

Han-Nationalism Throughout the Ages

Weiyng Wu
Washington University in St. Louis

Introduction

Beginning in the 1980s, a trend of traditional studies known as “*guo xue*,” (国学) meaning national studies, proliferated in the wake of socioeconomic changes in contemporary China.¹ In particular, it encompassed the revival of Confucianism, giving rise to related activity such as the establishment of “national studies institutes” (国学院) and “Han study centers” (汉学中心). This intellectual trend and related activities are referred to as the “national studies craze” (国学热).² In the 2010s, the trend gained new traction with the aid of internet and media technologies. Activities like adorning the “*Han fu*” (汉服) historical dress of the Han people that was designed to reflect Confucian scholars' aspirations towards rituals, music, and moralistic ideals - and learning classical poetry and literature through television shows like *Lecture Room* (百家讲坛), *Chinese Poetry Conference* (中国诗词大会), and *Letter Alive* (见字如面) became immensely popular in urban China, especially among Chinese millennials.³ The official response to the “national studies craze” has been generally positive. In 2014, Chinese president Xi Jinping remarked, “[the] learning of excellent Chinese traditional cultures is the spiritual lifeline of the Chinese nation and a source of inspiration for the values of socialism.”⁴ Yet despite the atmosphere of enthusiasm, the legitimacy of “national studies” came under the critical scrutiny of Chinese historians and ethnic studies scholars. It is apparent that contemporary “national studies” have either consciously or subconsciously co-opted Han traditions and practices over other ethnic cultures that made up the social fabric of past and

¹ Ao, Jia. *Guoxue Re Fangxing Wei Ai He Na Ban?* (国学热方兴未艾为哪般?) [the Difficult Rise of the National Studies Craze] (*Ziyou Yazhou Diantai* (自由亚洲电台), 27 Dec. 2018), 22–30.

² Chen Jiaming, *The National Studies Craze* (China Perspectives, 2011), 22-30.

³ Leibold, James. *More Than a Category: Han Supremacism on the Chinese Internet* (The China Quarterly, 2010), 539–559.

⁴ Xi Jinping, *Speech in Commemoration of the 2,565th Anniversary of Confucius' Birth*, (US-China focus Library, 2014) <http://library.chinausfocus.com/article-1534.html>.

present China, thus reinforcing the idea of “Chinese-ness” as a Han-centric and exclusionary one. Historian James Leibold observes that Han-centricity is especially pervasive in the contemporary thoughts and speech of a segment of “increasingly vocal Chinese youth”. In his study, *Han Supremacism on the Chinese Internet*, he argues that the expression of Han-centric Chinese pride and patriotism has much to tell us about the complex nature of identity formation in post-reform China—it reflects a complicated mix of “anxiety”, “frustration”, “a sense of powerlessness” and “dislocation”.⁵

A parallel can be seen between the contemporary “national studies craze” and the late-Qing revolutionary discourse. At the turn of the 20th century, the articulation of Han supremacism was most notable during China's transition from empire to nation-state, when a new generation of Chinese elites adapted the Western concept of race into the Chinese discourse.⁶ Revolutionary intellectuals like Zou Rong (邹容), Liang Qi Chao (梁启超) and Sun Yat Sen (孙中山) were at the forefront of the anti-manchurism and modernization movements. Their cause inevitably entailed the procedure of othering the Manchus, which simultaneously reconfigured a pure Han ethnic identity.⁷ After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912, young revolutionaries were inspired by their newly possessed sense of racial awareness and meted out vengeance against the Manchu ethnic group, resulting in heavy casualties. Realizing the danger of Han-supremacism, the republican government began to merge Western notions of liberal pluralism with the Confucian discourse of cultural universalism to promote a more inclusive multi-ethnic society. The subsequent Communist regime took a similar stand: in 1953, Mao Zedong claimed that “Han chauvinism” (大汉主义) was ripe throughout the Party

⁵ Leibold, James, *More Than a Category: Han Supremacism on the Chinese Internet* (The China Quarterly, 2010), 541.

⁶ Joniak-Luthi, *The Han: China's Diverse Majority* (University of Washington Press, 2015), 3-18.

⁷ Leibold, James, *More Than a Category: Han Supremacism on the Chinese Internet* (The China Quarterly, 2010), 543.

and among the masses, and needed to be resolutely stamped out.⁸ Under the Mao era, traditional Confucianism was also labelled as feudalistic, conservative and an impediment to social progress. As such, it was subjected to organized criticism throughout the country. Yet, after the death of Mao and the end of his pervasive ideological presence, Confucianism was revitalized as a primary source of moral code and governing principle. Intellectual elites again mobilized the ancient Han ethnonym to create a sense of unity in the population and craft an image of authentic Chineseness that is memorable to the global audience.⁹

This paper seeks to contextualize the discursive terrain in which Han supremacism has been conceptualized and incubated. It compares the multiple resurgences of Han-centricity and Confucianism in the 1900s (late to post-Qing), 1980s (post-Mao) and 2010s (present day) respectively, and explores the reason for its continuity. The paper seeks to add nuance to the conventional wisdom, official narratives and assumptions that have guided popular discourse on present-day Chinese nationalism and ethnic problems, while presenting the diverse contemporary viewpoints on the latest “national studies craze”. The methodology of the paper includes examining the writings of historical intellectual elites who have shaped the public discourse Chinese identity and racial politics, such as Zou Rong, Liang Qichao, Hu Shih and Sun Yat Sen and analyzing contemporary commentaries published through both formal and informal channels such as newspapers and social media. The paper argues that contemporary ethnic conflicts are a continuation of the post-Qing Han-nationalistic sentiments, which essentially stem from the Han population’s feeling of anxiety and identity crisis.

From imperial to post-imperial Han ethnicity and nationhood

⁸ Mao Zedong, “Criticize Han chauvinism” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Foreign Languages Press, 1977), Vol. 5, 87-88.

⁹ Song X, *Reconstructing the Confucian Ideal in 1980s China: The Culture Craze” and New Confucianism” in New Confucianism: A Critical Examination*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403982414_4.

The Han Min Zu or Han Zu (汉族) translates as “Han nationality” or “Han ethnic group”. It refers to the largest state-recognized ethnic group in China that makes up 91.5 percent of the total population.¹⁰ In China today, Han Zu is officially recognized as the “core” of the Chinese multi-ethnic nation, surrounded by 55 “minor groups”. Ironically, while the “minor groups” became the subject of various researches since the Min Zu Classification Project (民族识别) in the 1980s, the largest ethnic group – Han Zu - experienced limited attention from mainstream ethnic scholarship. Hitherto, the exact size, distribution and characteristics of the Han ethnic group remain a mystery. In scholar Peng Yong Jie (彭永捷)’s words: “the Han culture does not possess any unique features that is not shared by rest of great Zhong Hua nation” because is it “already the collective identity” of a hodgepodge of people, brought together by historical patterns of migrations and contemporary policies.¹¹

Similar to the concept of whiteness in the United States, Han is constructed and institutionalized for varying purposes in different periods of Chinese history. The generally accepted view is that Han Chinese can trace their origin to the Hua Xia ethnic group, which took shape during the Shang and Zhou dynasties (21st–8th centuries BC) in the Central Plain region (中原).¹² Nonetheless, the geographical boundaries of Han during the Spring and Autumn Period were unstable because state institutions did not have the capacity to guard their lands to the degree possible in the modern and contemporary periods. As such, Han people melded together with the ethnic minorities during immigration, wars and conflicts. Moreover, territorial and lineage identities were more important than the Han ethnicity in the pre-modern

¹⁰ Joniak-Luthi, *The Han: China's Diverse Majority*, (University of Washington Press, 2015), 3-18.

¹¹ Leibold, James, *More Than a Category: Han Supremacism on the Chinese Internet* (The China Quarterly, 2010), 549.

¹² Cioffi-Revilla C, Lai D, *War and Politics in Ancient China, 2700 BC to 722 BC: Measurement and Comparative Analysis* (Journal of Conflict Resolution, 1995), 467–494.

tribal relationships and social organization.¹³ To further complicate matters, the Han identity shared an indistinct relationship with other Chinese identities that originated from the same period, such as Zhong Hua (中华), Xia (夏), Hua (华), and Hua Xia (华夏), all of which can be used interchangeably to convey the meaning of “Chinese”.¹⁴ Collectively, these factors render the historical Han-ness ambiguous, flexibly, and poorly-institutionalized.

The concept of Han first emerged as a distinctive and institutionalized nationality, ethnicity or race identity during the first decade of the 20th century, during China's transition from empire to nation-state. During this period, a new generation of Chinese nationalist, famously led by the founder of Republic of China (ROC) Sun Yat Sen, adapted the Western concept of race into the Chinese discourse and reconfigured a pure Han identity that united their revolutionary cause.¹⁵ Inspired by the history of revolutions in the West, the Chinese nationalists developed a heightened awareness of their own ethno-national identity. In Zou Rong's essay, *The Revolutionary Army* 《革命军》, he opens his argument with the following lines:

The excessive rights given to the aristocrats, the harm done to the people's livelihood, the unauthorized increase of taxes...were the reasons why the English Parliament revolted against King Charles...the abandonment of the principle of the protection of the people, and unrestrained taxation were the reasons that French people ... did not flinch from violence and upheaval. A heavy tea tax, the forcible imposition of a printing tax without the consent of the legislative assembly...were the reasons that the Americans protested against the British...I do not mind

¹³ Joniak-Luthi, Agnieszka, *The Han "Minzu", Fragmented Identities, and Ethnicity*, (The Journal of Asian Studies, 2013), 849-871.

¹⁴ Joniak-Luthi, *The Han: China's Diverse Majority*, (University of Washington Press, 2015), 3-18.

¹⁵ Chow Kai-wing, "Imagining boundaries of blood," in Frank Dikitter (ed.), *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997), 34-52.

repeating: Domestically we are the slaves of the Manchus and we are suffering from their abusive suppression.”

与贵族重大之权利，害人民营业之生活...此英国议院所以不服查理王而倡革命之原因也...大相悬殊，既失保民之道，而又赋敛无度，此法国志士仁人所以不辞暴举逆乱之名。重征茶课，横加印税，不待立法院之承允...此美人所以抗论于英人之前。吾不惜再三重申详言曰：内为满洲人之奴隶，受满洲人之暴虐。”¹⁶

By drawing parallels between the famous Western revolutions - the anti-aristocratic English Revolution, French Revolution and the anti-colonial American Revolution - Zou underscores the notion that China was being governed by an alien race of the Manchus, just as how America was governed by British colonists who felt no remorse for their nameless subjects in the foreign land. Zou implies that the Manchus were no different from the exploitative aristocrats or colonizers, because their sole agenda was to “enslave” (“奴隶”) and “abuse” (“暴虐”). This perception of a master-slave relationship gave rise to the conclusion that the goal of modernizing China necessarily entailed the overthrow of the Manchus and the establishment of a Han-Chinese nation state. Sun Yat Sen summarized this grand ambition in twelve characters in his rebellion slogan: Expel the Barbarians, Restore the Hua and Establish the Republic of China (驱除鞑虏，恢复中华，创立民国).¹⁷ In Sun’s revolutionary philosophy, the Han identity is exclusively possessed by the so-called civilized Hua Xia (华夏) people originating from the Central Plains who were former subjects of the Celestial empire and

¹⁶ Zou, Rong, and Jung Tsou, *The Revolutionary Army* (Editions de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales 1968).

¹⁷ Barabantseva, E, *From the Language of Class to the Rhetoric of Development: discourses of nationality and ethnicity in China* (Journal of Contemporary China, 2008) , 17(56), 565–589.

espousers of Confucianism. After the fall of the Celestial empire, the Hua Xia subjects were turned into an ethnic group. They embodied the spirit of the great Hua civilization, and are the rightful inhabitants of the modern Chinese territory. Vice versa, the non-Han person is an uncivilized alien who did not participate in the history of Chinese civilization in a significant and meaningful way.¹⁸ As such, Zou Rong famously proclaimed that “中国为中国人之中国。我同胞皆须自认自己的汉种中国人之中国” China is the China of the Chinese. We compatriots should identify ourselves with the China of the Han Chinese.¹⁹

Zou Rong's work, *The Revolutionary Army* became the most successful piece of anti-Manchu propaganda in the revolutionary decade, and earned the honorary names of “The First Textbook of National Education” (国民教育之第一教科书) and “Oath of Human Right in Modern China” (中国近代《人权宣誓》).²⁰ His writing was effective because of its strong psychological appeal to the masses who were suffering from the turmoil of internal instability and foreign aggression in the late Qing-period. Zou's writing provided an assuring answer to the despondent population that all of China's 20th century problems can be attributed to the alien Manchu rulers. In doing so, he symbolically absolves the Han population of blame, while boasting their potential for achieving greatness if given the chance to rule:

The stain in the history of the country can be cleansed, your motherland's reputation is flying, and your independence flag is high above the clouds. The Liberty Bell has sounded in Yucheng, and your Independence Hall has been erected

¹⁸ Irgengioro, J, *China's National Identity and the Root Causes of China's Ethnic Tensions* (East Asia 35, 2018), 317–346.

¹⁹ Zou, Rong, and Jung Tsou, *The Revolutionary Army* (Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales 1968).

²⁰ Lu Shan, *Zhenluo Huangguan De Diyi Sheng Jinglei* (震落皇冠的第一声惊雷) [The first roar of thunder that shook away the crown] (The 1911 Revolution Museum, 2014), <http://www.1911museum.cn/view/609.html>

in the centre, and your monument is towering above the high wind, and your god of freedom is pointing to the sky with his left hand, and the earth with his right, appearing before you.

尔国历史之污点可洗，尔祖国之名誉飞扬，尔之独立旗已高标于云霄，尔之自由钟已哄哄于禹城，尔之独立厅已雄镇于中央，尔之纪念碑已高耸于高风，尔之自由神已左手指天，右手指地，为尔而出现

Zou's writing left a profound impact on the public's identification with modern ideas of ethnicity, nationality and race. His narrative of the imperial Han race (皇汉人种) being the descendants of the divine Huang Di (黄帝神明之子孙) adds a sense of prestige, formality and sacredness to the otherwise uncharacterized Han identity. Simultaneously, his victimizes the Hans as slaves suffering incredible humiliation under the Manchu barbarians - "*My compradors today are straddled by the Manchu thieves like ox and horses of the herdsman*" (今我同胞受治于贼满人之胯下，是即牛马之受治于牧人也). Zou's description of the Hans' misery contrasts starkly against the glorious Han history of Huang Di's era, and evokes a strong feeling of vengeance, desire of restoration and patriotism to the Han-Chinese nation.

Unfortunately, Zou and Sun's revolutionary narrative went a bit too far with the othering of Manchus. The use of highly derogatory names, such as "Despicable nomads" (游牧贱族) cultivated a sense of hatred against not only the Manchu Qing-government, but also all the other non-Han ethnic groups and nomadic tribes of China. In 1991, the Xin Hai revolutionaries launched mass massacres against the Manchus across China, slaughtering the entire 20000 Manchu population in Xi'an.²¹ Realizing the danger of Han-supremacist, anti-

²¹ Edward J. M. Rhoads, *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861–1928*, (University of Washington, 2000), 190.

Manchu nationalism, the republican elites attempted to turn back to more neutral interpretations of national identity, such as Liang Qichao's (梁启超) "Grand Nationalism" (大民族主义) that advocated for the incorporation of the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, Miao and Tibetan into one *minzu*, and Hu Shih's (胡适) "Liberal Pluralism" (自由多元主义) that was inspired by John Rawls's "Political Liberalism" (政治自由主义), which promoted the equality of rights and opportunity for members of the society with different ethno-cultural background.²²

Overall, the Han-supremacist narrative of the late-Qing nationalist revolution was born out of a necessity to other the Manchus and establish a clear binary between the aggressor and the victim. Emotionally-charged anti-Manchu rhetoric appeal to the public because it exploited the sentiments of anti-establishmentarianism, disillusionment and frustration at the Qing government's inefficiencies and the general problems that China was facing. Although this narrative was effective in rallying mass support for the revolution, it produced a vicious side-effect of demonizing the non-Han ethnic groups and sowed the seed of discord for later episodes of inter-ethnic tensions. These seeds of discord were combated in the Mao era, when a more inclusive socialist identity was favored over ethnic identities.

Post-socialist Confucianism and the Search for Roots

Mao's China went through a period of relative decline in Han-centricity and exclusion of minority ethnic groups, because the communist-socialist ideology promoted "equality de facto among ethnic groups", and the proletariat movement always welcomed more members

²² Yang Rui Song, *Dazao gongtong de xin chou jiu hen: Zou Rong guozu lunshu zhong de "tazhe jiangou"* (打造共同体的新仇旧恨：邹容国族论述中的“他者建构”) [Fomenting Racial Hatred in the Chinese Community: Zourong's Construction of the "Other" in his National Discourse] (Journal of Shenzhen University, issue 28 volume 6, 2011), 125-131.

regardless of their ethno-cultural identities.²³ Nonetheless, after the death of Mao and the end of Cultural Revolution in 1976, a “culture craze” (文化热) that promoted New Confucianism and Han-centric national studies swept across China. These developments were part of New Enlightenment Movement (新启蒙运动), a series of intellectual discourse between 1980 and 1984 that debated the meaning of nationhood and modernization for China. Intellectuals of this movement attempted to define the “national style” and “national heritage” by looking into both Chinese traditional culture and concepts of Western Modernism. In the field of literature, the “Seeking Roots” (寻根) school and “Obscure Poetry” (朦胧诗) emerged to express the sense of lost and the desire to find the cultural anchor amidst the rapid changes in post-reform China. In the field of philosophy, scholars started to re-explore traditional philosophies like Confucianism for guidance on morality and governance.²⁴

In 1978, Shandong University organized a ground-breaking forum which, for the first time in decades, discussed Confucianism without condemning its negative feudal ties. In 1980, the re-evaluation of Confucianism gained prominence when influential scholars like Zhang Dainian (张岱年), Tu Wei-ming (杜维明) and Cheng Chung Ying (成中英) began to advocate for a scientific reading of the ancient philosophy. Subsequently, Confucianism — under the name of New Confucianism — became legitimized in intellectual discussions of Chinese modernization and Westernization.²⁵ The same period also witnessed the opening of the Academy of Chinese Culture (中国文化书院) and of the Chinese Confucius Research Institute (华孔子研究所), which can be seen as physical evidence of the revival and rebranding of

²³Rong Ma, *Ethnic Relations in Contemporary China: Cultural Tradition and Ethnic Policies Since 1949, Policy and Society* (Routledge, 2006, 25-1), 85-108.

²⁴Song X, *Reconstructing the Confucian Ideal in 1980s China: The “Culture Craze” and New Confucianism” in New Confucianism: A Critical Examination*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403982414_4.

²⁵ibid, pp.84

Confucianism in the reform era. Although these academies were meant to research on the Chinese culture as a whole, they placed a premium on Confucianism because of its political ties to the glory days of the imperial era: Confucianism was perceived as the “founder of spiritual civilization” of feudal China, and formed the basis of Chinese governance and political philosophy in some of the most prosperous Chinese dynasties.²⁶ As such, Zhao De Zhi (赵德志) concluded that “the characteristics of Chinese traditional culture are, in fact, the characteristics of Confucian thought,” and “The fate of Confucian thought is tied up with the fate of the nation’s future.”²⁷ As such, New Confucianism is an indispensable part of the New Enlightenment Movement, because it is closely related to China’s future of modernization. As a result of the high-profile intellectual discussions and enterprises, Confucianism, once condemned as the culprit of feudal evils in the Mao era, was now credited as the mainstay of traditional Chinese culture and the “national essence” of contemporary China.

The Chinese intellectuals’ enthusiasm in promoting New Confucianism as the “national essence” can be interpreted as a reaction to China’s sudden opening to the outside-world. In the early phase of the Open-Door policy, Chinese intellectuals suffered a nasty shock from the economic gap between the West and China after the Cultural Revolution. Similar to how the anti-Qing nationalists felt about the “weak” China under Manchu rule, intellectuals of the 1980s were increasingly self-conscious, agonized and humiliated by the staggering discrepancy. They were tempted to modernize China by applying Western concepts, but at the same time hoped to preserve the cultural traditions that had been the very source of Chinese cultural pride.

²⁶ Zhang Dainian, “The Impact of the Thought of the School of Confucianism and the School of Daoism on the Culture of China”, *Chinese Studies in Philosophy*, Routledge, 1993, 24-4}, pp.65-68

²⁷ Zhao Dezhi 赵德志, *Xiandai xin Rujia manlun (xu)* (现代新儒家漫论 (续)) [On Modern New Confucianism: A Sequel], *Shehui kexue jikan* (社会科学季刊 1988.2), 24–25.

As such, the intellectual and ruling elites decided that the Chinese brand of modernity requires a unique expression, which entails the deliberate rejection of the West when necessary. Specifically, they promoted Confucianism as China's alternative for Western modernization theories, and attempted to create a memorable image of the Chinese people as rational, scientific and nuanced.

Unfortunately, the New Confucian Movement and its associated cultural renaissance, disproportionately endorsed the Han culture over other ethnic cultures or philosophies. Since Confucianism is steeped in the imperial tradition of Han China, it seems to naturally cast the Han ethnicity as superior and more advanced. The result is that these narratives pushed the rise of racial nationalism in the post-1989 era, which prompted an increased sense that all minorities shared the same culture and blood relations as the Han, and rejection of the idea of minority uniqueness. Here, a commonality can be observed between the late-Qing period and the post-Mao period: despite its effectiveness in creating a strong sense of ethnic or national identity in the short term, nationalistic narratives premised on ethnic grounds often fuel excessive inter-ethnic tension in the long run, resulting in eventual outbreak of conflict.

Han revivalism in the cyberspace

Since the early 2000s, an increasingly vocal group of Chinese Youth started articulating Han nationalist and supremacist speech in cyberspace, via social media, websites and online communities. One of the most prominent channel of expression was the Han-net (汉网), which had 20,000 members by the end of its second year of operation in 2004.²⁸ The young membership of these sites reflected a growth in the sense of nationalism and Chinese tradition in the post-80s and 90s generation (80后,90后) born after China's reform. Members of this

²⁸ Leibold, James, *More Than a Category: Han Supremacism on the Chinese Internet* (The China Quarterly, 2010), 556

generation generally shared the opinion that Mao's "revolutionary legacy" is not representative of the Chinese nation, and the cultural revolution was more of a diversion than a cultural event worthy of remembrance. As such, the younger Chinese turned to the imperial past for the search of their Chinese roots.²⁹ In particular, the Han legacy was again co-opted as the essence of Chinese culture. Its supporters advocated for the study of Han classics - *Four Books and Five Classics* (四书五经)³⁰ - and glamorization of the Han traditional clothing - the Han Fu, which Han-nationalists believe to be the only true form of Chinese traditional clothing as opposed to the Qipao (旗袍) and Magua (马褂) - forms of Manchu clothing.³¹ In March 2007, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference even sought to pass a motion declaring Han Fu China's national costume. Although the allure of traditional clothing and culture attracted many neutral audience to the Han Fu movement, it was started by the same group of Han-net nationalists as a campaign "for exposing "fake Chinese elements (including those masked Manchu and Mongol descendants)" who are actively hindering the restoration of Han power and consciousness. Prolific blogger Zhao Feng Nian (赵丰年) wrote that the Han-nationalist movement "does not seek revenge against any minority races," but rather the restoration of the natural order - bringing mutual benefit to both Han and minorities by destroying the violent, oppressive and pestilent culture of the nomad."³² This vision echoed the

²⁹Geremie Barm, *Shades of Mao* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996); Yang Guobin, *China's zhiqing generation*, (Modern China, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2003), 267-96; Zhu Ying, *Television in Post-reform China* (London: Routledge, 2008).

³⁰ The Four Books and Five Classics are classic Chinese texts that illustrate the core Confucianism values. They were made into the official civil examination curriculum during the Western Han, Ming and Qing dynasties.

³¹Shi Yi and Dong Yiran, *Women weishenma jiaru Hanfu yundong* (我们为什么加入汉服运动) [Why we joined the Hanfu move ment] (Beijing kejibao, 27 July 2005), <http://www.hanminzu.com/Article/mtbd/200906/713.html>.

³² Zhao Fengnian, *Hanfu chongxian yu Zhongguo de wenyi fuxing* (汉服重现中国的文艺复兴) [The reappearance of Han clothing and China's cultural renaissance] (Han Wenhua Wang (汉文化网), 08-02-2017, <http://www.han-people.com/bbs/article/articleshow.asp?id=235&name=%D5%D4%B7%E1%C4%EA&classname=%C8A%CF%C4%8F%CD%C5d>).

words of Zou Rong from the anti-Manchu movement, and gave people an impression that the Hanists' struggle to restore the true Chinese nation was not yet over. Evidently, the intellectual influence of the Qing nationalists endured and has permeated into contemporary thoughts. When present-day ethnic conflicts arise, Zou Rong's binary view of nomad-versus-Han becomes a straightforward framework for people to make sense of the chaotic situation, develop a sense of solidarity rooted in imagined ethnic glory, and organize themselves against a common enemy.

The younger generation's pursuit of Han restoration in the 2000s cannot be separated from the larger issues of racial and political power in China. The movement reflects the emotions of Chinese youth in the reform era: anxiety about their position within the society; frustration at the growing economic disparity and a sense of dissatisfaction at the affirmative policies targeted at minority ethnic groups. In the 1980s, the Chinese government reinstated and expanded a number of ethnic affirmative action policies which have been dismantled in the Mao era, in order to reduce income inequalities while promoting economic modernization of rural and frontier China.³³ The state provided the minorities with easier access to education and political office, certain exceptions from family planning, and special tax breaks and other economic incentives. Unsurprisingly, when the party-state altered the rules on ethnic registration to allow mixed marriage and people previously "misclassified" to re-apply, the minority populations ballooned, nearly doubling from 67 million in 1982 to 123 million in 2005.³⁴ Inadvertently, these policies invested minority identities with increased political significance and utility, which created resentment among the Han majority, who decry the state's action of privileging the "backward barbarians" at the expense of the more economically

³³Sautman, Barry, *Preferential policies for ethnic minorities in China: The case of Xinjiang* (Working Papers in the Social Sciences, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (32): 35, 1997).

³⁴Leibold, James, *More Than a Category: Han Supremacism on the Chinese Internet* (The China Quarterly, 2010), 545

productive Hans. In Stevan Harrell's words: "Han identity" is now a "handicap" in the era of affirmative action".³⁵ The environment gave rise to a sense of insecurity within the Han population, who pondered about their identity and position in China's multi-ethnic mosaic. Many came to the realization that the Hans are actually a "silent majority" which, unlike the rest of the ethnic groups in China, lacks their own "specialized organization", unique privileges and rights.³⁶

The frustration at the Han's underprivileged position became the motivation of anti-minority, Han-nationalist expressions in the 2000s. Commentaries that questioned the state's ethnic policy, and even harsh, neo-conservative racial narratives began to appear in abundance on the internet.³⁷ One prominent scholar and blogger Ma Rong argued that "the Han ethnicity is too weak". In contrast, the "wild wolves of the frontier have been fattened in the pigpen of the CCP's misguided nationality policies, leading to the recent riots and unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang, and creating the possibility that China will follow the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia on to the path to ethnic implosion."³⁸ Despite the deep cynicism, the blogger's comment is not without basis. The prolonged discrimination and pent-up emotions between the Han and the Uyghur minorities erupted in the July Urumqi riots, where more than 2000 people died or injured in the violent street protests, prompting the Chinese government to drastically increase armed police presence in Urumqi and limit communication access for all civilians.³⁹

³⁵Stevan Harrell, *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* (University of Washington Press, 2001),295-308.

³⁶Xu Jieshun, *Han minzu yanjiu chuyi* (汉民族研究刍议) [My humble opinion on Han studies] (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe (南宁: 广西民族出版社), 1985), 1.

³⁷Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 8-9.

³⁸Ma Rong, *Shaoshu minzu wenti de 'qu zhengzhi hua* (少数民族问题的“去政治化”) [The 'politicization' of the ethnic minority question] (Tianya, 05-21-2006), at <http://www.tianya.cn/New/PublicForum/Content.asp?strItem-no01 &idArticle=242280>.

³⁹Wong, Edward, *Chinese President Visits Volatile Xinjiang*, (The New York Times 08-25-2009) *Xinjiang arrests 'now over 1,500* (BBC News. 08-3-2009) *Xinjiang doubles compensation for bereaved families in Urumqi riot* (Xinhua News Agency, 07-21-2009).

Conclusion

Comparing the three periods, the common factor that gave rise to the resurgence of Han-nationalism is the Chinese nation's feeling of insecurity resultant from either domestic suppression or global exposure. In the post-Qing period, the public grievances at Qing government's ineffective and suppressive rule, coupled with the realization of China's backwardness as compared to the West, motivated nationalist elites to adopt a narrative of "restoring the Chinese nation" in their anti-Qing revolution. Their narrative emphasized the illegitimacy of the Manchu rule of China while calling for a Han take-over, which allegedly could restore China to its former glory. A continuity of this belief can be seen in the 1980s-reform era, where Confucianism was adopted as the "national essence" due to its association with the prosperous "Han-ruled dynasties" in the imperial past. Although this perception of Chinese history is factually and logically problematic, it deepened the imaginary divide between the Hans and the non-Hans, and increased one's fear and mistrust of the other. Today, the historical inter-ethnic tension is compounded by the failures of contemporary ethnic policies. Widespread frustration at the state's ethnic-based affirmative actions created an impression that the Han ethnicity is again repressed and disadvantaged. The feeling of anxiety, indignation and insecurity gave rise to a radical, Han-supremacist push-back that sought to give a voice to the "silent majority". Overall, Chinese nationalism throughout the ages can be seen as a constant attempt to identify who is inside or outside of the Chinese nation - an entity that is arbitrarily conceived without clear geographical, historical and ethno-cultural basis. More often than not, this ill-defined Han-nationalism is used provisionally as a political tactic to rally mass support or instil civil obedience during tumultuous times. Unfortunately, its political utility comes at the peril of future inter-ethnic relations, where Han-nationalism becomes a justification for discrimination and a ticking time bomb for ethnic conflicts like the Urumqi riot. The same trend can be seen in the deteriorating relationship with Uyghur minorities in

Xinjiang in the past few years. The official narrative of “poverty alleviation” (扶贫) and “modernize Xinjiang” (现代化改造新疆) tends to be paternalistic in nature and feeds into the subconscious assumption of the Yellow man’s burden - a duty for the Hans to civilize the less developed frontier people.⁴⁰ In this context, the Uyghurs’ rejection of help is seen as a form of defiance and betrayal, which, in popular opinion, warrants correctional punishments. In the atmosphere of exclusion and paternalism, inter-ethnic relations soured rapidly in cities where large numbers of Han and Uyghurs live together. Their ethnic boundary has been repeatedly reinforced by differences in policy treatments - while Uyghurs did enjoy attractive affirmative policies, they are also subject to stricter security checks and limited freedom of movement and speech. The belief that Uyghurs are the main beneficiaries of the country’s welfare system also exacerbated the Han civilians’ patronizing attitude towards their Uyghur neighbors.⁴¹ The widespread discrimination and mistrust has even backed considerable public support for the hard-line measures taken to put down Uyghur protests and the controversial re-education camps.⁴² These measures, in turn, heighten the sense of ethnicity and nationalism in the Uyghur population as well, resulting in a vicious cycle of mistrust and hostility - a continuation of the ethnic tension that existed since the turn of the 20th century.

In sum, the paper argues that the current state of ethnic relations in China is inseparable from the social and intellectual history of Han-nationalism since the post-Qing period. The instances of its resurgence always leave an unsavory possibility of chaos for the next

⁴⁰Ye M, *Thomas P. Paternalism in China Daily’s coverage of Chinese Muslims (2001–2015)* (Discourse & Communication. 2020;14(3):314-331), doi:10.1177/1750481319893770.

⁴¹Shan Wei, Chen Gang, *The Urumqi Riots and China’s Ethnic Policy in Xinjiang*, (*East Asian Policy*, National University of Singapore, 2009), 20 - 21.

⁴²Xiao, B. Why many in China support Beijing’s policies in Xinjiang n Hong Kong (ABC News, 30-11-2019), <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-30/why-many-in-china-support-beijings-xinjiang-n-hongkong-policy>.

generation, who continue to live under the shadow of the forefather's early imaginations about ethnicity, race and the nation.

Works Cited

1. Ao, Jia. "Guoxue Re Fangxing Wei Ai He Na Ban? (国学热方兴未艾为哪般?) [the Difficult Rise of the National Studies Craze]." *Ziyou Yazhou Diantai* (自由亚洲电台), 27 Dec. 2018, pp. 22–30, www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/kejiaowen/hc-12272018103616.html.
2. Barabantseva, Elena. "From the Language of Class to the Rhetoric of Development: Discourses of 'Nationality' and 'Ethnicity' in China." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 17, no. 56, 19 June 2008, pp. 565–589, 10.1080/10670560802000332.
3. Cioffi-Revilla, Claudio, and David Lai. "War and Politics in Ancient China, 2700 BC to 722 BC: Measurement and Comparative Analysis." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 1995, 10.2139/ssrn.2291100.
4. Geremie Barmé. *Shades of Mao : The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader*. London ; New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.
5. Jiaming, Chen. "The National Studies Craze." *China Perspectives*, vol. 2011, no. 1, 1 Jan. 2011, pp. 22–30, 10.4000/chinaperspectives.5373. Accessed 15 Oct. 2020.
6. Rong Zou, and John Lust. *The Revolutionary Army : A Chinese Nationalist Tract of 1903*. Paris ; The Hague, Mouton, 1968.
7. Zedong, Mao. "Criticize Han Chauvinism." *Chinese Law & Government*, vol. 14, no. 4, Dec. 1981, pp. 53–54, 10.2753/clg0009-4609140453. Accessed 22 July 2019.

8. Yang Rui Song, "Fomenting Racial Hatred in the Chinese Community: Zourong's Construction of the "Other" in his National Discourse", *Journal of Shenzhen University*, issue 28 volume 6, 2011, pp.125-131.
9. Agnieszka Joniak-luthi, "'INTRODUCTION.'" *The Han: China's Diverse Majority*", University of Washington Press, SEATTLE; LONDON, 2015, pp. 3-18.
10. Zhang Dainian, "The Impact of the Thought of the School of Confucianism and the School of Daoism on the Culture of China", *Chinese Studies in Philosophy*, Routledge, 1993, 24-4, pp.65-85,
11. Song X, "Reconstructing the Confucian Ideal in 1980s China: The "Culture Craze" and New Confucianism". In: Makeham J. (eds) *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. 2003, pp.81-104 Geremie Barm, "Shades of Mao", Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996.
12. Yang Guobin, "China's zhiqing generation", *Modern China*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2003), pp. 267-96.
13. Zhu Ying, "Television in Post-reform China", London: Routledge, 2008.
14. Sautman, Barry, "Preferential policies for ethnic minorities in China: The case of Xinjiang", *Working Papers in the Social Sciences*, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (32): 35, 1997
15. Ye M, Thomas P, "Paternalism in China Daily's coverage of Chinese Muslims (2001–2015). *Discourse & Communication*", 2020;14(3):314-331.
16. Shan Wei, Chen Gang, "The Urumqi Riots and China's Ethnic Policy in Xinjiang" *East Asian Policy*, National University of Singapore, 2009, pp. 14-22.
17. Leibold, James. "More Than a Category: Han Supremacism on the Chinese Internet." *The China Quarterly*, no. 203, 2010, pp. 539–559.

18. Irgengioro, J. China's National Identity and the Root Causes of China's Ethnic Tensions. *East Asia*, 2018 35, 317–346.
19. Stevan Harrell, "Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China", University of Washington Press, 2001.
20. Edward J. M. Rhoads. *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861–1928*. University of Washington, 2000.
21. Zhao Dezhi 赵德志, "On Modern New Confucianism: A Sequel" *The Social Science Journal*, 1988.2, pp.24–5.

Primary Sources

Blog posts in Chinese:

1. Xiao, B. "Why many in China support Beijing's policies in Xinjiang n Hong Kong" 30-11-2019, from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-30/why-many-in-china-support-beijings-xinjiang-n-hongkong-policy>
2. Zhao Fengnian, "Hanfu chongxian yu Zhongguo de wenyi fuxing" ("The reappearance of Han clothing and China's cultural renaissance"), *Han wenhua wang*, 8 February 2007, at <http://www.han-people.com/bbs/article/articleshow.asp?id=235&name=%D5%D4%B7%E1%C4%EA&classname=%C8A%CF%C4%8F%CD%C5d>.
3. Shi Yi and Dong Yiran, "Women weishenma jiaru Hanfu yundong" (我们为什么加入汉服运动) [Why we joined the Hanfu move ment], *Beijing kejibao*, 27 July 2005, as reposted <http://www.hanminzu.com/Article/mtbd/200906/713.html>.

4. Ma Rong, "Shaoshu minzu wenti de 'qu zheng zhi hua'" (少数民族问题的“去政治化”)

[The 'politicization' of the ethnic minority question], as reposted on Tianya, 21 May 2006, at <http://www.tianya.cn/New/PublicForum/Content.asp?strItem=no01 &idArticle=242280>.

5. Huang Wei “wei shenme guo xue re chi xu shengwen?” (为什么国学热持续升温?) [why does National studies keep heating up?] <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2019/1029/c429373-31425661.html>

6. Zhu Si, “Guo xue re de leng si kao” (国学热的冷思考) [Cool-headed thoughts on the National Studies Fever], as posted on Sina on 2014 September 16
<https://zhuanlan.sina.cn/article?id=25375&ch=history&vt=4>
<https://chinajapan.org/articles/15/15ishikawa7-26.pdf>

Published Commentaries and speeches

1. Wong, Edward, "Chinese President Visits Volatile Xinjiang", 08-25-2009, The New York Times.

2. Lu Shan, “Zhenluo huangguan de diyi sheng jinglei” (震落皇冠的第一声惊雷) [The first roar of thunder that shook away the crown], The 1911 Revolution Museum, 2014-06-14, <http://www.1911museum.cn/view/609.html>

2. “Xinjiang arrests 'now over 1,500'". BBC News. 08-3-2009.

3. "Xinjiang doubles compensation for bereaved families in Urumqi riot". Xinhua News Agency, 07-21-2009.

4. Xu Jieshun, "Han minzu yanjiu chuyi" (汉民族研究刍议) [My humble opinion on Han studies], in Han minzu lishi he wenhua xintan (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1985), pp. 1.
5. Zou, Rong, and Jung Tsou, *The Revolutionary Army* (Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales 1968).
6. Xu Ji Lin, "Gong he ai guo zhu yi yu wen hua min zu zhuyi" (共和爱国主义与文化民族主义) [republic patriotism and ethno-cultural nationalism], Hua Dong Shifan Newsletter, 2006 volume 1.
7. Xi Jinping's Speech in Commemoration of the 2,565th Anniversary of Confucius' Birth, 24-09-2014, US-China focus Library, <http://library.chinausfocus.com/article-1534.html>.