly, the strategy reflects knowledge and experience derived from the longstanding conflicts between agriculturalists and pastoralists on the East Asian continent.

The present author has reason to believe that the distinction between “core China” and “peripheral China” that ancient maps depict, along with the two related yet distinct concepts of the territory of China, reflects just this

9 See *Han Shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 94.3816.

10 Ban Gu 班固 regarded “loose bridle” as “The wise sovereign’s proper way to control and direct barbarians (*manyi* 蠻夷).” *Ibid.*, 94.3843.

coexistence of the agriculturalist and pastoralist worlds on the East Asian continent, as well as their conflict and integration. This has shaped their concept of territory, with its distinction between land subordinate to the center (*zhongyang shutu* 中央屬土) and frontiers on the periphery (*zhouyuan bianchui* 周緣邊陲). It is not like modern nation-states, which, due to taxation, stationing of troops, and internationally recognized standards, can have definite borders. The existence of the pastoralist world caused profound security problems for the agriculturalist world. They could not be resolved by a decisive military conquest, nor by economic and cultural means. Instead, two different worlds were forced into long-term coexistence in one geographic area. The dynasties of the center were only able to secure their security interests in exchange for economic, property, and cultural exchanges – or else through military conquest. Seeking political subordination of tribal forces and states on the frontier resulted in the establishment of an order in which the world on the periphery paid tribute to the agriculturalist world at the center. Thus, central dynasties and tribal forces – even states – that owed allegiance to them formed a complex relationship of subordination. This relationship of subordination had several types: appointing local chieftains (*tuguan* 土官, *tusi* 土司) to administer the system of “loose reign” prefectures (*jimi zhousi* 羈縻州司); stationing troops to monitor and administer the march governor (*duhu* 都護) system; and establishing a tributary and vassalage relationship through ennoblement. The link among each of these types was the use of military force, politics, and culture to develop relations of subordination that were progressively more distantly aligned with the central power.¹¹ Based on these historical facts, when ancient people depicted the layout of state territory, they naturally reflected this collective experience in their maps. On the one hand, they considered the “Nine Provinces” where Yu the Great traveled to be China; on the other, they included in China peripheral areas with close relations of political subordination under the tributary order to the central dynasty. Both belonged to a unified China. From the perspective of the modern nation-state’s concept of

11 These different kinds of political relations of subordination are somewhat similar to the order of “five domains” (*wufu* 五服) described in *Yugong* 禹貢 and *Shanhajing* 山海經: the central government domain (*dian* 甸), the governing domain of the feudal vassals (*hou* 侯), the pacified domain (*sui* 綏), the peripheral domain (*yao* 要) and the uncivilized domain (*huang* 荒). However, whether the order of “five domains” is a historical fact or the imagined ideal of ancient literati is still controversial. The present author does not endorse directly comparing the tributary order with the order of “five domains,” and especially does not endorse viewing the tributary order as a “model of the world” without borders. Yang Liansheng 楊連升 has criticized this view as a “myth” without historical basis. Yang Liansheng 楊連升, *Guoshi tanwei* 國史探微 (Taipei: Lianjing chubangongsi, 1984).

territory, this may be difficult to comprehend. However, once we delve into the ancient politics, economics, culture, and geographic life and customs of the East Asian continent, it seems perfectly natural.

Translated by Brook Hefright

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Tianxia: The Threefold Connotation, Vehicle of Language, and Journey to Reestablishment

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Abstract

Tianxia 天下 has recently become a buzzword in Chinese academia. The word's threefold connotation in relation to geographical, political, and international systems needs to be analyzed to illustrate its different meanings. These three meanings were centered around China in the self-sufficient traditional Chinese civilization; however, they all need reinterpretation in the current age of globalization. Reinterpreting *tianxia* requires an appropriate vehicle of language: weak and regressive language, early modern language that has undergone transformation, and pretentious usage cannot effectively reinterpret *tianxia*. A non-literati, nonpolitical approach to linguistic expression is necessary to avoid the corruption of language and reinterpret the word from a universal perspective. The principal matter to be addressed in reinterpreting *tianxia* is its notion in relationship to nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Merely reinterpreting the best intentions of *tianxia* is insufficiently convincing for the concept in the age of globalization. How *tianxia* is elucidated through the lens of the individual, state, and international world determines the reliability and credibility of the interpretation.

Keywords

Tianxia – geography – China – world – language – reestablishment

* Note: The term *tianxia* is notoriously difficult to translate into Western languages. Its literal meaning is simply “under heaven.” To emphasize the term's universal inclusiveness, it is more frequently translated as “all under heaven.” Depending on the context it can also be rendered as “all of China” or even “the whole world.” Different discussions call for different understandings of this important term. For the sake of ease in this article we will not force a single translation, but rather use the standard romanization *tianxia*, and let the readers digest it in their own way.

Chinese and western civilizations have been clashing since 1840. This kind of clash has not only failed to more clearly distinguish the superior from the inferior, but has tragically resulted in a rigid confrontation between Chinese and Western civilizations, as well as ancient and modern territory and space. This is not the outcome we desire for the contact between civilizations. However, history cannot be repeated. Chinese civilization's journey from 1840 to today means it is finally able to rationally plan and prepare for its future, reigniting the quintessence of Chinese culture that can serve humankind.

A weak civilization and nation that is passive and under attack often struggles to stand its ground amid suffering in its own pain, which makes it unable to rationally plan and prepare for its future or tap into the positive elements of its own traditional civilization that benefit humankind. When China finally emerged from its position as the passive underdog, it entered the world stage in terms of material power, and therefore had the conditions to properly consider exactly what its long-standing civilization will do for the entire human race. In particular, when Chinese people talk of the Chinese dream, the party in power has pointed out the essential consistency between the Chinese and American dream. The way in which this shared dream of humankind is highlighted and how Chinese civilization can offer an optimal solution and pioneering thought regarding this have become key questions. This is precisely the practical driving force for discussing the *tianxia* 天下 sentiment of Chinese culture.

1 The Threefold Connotation of *Tianxia*

Before the *tianxia* worldview of Chinese culture returned to its current scene, past encounters between Chinese and Western civilizations were not aggressive clashes; these are a tragic result of regional civilizations and cultural opposition between Chinese and Western cultures. The “modern world-system”¹ embodied by the West since 1500 and the “ancient *tianxia* system”² developed by the long-term development of Chinese civilization are in a state of opposition regarding the overall vision of human society. The significance of

1 Immanuel Wallerstein states that “The capitalist world economy is the origin of the modern world-system and where the modern world-system historically developed. The modern world-system is a historical system that originated in parts of Europe and later expanded to include other parts of the world until it spread to the entire world.” Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, trans. You Laiyin 尤來寅 et al. (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), 1.

2 Li Yangfan 李揚帆, ed., *Bei wudu de tianxia zhixu 被誤讀的天下秩序* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2016), 3–18.

clarifying the true connotations of the two systems therefore becomes apparent. For example, discussing this *tianxia* worldview of Chinese culture within the proposition of “reigniting Chinese civilization” necessitates the clarification of the threefold connotation of the “*tianxia* system.”

Firstly, *tianxia* is a geographical concept of understanding the world for Chinese people. In the current taxonomy of academic disciplines, it belongs to the field of geographical investigation. This geographical scope has evidently changed with the expansion of the Chinese regime. It seems impossible to overlook this implication when currently discussing *tianxia* – it depends on physical objects in the world. The emphasis on the Chinese understanding and fondness of *tianxia* generally pertains to the highest realms of spirituality or value. On a more mundane level, *tianxia* mainly refers to the correlation between the Chinese and surrounding ethnic groups, which is related to the *tianxia* systematic structure established by the ancient Chinese. In the traditional cultural system, it is the “kindred level system” (*wufu zhidu* 五服制度) of the Zhou dynasty and later the “tributary system” (*chaogong tixi* 朝貢體系), which were an inter-state mechanism established by a series of regimes. In the current landscape of equal nation-states, it would be inconceivable to attempt to rebuild a world in which Chinese people are absolutely dominant, to include other cultures and nations in China’s *tianxia* ideology and for them to identify with this worldview that Chinese civilization has created since ancient times. However, this *tianxia* sentiment has a certain transcendental value.

In our modern day, whether from the perspective of global issues or governance, there are not many countries that maintain the worldview of a “one family world, one person China” (*tianxia yijia, zhongguo yiren* 天下一家, 中國一人)³ due to the long-term domination of foreign thought. We must of course acknowledge some Western countries which have retained this worldview. However, in recent times, Europeans who express this sentiment have been challenged by Middle Eastern immigrants, who supposedly hinder the progress of Europe. Moreover, in the United States, former President Donald Trump subscribes to a conservative tradition with close-minded characteristics. Nevertheless, there is still an unquestionable element of idealism and a predilection for inclusion in American culture. U.S. history is markedly short. If we elongate the lens through which we view history, then this collective

3 “Liyun” 禮運, in *Liji* 禮記 states, “So saints can make the whole world like one family, like the whole nation like one person, not through subjective imagination, but realising human relationships, knowing justice, understanding people’s interests, and being familiar with human suffering. Only then can it be achieved.” See Zhu Bin 朱彬, *Liji xunzuan* 禮記訓纂 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 1: 344.

tianxia consciousness of Chinese civilization is the most longstanding and worthy of rebooting.

There are three factors that prompt the reestablishment of Chinese civilization's *tianxia* worldview. One is that global problems and governance have become key issues. It has become increasingly important to look beyond national horizons and establish a global perspective. Another factor is that having overcome the tragic fate it experienced in modern times, China has a new understanding of the clash between Chinese and Western culture and knows it must overcome the value conflicts and regional confrontations between the two cultures. China's modern civilization has reached a critical point where it is right in front of the threshold of human civilization, and can either advance or retreat. Thirdly, Chinese civilization is at a crossroads in terms of determining its future development, and has reached a key moment of needing to re-examine its cultural legacy.

Chinese civilization once had a complete system of *tianxia* founded on geography, and safeguarded by the kindred level and tributary systems. In comparison, the system has both inherited and surpassed the regional construct of the "*tianxia*" concept. It is evident that the *tianxia* system established in ancient China has made great breakthroughs in terms of geography. Ancestors often believed that China was the Central Plains (*zhongyuan* 中原), the *tianxia* of the Han people. Historically, on the notion of China's frontier, people long believed that the areas surrounding the Central Plains were all inhabited by barbarians, named the Four Barbarians (*man, yi, rong, and di* 蠻、夷、戎、狄), and that only the Han people could be considered ethnically Chinese. This is the reason for the "Sino-barbarian dichotomy" (*yan yixia zhifang* 嚴夷夏之防)⁴ rhetoric. This geographical concept gradually expanded, and, following China's significant influence on East Asia and even Southeast and parts of central Asia, the concept of *tianxia* in the geographical sense has developed connotations that are vastly different from its original geographical meaning. However, the real structural breakthrough was triggered by the modern event of China beginning to "open its eyes to the world" in 1840: *tianxia* gradually became the modern "world" and today's "global village".

Chinese *tianxia* is a geographically expansive concept. However, it has often been turned into a laughingstock throughout its development in modern times. Even those enlightened in the early days of modern China, not just the

4 Mencius clearly emphasizes in "Tengwengong shang" 滕文公上 in *Mengzi* 孟子 that "I've heard of using the civilization of the Central Plains to change barbarians (*man yi* 蠻夷), but never heard of being changed by barbarians." See Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 260.

conservatives, once made fools of themselves when opening their eyes to the world. In the second half of the 19th century, Chinese pioneers and trailblazers of modern culture, during this opening up to the world, assumed that westerners and even Chinese people who were close to westerners were monsters. Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857), the editor of *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志 was one such pioneer. Wei's writing described Christians in bizarre language: A non-believer walks into a church, takes a pill, and kneels, as if they are possessed, in front of a statue of God to worship, completely not recognizing their parents, relatives, uncles, and cousins ...⁵ He viewed Christianity entirely as a cult when it is actually a highly established modern, orthodox religion. The geographical expansion of the concept of *tianxia* has undergone abrupt change with the Age of Discovery in modern times, and it is no wonder that Chinese people became such a laughingstock at the time due to their ignorance. More than two hundred years have passed since Wei Yuan's time, and we will not be seeing too much of such ignorance about the world that was beyond *tianxia* at the time.

Rebooting the *tianxia* worldview of Chinese civilization does not necessarily mean reestablishing a systematic structure that was formerly supported by the kindred level and tributary systems. There is a saying that the rise of China must be reflected in the decline of the United States, or that the rise of the East must hinge on the decline of the West. In other words, the contemporary “self-centered” Chinese worldview and its corresponding institutional system are the subject of reflection for the *tianxia* establishment. Is it possible for this modern version of the *tianxia* system that is founded on Chinese history to reintegrate the historical justice-tempered-with-mercy, moral reform, and political arrangement in the present? It is hard to say. From a historical perspective, the geographical vision of the traditional kindred level system was rich, but the construction of the tributary system that developed from the kindred level system relied not on a singular but two aspects. The first was its conversion of foreign nationals to voluntarily accept Chinese culture, and the other was its powerful driving force provided by military conquest. Only focusing on upholding the former aspect and regarding it as the spiritual pillar for the reestablishment of the *tianxia* system is unfortunately inconsistent with historical reality, yet it is also at present difficult to assert the latter aspect of strength.

We can revisit the work of the renowned historian Chen Xujing's 陳序經 (1903–1967) *Xiongnu shigao* 匈奴史稿 and from that learn that the Han dynasty

5 For such legends, refer to Wei Yuan 魏源, *Wei Yuan quanji* 魏源全集 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2004), 27.805–06.

(202 BCE–220 CE) fought and defeated the Xiongnu, who migrated to Europe, inducing fear in Europeans regarding the power of Asians.⁶ Although this is not directly related the *tianxia* upheld by China and its surrounding areas, the enormous repercussions of the war between the Han and Xiongnu showed that military force in the construction of the *tianxia* system definitely played no less of a role than that of moral reform and cultural identity. However, with the world currently being in a multipolar structural state, attempting to rely on force to reestablish *tianxia* would be impossible.

The tributary system was not what current Chinese people surmise it to be – neighboring countries genuinely and sincerely submitting to China's rule. When neighboring countries came to China to pay tribute, China often possessed the narcissism that came from unilaterally believing it to be respect from outsiders, when in fact the tributes rarely had this reverence. The remark “measure and give China's material resources to appease big powers”⁷ was by no means just the politicized diplomatic mentality of China supporting itself as a less powerful state, but the core of the foreign policy system in Chinese civilization, but it was embodied in two aspects. In ancient times, any country that came to pay tribute meant it submitted to the Chinese regime and in turn could receive great material gifts. This was a kind of sentimental influence regime in the tributary system; in modern times, with China having weaker national power, it adopted a mentality of not losing face, and therefore would rather cede benefits to outsiders to maintain its dominance. This was a kind of political competitiveness of the tributary system, and does not mean that imperial China had the hard and soft powers to subjugate countries paying tribute. Moreover, the tributary system cultivated imperial China's political habit of being passive in diplomatic relations, which was evidently not conducive to active diplomacy for imperial China, and this introversion is also obvious.⁸

Contemporary relations between countries are more concerned with equal exchange and reciprocal interests, which is certainly not a modern reestablishment of the tributary system. In comparison, out of the three connotations of the traditional *tianxia* system, the contemporary value of the geographical and systematic aspects is no longer apparent. What is conducive to paving a bright future for humankind is its spiritual notion, namely a fondness for *tianxia*.

6 Chen Xujing 陳序經, *Xiongnu shigao* 匈奴史稿 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), 514–48.

7 Qing (1616–1911) court edict from the Guangxu Emperor 光緒 (r. 1875–1908) on February 14th 1901, under the invasion of the Eight-Nation Alliance and the defeat of the Qing government.

8 Li Yunquan 李云泉, *Wanbang laichao: chaogong zhidu shilun* 萬邦來朝：朝貢制度史論 (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 2014), 256–62.

China pays attention to the entire world and attaches importance to the consistency of human values, and the “one family world, one person China” saying is truly the most valuable concept in today’s noisy world. Viewing the world as one family and China as one person does not mean that everyone in the world belongs to the imperial family and submits to the emperor alone. On the contrary, its essence is that like attracts like (*tongqi xiangqiu* 同氣相求) – all humans are brothers and sisters, and all creatures are companions (*minbao wuyu* 民胞物與).⁹ It is founded on people’s uniform dignity, intercommunity development, and equality, thereby equipping it with a universal inspirational energy. Based on this, China’s *tianxia* worldview is not limited to a national lens, but undoubtedly a global vision. In other words, this fondness or predilection is not only of practical significance to the Chinese people themselves, but universally pertinent to global governance; it is not merely about pursuing cultural uniqueness, but rather comprehensively widening our horizons so that all citizens across the globe can unite and share in our personhood. This therefore allows the possibility to transcend the oppositional world system constructed by heterogeneous nation-states.

In this particular sense, rebooting the *tianxia* worldview of Chinese civilization is to mainly tap into the valuable essence of the nation that is capable of rectifying the conflict mechanisms in the modern world system. At the same time, we need to curb the non-inclusive notions of megalomania and dominance embodied in the deific complex (*wanbang laichao* 萬邦來朝) of the ancient Chinese *tianxia* system. Only in this way can Chinese people truly shoulder the responsibility for our bright and prosperous future.

2 A Language Vehicle for the *Tianxia* Worldview

Language is an important vehicle for the development of civilization and culture. Renowned philosopher Martin Heidegger emphasized that “Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell.”¹⁰ To reboot *tianxia*, we must select an appropriate linguistic vehicle. Due to the major changes that ancient and modern Chinese have undergone, it is in a sense very difficult to understand the fundamental principles expressed in “ancient Chinese” in

9 “All people are siblings of mine, and all things are fundamentally connected to me.” 民吾同胞；物吾與也。Zhang Zai 張載, *Zhangzai ji* 張載集, coll. Zhang Xichen 章錫琛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978), 62.

10 Martin Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 239.

traditional China from a perspective consistent with ancient and modern language, such as the meaning of concepts like home, nation, and *tianxia*, and the cultural environment depicted in them. There would be a considerable gap in understanding these in contemporary China. Due to the change in the country's power in modern times, understanding the historical, cultural, and political connotations of the traditional home, nation, and *tianxia* through incorrect assumptions may cause greater misunderstandings. Therefore, determining a modern expression for the traditional *tianxia* worldview may be a precondition for rationally conveying a “modern” *tianxia* worldview.

With the collapse of the ancient *tianxia* system in modern times, the Chinese language has evidently regressed or even degenerated in the broad sense of intellectual prowess. Firstly, the vigor in the language that was symbolic of Han through Tang dynasties' atmosphere has vanished. That kind of discourse was a language form that demonstrated the majesty of Chinese civilization. It possessed an exemplary element for neighboring countries. Broadly speaking, *tō-on* (Tang sound, *tang yin* 唐音) was once considered to be an extremely developed language in Chinese civilization. However, through history repeating itself, the decline of civilization, and being conquered by ethnic minorities twice, the language incorporated the vernacular of outsiders. Although this renewed the dynamics of the Chinese language, it also drastically changed the structure of Chinese phonetics and ideograms. Some have pointed out that Mandarin today is a “post-slavery language”.¹¹ It is a Chinese system of communication based on the Manchu (*manzu* 滿族) language. Even though Mandarin is not directly equivalent to Manchu, the tone and intonation of Manchu significantly affects its pronunciation. As such, even if Mandarin is not a “slave language”, it is at least a “colonial language”. Putting aside the element of extremism in this kind of rhetoric, it does reflect the historical rise and fall of Chinese civilization's language.

This kind of language system, after the intrusion of western culture and the exertion of western forces on the east (*xili dongjian* 西力東漸) coupled with the eastward spread of western thought (*xixue dongjian* 西學東漸), has made Chinese traditional culture both difficult to understand in depth and facing problems conveying “modern” expression if it does not embed western rhetoric and modes of expression. Especially following Japan's “secondhand” translation of western culture, modern Chinese has been loaded with a duality of social information. One is the messaging of being a loser – the language of the

11 Nangfang wang 南方網, “Putonghua shi wuhu luanhua de nuhua chanwu” 普通話是五胡亂華的奴化產物, Sohu, July 15, 2010, <http://star.news.sohu.com/20100715/1273518353.shtml>.

Han through Tang dynasties has been made obsolete and become a powerless language. What was entrusted to the Chinese language was not the substantive power of its civilization and culture, but voices of the disenfranchised calling for justice that were rooted in the language. Chinese has many expressions for this. The crux of it, however, is that it is a victim narrative: because I am the vulnerable, you cannot bully me, and because I am vulnerable and you once bullied me, the bully is never right so I am forever morally superior. The formulaic expression for the country's situation that "a nation will be bullied if it is weak" reflects a certain modern personality of the Chinese language. Strictly speaking, this kind of expression requires a comprehensive rethinking. If this kind of weak and moralizing language does not undergo fundamental change, the long-suppressed concept of *tianxia* will not only be difficult to comprehend, but it will also cause people to believe China has fallen into a state of vanity. It would be challenging for *tianxia* to rebuild a normal or strong language in such a linguistic environment.

Second, due to the Western world system showing its dominance toward the traditional Chinese *tianxia* ideology in modern times, China often uses the behavior patterns of westerners to construct language, exhibiting a linguistic style considerably characterized by social Darwinism. This was succinctly and clearly conveyed by Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854–1921): "The inferior races therefore perished so that the superior races could survive. The surviving superior races continue to compete with each other, with the fittest remaining, continuously outcompeting other races. As the outcompeted increase in number, those surviving evolved day by day, thus giving rise to humankind. Human beings are the fittest of today's organisms, but what will happen in the future is unknown. Darwin's theory of natural selection, the leading theory in academia and politics, is one that is immutable."¹² This philosophy is bound to turn language into a tool for competition. The sense of home that people place in language would disappear without a trace. This results in a distorted use of language: when facing the current balance of interests between countries or in the effort to resolve conflicts between them, language is wielded as a moral instrument for self-defense rather than a means of expressing the actual situation and as a bargaining tool. Further, language is also taken as a means of expressing attitude rather than a tool for rational articulation, and polarized rhetoric is prevalent. In this regard, Chinese must undergo reform before it can truly assume a linguistic role that bears the future of humankind.

Of course, when looking at the modern evolution of Chinese civilization through language, there is still the issue of how to deal with "the language of the

¹² Yanfu ji 嚴復集, ed. Wang Shi 王栻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 186.

May Fourth” and “cultural heritage”. I have a firmly defensive attitude toward the spirit of enlightenment of the May Fourth Movement, unequivocally rejecting all the so-called classical arguments that deviate from the standpoint of modern values, and the views that reject what is modern from a postmodern perspective. This is because, while the language of the May Fourth was extreme, it pointed out that China must pursue modern knowledge (science), and achieve the political goal of limiting power (democracy). This is still the goal for the modern transformation that Chinese people should endeavor to accomplish in contemporary China. However, the May Fourth Movement also had its shortcomings. On the one hand, because the movement was a modern revolution in traditional language and writing, it contributed tremendously to bringing Chinese into the world of modern language, from a purely linguistic perspective. On the other hand, though, it regarded ordinary language too highly, and even made it populist, resulting in the total loss of China’s elite language. Elite language is not simply a form of language that embodies the consciousness of elite groups, but a means of expression with abundant personality for the Chinese language. Because the movement single-handedly promoted written vernacular Chinese and rejected Classical Chinese, the individuality of linguistic expression was wiped away, most of the elite language vanished, and the usage of inelegant language became prevalent. This is quite a pity. In comparison, the traditional Chinese elite language (Classical Chinese and its vernacular) contains the essence of classical Chinese culture, and maintained a refined quality in expression. If it were turned into a modern Chinese elite language, it would distinctly help people to accept rational modern language culture. Written vernacular Chinese plays a major role in popularizing culture, and through prosaic expression, it allows for easy communication in contexts that foster ease of comprehension and is suitable for all ages. However, simplification as the only pursued aesthetic form for written vernacular Chinese has greatly hurt the character of the elite language, and the generic and lack of diverse expression makes it very difficult for modern Chinese to exemplify the respective wonders displayed through even two linguistic forms of the elite and ordinary language.¹³

There are not many literary language forms at present that sound both attractive and feel good, but maintain an air of obscurity. The reason is that such linguistic expressions are somewhat out of touch with the current prevalent system of communication. The May Fourth Movement intercepted elite

13 Shang Wei 商偉, “Yanwen fenli yu xiandai minzu guojia – ‘baihuawen’ de lishi wuhui ji qi yiyi” 言文分離與現代民族國家—“白話文”的歷史誤會及其意義, *Dushu* 讀書, no. 11 (2016): 11.

language, and personalized language expressions decreased while generic and political language increased. Therefore, the politicized or moral language with which people today are familiar naturally logically dominates. It is a communication system in which grandiose statements obscure enriched thinking. According to economist Zhang Weiyong 張維迎, this is a kind of “language corruption”: “What is meant by language corruption? Simply put, it is when people form vocabulary for political or ideological purposes, and attach some different or even completely antonymous connotations. They can then fool the audience and achieve their agenda.”¹⁴ This kind of phenomenon has not yet been taken seriously by people – everyone uses this type of language, so we are all accustomed to it and unsurprised by it. People never seem to think of using their own distinctive language to realize the purpose of mutual communication more thoroughly, so that language can truly become the spiritual home of the nation and the people.

China’s attempt to reboot *tianxia* and modernize its expression requires another linguistic revolution. Of course, that would no longer be a linguistic revolution in the style of the May Fourth Movement’s new cultural movement. This is not merely because we lack the appeal that people such as Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967), Li Dazhao 李大釗 (1889–1927), and Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) had, but also because a personalized method of linguistic expression is what is needed post-revolution, not pursuing a uniform system of expression. Only under the premise of opening up a market for the ideology of *tianxia* and manifesting its discourse and phenomenal majesty can it reenter the theoretical stage of the modern world. In other words, *tianxia* needs to be placed into the ideology market to convey its multifaceted expressions, in order to highlight its rich connotations and modern vigor in competitive and personalized expressions. This would bring *tianxia* into the inner world of contemporary China, not only enabling it to be expressed in a deeply systematic and creative way, but to break into mainstream thought on a wider scale and become an ideological resource for sparking modern society’s envisioned world system.

14 Zhang Weiyong 張維迎, “Yuyan fubai dao zhi daode duoluo” 語言腐敗導致道德墮落, on Fenghuang wang 鳳凰網, accessed April 22, 2022, https://finance.ifeng.com/news/special/beiyoucaig3_1/index.shtml.

3 Nationalism and Reestablishing the *Tianxia* Worldview

There is the question of whether the *tianxia* sentiment and ideology can reach a field of theoretical research that is comparable or equal to nationalism in terms of theoretical connotation. This is a question that requires careful analysis. In a sense, because nation-states are the norm in today's world, people will habitually view national issues and international relations from a nationalist point of view. However, this is not an ideal situation. Breaking away from the confines of nationalism and embarking on an attempt to adopt thought that transcends antagonistic and divisive nationalism is an important driving force that encourages people to imagine a new world order.

From a historical point of view, nationalism has been the predominant political school of thought since the signing of the Peace of Westphalia, and is one of the most critical political doctrines for the establishment of a modern nation-state. However, what is well acknowledged in the academia of politics is that nationalism has not been well articulated in theory. On the one hand, this is reflected in the long history of nationalism and its absence from recognized classic academic disciplines, but it is also due to the fact that nationalism is always in a state of pursuing the own self interests of the nation and its correspondingly constructed state,¹⁵ lacking the virtue of "above all nations is humanity". The elucidation of cosmopolitanism in Western academia far exceeds its elucidation of nationalism theory. From a theoretical perspective, nationalism roughly comes from empirical description or generalization of the status quo.

Whether it is *tianxia* or cosmopolitanism, what is their relationship with nationalism? A conflicting one, of course. Nationalism is concerned with the smaller communities in the global village, including the ideologies, cultural traditions, and identities of each nation. Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925) once said that "nationalism is a treasure for countries seeking development and races seeking survival."¹⁶ Why is nationalism a treasure? Because in the era of the nation-state, each nation relies on nationalism to strengthen national identity and sustain its own centripetal operation. Whether in cultural, political, or other identities, this kind of group identity is tantamount to building a wall that protects one from others. In order to establish a modern nation-state, people have consolidated traditional boundaries and barriers of nationalities

15 Zhao Tingyang 趙汀陽, *Tianxia tixi: shijie zhidu zhexue daolun* 天下體系：世界制度哲學導論 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2011), 1–10.

16 Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 [Sun Yat-sen], *Sun Zhongshan xuanji* 孫中山選集 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981), 2: 644.

and races, and almost without exception have experienced the tragedy of racial discrimination, ethnic cleansing, and even genocide. This hints of nationalism's downhill trajectory.¹⁷

The evolution of nationalism has also had a positive effect. Its evolutionary journey has prompted modern nation-states to overcome three thresholds. The first is the establishment of a corresponding state based on the majority nationality of their central inhabited area. This is the modern state structure of the nation-state with which people are familiar. The second is that when underdeveloped nations strive to establish a state, they naturally imitate advanced nations in the sense of a predecessor. At the same time, depending on the circumstances of the underdeveloped nation, a strong moral impulse emerges – a sense of justice, which stems from powerful countries and simultaneously projects onto weak ones, to help the disadvantaged and impoverished. For example, we realize that there are other nations like us in the world that are bullied by Western powers and need to establish statehood, so we are willing to support their state-building enterprise, and the slogan “people need liberation, nations need independence” reflects this concept of statehood. This kind of solidarity transcends the narrow boundaries between nations. Thirdly, driven by the political psychology of transcending national boundaries, a kind of internationalist sentiment based on “we all share the same humanity”¹⁸ spontaneously arises. However, the corresponding vision for such a system and its realization are still rather void.

Nationalism has been heavily criticized, and needs to be reflected upon in political theory. The reason is that nationalism itself is structurally contradictory: on the one hand, it appeals to the aspirations of small communities relative to the global “big family”, while on the other, it must ultimately transcend national boundaries and tend toward a one-family world. This inevitably means conflicting ethical and political desires, which require the gradual development of political ability and conceptual skill to rationally manage these conundrums by nations all over the world.

Nationalism is not a notion of absolute mutual exclusion among nations. Therefore, it is not necessarily entirely antagonistic to or in conflict with *tianxia* and cosmopolitanism. In this sense, there is an assertion that polity structure is linked with international relations – nations that have become democratic, such as the French and Yamato people, established democracies without war

17 Michael Mann, “The Argument,” in *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1–11.

18 *Mao Zedong shici jianshang daquan* 毛澤東詩詞鑒賞大全, comp. Ji Shichang 季世昌 (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 1994), 169.

between them. International conflict between non-democratic countries, on the other hand, often resort to war. Generally speaking, the homogeneous pursuit of peace is first achieved among democracies. Independent democracies have subdued the uncivilized elements of nationalism in their shared pursuit of democracy, and therefore are able to live in mutual peace and deal with conflicts through peaceful approaches. The most recent example is Scottish independence, which the United Kingdom did not resolve through force, but decided through a referendum. In this regard, the paths forward for nationalism and cosmopolitanism converge.

Political theories that attempt to surpass nationalism take two different approaches – “*neo-tianxia* ideology”¹⁹ and “neo-cosmopolitanism”.²⁰ *Neo-tianxia* ideology emphasizes the equal relationship between nation-states; this equality, however, is not from the cosmopolitanism constructed by modern Western nations, but from the ancient Chinese concept of *tianxia*. This concept is just no longer founded on Sinocentrism, but rather stands among equal nation-states. At the same time, the ideology overcomes the small-minded pursuit of interest of nation-states, fostering a kind of political sentiment that approximates the one-family world. This *tianxia* ideology is referred to as *neo-tianxia* ideology because it not only subverts the ancient Chinese Sinocentric *tianxia* establishment, but also addresses the inequality between nation-states that has long been dictated by Western countries. However, *neo-tianxia* ideology attempts to reintroduce the classical Chinese concept of *tianxia*, and places the ancient and modern aspects of dealing with diplomatic relations in the modern day above the Chinese-Western aspects. This attempts to change the issues of the ancient-modern relationship highlighted by the structural transformation of Chinese tradition, issues of Chinese-Western relations hastened by Western pressures on China, into the issue of China reestablishing its tradition to solve modern day challenges. It would be a blessing for humanity if *neo-tianxia* ideology promoted a new way on an institutional level. More importantly, it would be a blessing brought to the whole world by the Chinese people. However, this idealistic conception of international order is essentially no different from the idealized “world” order constructed by Western countries. Thus, neither of the relevant theoretical underpinnings that have presently attracted attention,

19 Xu Jilin 許紀霖, Liu Qing 劉擎, and Bai Tongdong 白彤東, “Xin tianxia zhuyi: dang zhongguo zaoyu shijie” 新天下主義：當中國遭遇世界, Sohu, March 17, 2018, https://www.sohu.com/a/225767793_215308.

20 Li Yongjing 李永晶, “Xin shijie zhuyi: pojie minzu jingshen de shidai kunjing” 新世界主義：破解民族精神的時代困境, Sohu, August 24, 2017, https://www.sohu.com/a/166952528_120776.

namely “*neo-tianxia* ideology” and “neo-cosmopolitanism”, have been able to demonstrate the fundamental differences they each claim.

Generally speaking, the *tianxia* system emphasizes the systematic level, and not that of individual behavior. What will be the relationship between the two? If political theory only talks of the system and not the individual, is the relevant institutional design simply not feasible?

There is indeed some kind of disconcerting disconnect between the two. The first is the logical disconnect of modern political theory, which aims to address issues regarding individual behavior, and only guarantees a state of government or order in certain nation-states. That is, protecting individual freedom and social order through the limitation of power. As soon as it reaches an international level, this theoretical logic is lost. What is the reason for this? It is due to the international community still being in a state of anarchy as a whole. This makes international politics vastly different from politics in China, which seeks to address the legitimacy of individual, organizational, and political acts within the sovereignty of the state. It is powerless once beyond this scope. This is an issue that the international community has been unable to manage properly to date. The agents of political behavior within a state are individual citizens, whereas the behavioral agents of international politics are states as a whole, and people are unable to observe and comprehend political activity within and among states with the same logic when there is a sudden leap from individual behavior to behavior among huge-scale political groups, namely states. It is worth noting that in international political theory, there is no political construction that takes the individual as a behavioral entity, only the cognitive individualism approach.

Secondly, in the theoretical establishment of *tianxia* ideology, people try to adopt the approach of “self-cultivation, family regulation, state governance, and bringing peace to all” (*xiu qi zhi ping* 修齊治平),²¹ climbing their way up in order to solve all problems from self-cultivation to *tianxia* governance. I am under the belief that this is a dead end, because this mentality can neither adapt to the needs of modern society nor access the respectively separate realms of human action. The conceptualization of *neo-tianxia* ideology does not pay a high degree of attention to the individual. Whether this propagation is sufficiently felt is a matter of little concern to advocates. However, even if the degree of personal moral integrity is strong enough to have international influence, whether the corresponding feedback of the people is absolutely

21 “First cultivate the mind on a personal level, then you can manage your family well; only when family is taken care of can you govern the country, and only when the country is governed well can the world be united.” Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, 3.

unanimous is certainly questionable. In this sense, modern political theory can by no means implement a consistent smooth governance from the individual all the way to *tianxia*, as some suggest. In addition, “pay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God” results in a significant disconnect between secular and sacred affairs. Internal affairs are handled by their sovereign state, international affairs are handled through diplomatic negotiation or resort to war, and the familiar tactics of addressing political issues in one country cannot be applied to resolving international issues. Therefore, it becomes evident why realism and neorealism are at the forefront and mainstream in schools of thought on international politics, while the liberalism movement in international politics does not exert as great an influence as it does in internal politics. One of the reasons for this is that the thinking of liberalism theory in international politics cannot directly be mapped from the internal to the international scope, and properly manage all issues with consistency.

Translated by Serena Ye

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