The Great Han: The Development, Evolution, and Influence of Chinese Ethnic Nationalism on Modern Chinese Society and Government

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I. The Origins of Chinese Civilization and Han Identity

The concept of national consciousness and identity can be characterized as a collective affirmation of a set of common characteristics including a shared history, culture, and ultimately, a common origin that the group takes collective pride in. The foundations of a number of ancient civilizations have been built upon this particular concept. In the case of Chinese civilization, there is the pervasive idea that the inhabitants of the China proper all originated from a single source formed during the beginning of human civilization. This provides a continuous socio-historical narrative for the people of China proper to engage in the formation of a collective identity based on the shared experiences of the group. The formation of China’s particular national identity is very similar to Ernest Renan’s anthropological theory of the formation of a nation state. Renan asserts in *What is a Nation* that the concept of national identity stems from the belief of a group of individuals that accept the basic premises of a “possession in common of a rich legacy of memories…the nation, like the individual, is the outcome of a long past of efforts, sacrifices, and devotions.”¹ The overarching concept of Chinese civilization and the Chinese nation is built upon the shared experiences of a single group of people: the Hua Xia people, the first name for the inhabitants whom composed Chinese civilization. The Chinese Communists would later reinterpret the origins theory through their policies.

In the case of China, the essence of its civilization is the product of the development of a single ethnic group, the Han, throughout the history of Imperial China beginning with the Shang dynasty. Thus, the Chinese nation in this sense is the result of the shared memories and experiences of the inhabitants of the Chinese Empire, situated in present-day eastern and

¹ Ernest Renan. *What is a Nation?* Text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne, March 11th, 1882 in Ernest Renan *Qu’est ce qu’une nation?* (Paris: Presses-Pocket), 1992. (Translated by Ethan Rundell) P.10
northern China, also known as the Yellow River Valley, for the vast majority of the history of Chinese civilization. The particular stream of nationalistic sentiment that formed the conceptual basis for the Chinese nation is the unanimous acceptance by the inhabitants (in this case the Han Chinese) of a shared culture and common history that dates back millennia. In addition, the particular system of governance that was employed during the formative years of Chinese civilization embedded within the inhabitants of China a collective sense of moral and cultural tradition that served to promote the narrative of a culturally unified Chinese entity since its inception many millennia ago.

The imperial system in China was born out of what Anthony D. Smith describes as “a common name and a myth of descent”\(^2\) with the legend of the first emperors of Chinese civilization, the Yan and Yellow Emperors who were the two mythical founders of ancient China. With this particular precedent, the social structure of ancient China was formed with the Chinese emperor as the center of Chinese civilization. The emperor was also considered to be a being that embodied divine characteristics, akin to a demigod of sorts. For ancient Chinese society, the emperor, known the Son of Heaven (\textit{tian zi}) (\text{天子}), represented “the concrete object of loyalty and awe” and “society, including government, centered in his person as its apex.”\(^3\) Within Chinese society, the emperor was responsible for maintaining social harmony and ensuring that his subjects were treated in a fair and just manner. The Chinese emperor derived his legitimacy from the “Mandate of Heaven”, a concept that gave the ruling imperial family the right to exercise authority over the inhabitants of China. In the Chinese Empire, the emperor “[functioned] as military leader, administrator, judge, high priest, philosophical sage, arbiter of

taste, and patron of arts and letters, all in one.” The multitude of roles that the emperor played made him the keystone to maintaining peace and order in the cosmos. However, the emperor was still a human being and thus could lose the mandate if he ruled in a cruel manner and his subjects routinely suffered. This would open the doors for other individuals to claim that the ruler had lost Heaven’s favor and must be replaced. This mechanism was used to legitimize rebellions and dynastical changes in Imperial China. Despite the periodic changes in the ruling family that presided over the Chinese Empire, China’s system of governance remained rather static for a significant portion of its history.

The longevity of imperial governance fostered a common and collective acceptance of the sociopolitical system that Chinese society was founded upon. What is more, the myth of the founding emperors played a key role in nurturing the perpetuation of the imperial dynastical system. The Chinese people developed a belief that their emperor was indeed a divine figure sent from the heavens, and thus consented to submit to his authority. The god-like status of the Chinese emperor would also have a significant impact on the particular way that the Chinese people conceptualized the universal order. Indeed, the god-like qualities that the Chinese emperor supposedly possessed also gave the Chinese people a heightened sense of their rather unique position in the world. The Emperor was responsible for maintaining order on earth. As subjects of the Son of Heaven, the Chinese people by extension were part of the apex of civilization. This particular collective mentality amongst the Chinese would play an important role in the Empire’s territorial demarcation during the dynastical era. The shared socio-moral values amongst the subjects of the Emperor further augmented to the bond between the inhabitants of China. The inhabitants of China formed an identity based upon a belief of shared

\[4\text{ Fairbank, 6}\]
values and common origins as subjects of the Son of Heaven. This collective identity was further bolstered by legend that designated them as descendants of deities. Through the acceptance of their shared values, the Chinese had established the fundamental sociopolitical framework for the development of the Sino-centric world order.

Beginning with the establishment of the third Chinese dynasty, the Zhou dynasty (1050BC-250BC), the ancient inhabitants of the Chinese geo-body had developed a particular conceptualization of the cosmos that placed the Chinese Empire at the center of the known world. Indeed, the Chinese referred to their empire as Zhong guo (中国), which literally translates into middle or central kingdom. The name adopted by the early dynasties in Chinese history served as the first mechanism for establishing a clear distinction between the inhabitants of the Chinese empire and the people who resided outside of the empire. For scholars within China proper, their culture was considered to be the epitome of human achievement. The areas surrounding China were considered to be inhabited by groups collectively known as the Yi (夷), which translated into among other terms, barbarians, outsiders, and uncultured people that were considered to be socially and culturally inferior to the inhabitants of the more civilized Chinese Empire. This dichotomizing mechanism formed the basis for Imperial China’s foreign relations and underpinned the Sino-centric nature of the Chinese Empire. Chinese intelligentsia would very often trace the lineages of the tribes and other groups outside of the Empire to that of animals. This particular characterization of its neighbors serves to highlight a pervasive theme in self-identity within China proper, which represented the highest standard and served as the benchmark for civilization. In this sense, all the inhabitants outside of the Empire were considered to be inferior to the people who inhabited the sphere that was under the rule of the Chinese emperor.
For the Chinese, the particular path that the Chinese Empire took to build a uniform identity and instill a collective sense of unity amongst the inhabitants has its roots in the longevity of Chinese civilization and the shared cultural values amongst the vast majority of its inhabitants. It would be rather inaccurate to characterize the origins of Chinese national identity as a stream of civic nationalism due to the rather isolated nature of Chinese civilization throughout Imperial Chinese history. Indeed, the inhabitants of China proper identified themselves as the descendants of the Yan and Yellow Emperor (yan huang zi sun) (炎黄子孙), the mythical founding emperors of Chinese civilization. Furthermore, for a considerable portion of Chinese history, the geographical boundaries of the Chinese Empire remained primarily within the scope of present-day China proper (eastern China), with the most notable exceptions being the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty and the Qing (Manchu) dynasty, along with the Jin and Liao dynasties. This pervasive geopolitical dynamic served to further crystalize the Hua-Yi distinction and establish very clear geographic boundaries between what was considered China proper and all the territories that lay outside the empire.

The tributary system established during the Han dynasty (200BCE-220AD) set the perennial dynamic for Imperial China’s foreign relations and served to crystalize Chinese cultural superiority relative to the Empire’s neighbors, projecting the Sino-centric world order. In this system, Chinese tributary states acknowledged their supposed cultural inferiority to the more “civilized” Chinese through a series of rituals including the kow-tow (磕头), which served to display their respect for and submission to the Son of Heaven. This system was yet another mechanism used by the Chinese Empire to distinguish themselves from their neighbors. For the Chinese, the tributary system served the dual purpose of affirming Chinese cultural superiority as well as a security mechanism by the Empire to ensure that it was not surrounded by hostile
neighbors. The Chinese were also able to use the tributary system to play the conflicting interests of various tribes against one another as a way to constantly keep its frontiers in check. By giving certain tribes preferential treatment, the Chinese prevented the unification of the frontier tribes for centuries and ensured the security of the empire’s borders. The tributary system helped promote and preserve the Sino-centric world order in Asia for thousands of years.

Once a representative of an outside power preformed certain rituals such as the kowtow, in which individuals knelt on their knees and prostrated themselves before the Chinese emperor, they were granted an audience with him. The Chinese emperor represented not only the Chinese civilization, but also on a grander scale the entire universe. Indeed, as the “Son of Heaven” the Chinese emperor had the dual responsibility to simultaneously ensure “the continuing harmony of the universe” as well as play his role as a human being who represented “the man at the apex of organized civilization.” It was within this particular sociopolitical context that Imperial Chinese foreign relations operated for centuries. Indeed, the Chinese conceptualization of the cosmos was Sino-centric at its core, with the people in China proper sharing “a notion of universal kingship linked to a widely shared sense of participation in a high culture.” As there could not possibly be two emperors presiding over the known world simultaneously, many of the territories surrounding China proper were made into tributary states that professed their loyalty to the Chinese emperor in exchange for a degree of autonomy. The shared sense of community amongst the Chinese people also served as an important factor that upheld the legitimacy of the imperial system of governance for millennia.

6 Fairbank. 277
The overarching socio-moral system that characterized Chinese society during the dynastical era was the Confucian value system, first conceptualized by the ancient Chinese philosopher Kong Fu Zi (孔夫子), also known as Confucius during the Spring and Autumn period (chun qiu) (春秋). The system emphasized the values of loyalty, obedience to one’s elders, or filial piety, and righteousness. These values were the critical ingredients of what made one a “noble man” or what the Chinese referred to as a jun zi (君子). The noble man was an individual who possessed a set of moral values that made him superior to the other type of individual, known as xiao ren (小人), or a small and petty person. The xiao ren was a person that was opportunistic and lacked moral fiber. The noble man was able to and had the responsibility to serve as a model citizen for all the inhabitants in the Chinese Empire. According to Confucian doctrine, a jun zi was someone who was “persuaded by righteousness; the petty man is persuaded by profit.” What is more, by adopting the virtues advocated by Confucianism, an individual would be able to achieve inner peace and maintain his cultural superiority in relation to the inhabitants outside of the Chinese Empire, all of who supposedly lacked the characteristics that defined the “gentleman”. This particular concept helped crystalize the cultural superiority of Chinese civilization and was a core pillar in the establishment of the tributary system. With regard to Confucianism, the Chinese emperor was supposed to be the ultimate embodiment of the virtues, serving as a father figure to everyone within the empire and beyond. As the ruler of “all under heaven”, the Chinese emperor was not only responsible for maintaining the peace of China, but in a larger sense the cosmic balance of the entire universe. The concept of the jun zi

played an important role in the formation of Chinese identity in the imperial era and the perpetuation of the Sino-centric world order.

The term Han originated from the Han dynasty (206BC-220AD). The Han dynasty succeeded the Qin dynasty following a peasant rebellion led by the first Han emperor, Emperor Gaozu of Han. The dynasty was considered to be only the second time that China was formally unified for an extended period of time, and the longevity of the dynasty played a significant role in the development of imperial Chinese identity. Indeed, prior to the Han’s unification of China proper, the Chinese geo-body had been perpetually divided amongst various kingdoms and factions that waged constant war against one another in an attempt to control all of China. When Emperor Gaozu unified China proper following the Chu-Han contention, it set the stage for an extended period of peace within China proper, as the Western and Eastern Han dynasties, referred to as the “Two Hans” presided over China for over four centuries. Prior to the establishment of the Han dynasty, the inhabitants of China proper were referred to as the Hua Xia (华夏). Due to the immense cultural contribution of the Han dynasty to Chinese civilization, when outside scholars refer to the “Han”, the term is essentially synonymous with someone who is considered ethnically Chinese. The Han dynasty provided Chinese civilization with the first extended period of peace, as the dynasty persisted for more than four centuries, with the only brief interruption occurring when Wang Mang usurped the Western Han dynasty in 9AD to establish the Xin dynasty (9-25AD). As a result of the longevity and cultural contributions of the Han dynasty, the majority of Chinese people began to identify themselves as “Han Chinese”.

The Hua Xia’s transformation into the Han was the product of the Han dynasty’s tremendous contributions to Chinese civilization and culture as well as the extended period of unity that the Han Empire provided to the people of China proper. Indeed, the Han dynasty
exerted a significant amount of cultural influence across East Asia, with a plethora of dependencies acknowledging their submission to the Han emperor. Furthermore, Chinese society under the Han experienced a blossoming of cultural and technological advancement in the sciences and the arts. During the more than four hundred years of Han imperial authority, the dynasty also engaged in a series of conquests that saw the territory of the dynasty extend into the Korean peninsula to the north and southward into present-day Vietnam as well as a number of other Southeast Asian countries. Indeed, the Chinese tributary system also had its origins in the Han dynasty, making the Han the first imperial regime to implement such a system in terms of its foreign policy. The dynasty’s conquests served to expand the Han’s sphere of cultural influence on the East Asian continent.

Thus, a major part of the legacy of the Han dynasty was to impart its name to the inhabitants of China proper. The dynasty was considered to be the first cultural high point in the development of Chinese civilization, with the Tang and Ming dynasties being the other notable points of Chinese high culture. The Han dynasty was able to thus serve as a point of pride for the inhabitants of China proper, and the dynasty’s prestige in greater Asia further contributed to a sense of the importance of Chinese civilization. This pervasive geopolitical dynamic established by the Han dynasty served to further crystalize the Hua-Yi dichotomy and contributed to the formation of a collective ethnic identity amongst the subjects of Imperial China. Indeed, the cultural hegemony established by the Han throughout the dynasty’s control of China significantly augmented the sense of cultural superiority in the minds of the emperor’s subjects and contributed to the strengthening of the Sino-centric East Asian world order that persisted throughout the Han dynasty and beyond.
Due to this pervasive dynamic of ethno-culturally motivated dichotomization in the history of Imperial China, the inhabitants of China proper developed a very strong sense of their collectively shared cultural values in contrast to the various tribes and other groups that bordered the empire. The “othering” of the non-Han inhabitants of the frontier regions served to define and characterize the Han-centric psyche that was shared by the inhabitants of the Chinese Empire, a psyche that helped form the backbone of Imperial China’s relations with its neighbors. One example of the Chinese imperial tributary system in practice can be found in the Chinese empire’s relationship with the territory of present-day Vietnam. During the Han dynasty, the Chinese emperor sent a letter to the king of the Nanyue (the group that inhabited northern Vietnam during the Han dynasty) in 179 BC, claiming that “although [the king of Vietnam] govern independently you have changed your title from king to emperor. When two emperors appear simultaneously, one must be destroyed; sending an ambassador to communicate the way [of this] may produce a struggle.”\(^8\) However, the Chinese emperor offered an alternative, asserting that a conflict “is not the way of a person endowed with humanity.”\(^9\) The emperor in this instance showcased the superiority of Chinese culture in comparison to the “barbarian” inhabitants of Vietnam by adhering to the Confucian principle of showing benevolence to those who were considered to be inferior or weaker.

In response, the king of Vietnam sent a letter to the Chinese emperor that demonstrated his submission to the Chinese empire. Referring to himself as the “chief of the barbarians, with temerity worthy of death”, the king of Vietnam lamented that “[he eats] and find no flavor…[his] ears do not hear the sounds of bell and drum, all because [he] could not serve the Han.”\(^10\)

\(^8\) Fairbank, 66
\(^9\) Ibid. 66
\(^10\) Ibid. 67
Through this display of submission to the Han Chinese, which held significant political and military leverage, Vietnam became a vassal state of the Han Chinese Empire. Indeed, by opting to offer Vietnam peace in exchange for submission, the Han emperor sent the message that there was no need for the Chinese to prove their superiority through martial means. By coaxing the people of Vietnam to adopt Chinese social customs through the introduction of Confucian values, the Chinese were able to simultaneously project their considerable soft power beyond their borders and also prevent potential invasions from the individuals surrounding China proper. The paternalistic approach adopted by the Chinese empire towards the inhabitants of its frontiers reflected the cultural hegemony that was projected by Confucianism during the height of Imperial Chinese power and influence. The Chinese emperor adopted the role of the benevolent father figure to what he considered to be his subjects in a sense. Through the use of such cultural soft power, the Chinese Empire was able to extend its influence far beyond the confines of China proper.

Given the previously described historical context and analysis, this particular work will attempt to trace the origins and development of Chinese national identity and provide evidence to support the idea that throughout the course of the vast majority of Chinese history, the core of Chinese society and civilization was shaped by the idea that the inhabitants of the Chinese Empire were bound together through a connection based on shared blood and common ancestry. There was an unbroken chain of Han Chinese rule over China proper from the first dynasty that united China proper, the Han dynasty in 202 BC, to the Southern Song dynasty that collapsed in 1279. Of the 18 dynasties that ruled over Imperial China, only 4 ruling clans were not ethnically Han Chinese. This narrative of common origins was heavily highlighted during the nascent stages of Chinese nation building following the fall of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of
the Republic of China in 1911. The primary ethnic group this work will focus on is the Tibetans of the Tibet Semi-Autonomous Region in far western China, and how the relationship between the central government (whether it was Imperial, Nationalist, or Communist) has been characterized by a theme of “othering” by the majority Han Chinese at the center of the Chinese socio-political structure.

It would be rather inaccurate to portray Chinese national identity as the product of a stream of civic nationalism, as the individuals who inhabited the area of China proper were bound together by their belief in the shared biological origins dating back to the birth of Chinese civilization on the Yellow River Valley. Indeed, the glue that has held China proper together throughout the centuries has its roots in the millennia of shared culture and civilization between the inhabitants of the China proper. The Qing dynasty in particular was notable for the Manchus’ choice to construct their identity as the legitimate heirs to the ethnically-Han Ming dynasty that they had overthrown. The Manchus’ decision to portray themselves as the rightful successors to the Chinese empire created an interesting sociopolitical dynamic in which the Qing emperors adopted the Confucian social system along with other traditionally “Chinese” practices. This resulted in a series of issues with regard to Manchu identity during the Qing dynasty, which will be further discussed and dissected later in this paper. The Jurchen dynasty of the Later Jin (1626-36) was the predecessor of the Qing dynasty. During their conquest of northern China towards the end of the Ming dynasty, the Jurchens implemented a set of assimilation policies to govern their conquered territories. In the Jurchen Empire, it was mandatory for everyone to adopt certain Jurchen practices such as hairstyle and daily curtseys. Through this particular assimilation mechanism, the Jurchens perhaps sought to gradually erase the multi-ethnic distinctions within their empire, utilizing their status as the ruling class to consolidate their cultural influence over
their subjects. This practice would later be imitated by both the Guomindang of the Chinese Republic as well as by the Chinese Communists under Mao Zedong.

The historical Hua-Yi dichotomy (hua yi zhi bie) (华夷之别) that had served to demarcate the boundaries of civilization and barbarity defined Imperial China’s foreign relations and served as an overarching social construct that established the extent and scope of the Chinese geo-body during the dynastical era of Chinese civilization. This particular interpretation of what is considered to be “Chinese” has significantly influenced the development of Chinese identity throughout both imperial and modern Chinese society. Indeed, with the crystallization of the concept during the height of the Han dynasty, Chinese identity experienced a significant gravitation towards the Hua Xia ethnic group, and the establishment of the tributary system by the Han dynasty served to simultaneously project Han cultural superiority across East Asia and crystalize the identity of the people of China proper.

The concept of Chinese nationalism and the Chinese national consciousness is a relatively recent concept that was first born out of the Xinhai Revolution that saw the collapse and destruction of the last dynasty of Imperial China, the (Manchu) Qing dynasty. The revolution awakened the consciousness of the inhabitants of China, as the common people for the first time in Chinese history saw themselves elevated from periphery to the sociopolitical center of the new Chinese society in contrast to millennia of being relegated to the lower end of the Chinese social hierarchy in the imperial governance system.
II. The Formation of Chinese National Identity in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911)

When discussing the rather complex formation of Chinese national identity, we must first examine the Qing imperial origins that served as the earliest definition of what it meant to be Chinese. One of the key characteristics of dynastical China that was preserved in the Qing dynasty was the age-old Hua-Yi dichotomy, which formed the overarching political stance of traditional relations between the Chinese Empire and the regions that surrounded it. During the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the overarching thrust of imperial identity emphasized the concept of loyalty of the various peoples to the Manchu dynasty through the simplification of the Qing imperial identity. As the borders of the empire expanded to regions beyond the Great Wall and China proper, the Manchus faced the complicated issue of incorporating the plethora of frontier ethnicities. Indeed, the primary concern for the Manchus was to “stabilize the identities of conqueror and conquered without creating legal, political, or ideological obstacles to continued incorporation of imperial servitors.”11 According to the Qianlong Emperor (r.1735-1796), those individuals who had chosen to side with the Manchus following the collapse of the Ming dynasty were considered to have “become fundamental to the imperial narrative.”12 Through this process of establishing a collective and singular identity that encompassed all of the subjects of the Qing Empire, the Qianlong Emperor sought to underplay the rather complex social status of the Han Chinese during the early years of the Qing Empire. Indeed, Qianlong’s conceptualization of “Chineseness” had its roots in his desire to combine the various ethnic groups within the Qing Empire into a unified group under his rule. This expansive policy of incorporation initiated by

12 Ibid. 90
Qianlong did not necessarily entail the complete integration of the conquered peoples into the larger Chinese socio-political construct.

Despite the desire to incorporate the newly conquered territory, the Manchu Imperial Court under the Qianlong Emperor still established very clear boundaries regarding the geographic scope of China proper and the “outside regions” that bordered the Qing. According to the Qing scholar Wang Fuzhi who made the claim in 1656, there was a fundamental difference between the Chinese and the barbarians, who were of different compositions and different natures due to the contrasting environments under which the inhabitants developed. According to Wang, “the Chinese inhabitants of the central plains were composed of ‘heavenly qi’ (tian qi) (天气), while the frontier barbarians were fashioned of ‘impure qi’ (jian qi) (减气) In order to maintain the “purity of categories”, there was thus a need to establish “firm territorial boundaries between these dissimilar natures.”13 Thus, from the late imperial era of Chinese history, there was already a dichotomizing socio-political mechanism that served to clearly distinguish the inhabitants of China proper and the people that occupied the distant frontier. The Qianlong Emperor used his status as the Son of Heaven to adopt a “universalist ideology” that “centered upon himself as the sole point where all specifics articulated.”14 Through this expansive declaration of the geographic extent of the Qing Empire, Qianlong sought to incorporate, but not necessarily integrate the areas outside of China proper. The conceptualization of the genuinely “Chinese” area of the Qing Empire was still very much in China proper, where the Celestial Emperor resided. The Manchu Qing also sought to preserve their own particular identity as the minority ruling class during their reign in China. An example of the Manchu distinguishing

14 Crossley, 221
themselves from the Han Chinese majority was the Kangxi Emperor’s (Qianlong’s grandfather) proclamation that “the Manchus take riding and archery as the root *(ben)*, and this was originally no impediment to book learning.”\textsuperscript{15} In an attempt to create a more versatile court and governing mechanism, the Kangxi Emperor wanted all Qing court officials to be proficient in the Chinese and Manchu scripts as well as horseback riding and archery. However, this massive campaign by Kangxi to force those who wished to join and serve the Manchu court to legitimize themselves as the rightful successors to the Ming failed due to a number of reasons, such as “preferential routes for Manchus into the bureaucracy”\textsuperscript{16} that did not involve the military and academic requirements. This desire to create a more cosmopolitan governing group in the Qing courts by the Kangxi Emperor (and later the Qianlong Emperor) serves to underpin Manchu identity during the Qing dynasty as a rather incongruous combination of partial sinicization with a simultaneous effort to retain and preserve the inherent Manchu characteristics of the Qing elite. This element of duality was a principle characteristic of the Manchu dynasty, which sought to both incorporate Han cultural elements into the court officials’ daily lives and at the same time perpetuate the original essence of their culture, which meant adopting a rather Han-oriented approach that at times conflicted with the Manchus’ desire to retain elements of their own cultural aspects. Indeed, in order to legitimize themselves as the heirs to the ethnically-Han Ming dynasty, the Manchu had to Sinicize themselves to a degree in order to establish and crystalize their political legitimacy as rulers of their empire.

An example of the Manchu effort to establish a way to distinguish themselves from the Han and other ethnicities that they conquered (and thereby retain a semblance of their own cultural uniqueness) was the promotion of the arts of horseback riding and archery, which

\textsuperscript{15} Crossley, 306

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 206
formed the backbone of the Manchu military machine. During the reign of the Kangxi Emperor (r.1661-1722), he made a herculean effort to ensure that all Manchu men were proficient at the art of *qishe* (骑射), which was the ability to master horseback riding and archery, a staple of Manchu military might. In addition, Kangxi wanted all Qing officials to be able to read and write in both Chinese and Manchu. Indeed, Kangxi required “the bannersmen to become accomplished in both military (“Manchu”) and civil (“Chinese”) skills.”

This further complicated the imperial identity of the Manchu, as they became an interesting cultural conglomeration of the people they had conquered and their own conception of Manchu-ness. Indeed, the Manchu absorbed a large amount of Han high culture following the establishment of the Qing Empire, and were able to integrate much of Han Chinese culture into their Empire. The Manchu’s appreciation of Chinese customs and values led to a flourishing of classical Chinese poetry and other literature during their reign. This particular dualistic aspect of Manchu imperial identity was a pervasive theme throughout the Qing dynasty, a characteristic that allowed the Manchus to win over the services of the Chinese gentry and scholarly elite, which in turn helped them consolidate their political power during their rule over China proper.

The scope of Qing imperial policy with regard to the degree of what was properly considered to be part of the Qing Empire was rather exclusive. The genuine identity of the Chinese empire and civilization still very much focused on the Han Chinese. Indeed, although the Qing definition of empire was nominally expansive, the essence of the Empire (and its genuine identity as constructed by the Manchus) ultimately was confined to the geographic extent of China proper. For instance, early Qing imperial policy towards the Uighurs of China’s western frontier was first implemented by the Qianlong Emperor, who allowed for the nominal

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17 Crossley, 287
equality of the minority ethnicities within China. In the eyes of Qianlong, all of China’s “five races”: the Mongols, Han, Tibetans, Hui, and Uighurs, all had equal social status in the Qing Empire. Due to this policy, “Han Chinese and Han culture were not held as superior to Uighur and Islamic culture.”\(^{18}\) Despite this proclamation by the emperor, there were still a notable number of prominent individuals in the Qing court who still refused to consider the Xinjiang area as a part of China. Indeed, some Chinese intellectuals even made the claim that the territory was “a useless land (wu yong zhi di) (无用之地) and advocated for the abandonment of the Xinjiang area. According to Wu Long-A, a Manchu official stationed in Xinjiang during the Daoguang era (r.1820-50), the Imperial court “should not spend any money on [Xinjiang], and advised that the western four cities of Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, and Yangi Hisar be abandoned.”\(^ {19}\) This lack of interest amongst the Manchu and Chinese intellectuals with regard to the area resulted in a paltry amount of literature and studies done with regard to Xinjiang as a province. The Manchus’ attitude towards Xinjiang can be interpreted as an attempt by the ruling class to cement their overarching legitimacy as the rulers of the Chinese Empire by maintaining the geopolitical status quo with regard to Imperial China’s peripheral regions. This particular disinterest and lack of research with regard to the Xinjiang area in Chinese literature and academia may underpin a subtle perpetuation of the Hua-Yi dichotomy in internal Chinese politics that has its origins dating back to the era of Imperial China.

Indeed, a large number of Chinese intellectuals during the Qing dynasty placed great emphasis on the concept of “the differences between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, where inner meant


\(^{19}\) Jia, 10
China proper and outer meant beyond Jiayuguan.” Thus, it can be seen here that even after the Qing formally incorporated Xinjiang into its territory through conquest, there still existed a very strong psychological boundary between what the Qing government considered to be its territory and what the Chinese people (in this case the intellectuals and the Chinese gentry) considered to be the Chinese Empire, a cultural barrier that the Chinese Communist Party has attempted to break down through its assimilation policies, but nonetheless is still present in the minds of a considerable portion of the Chinese population. One example of the rather dichotomized nature of Imperial China’s views regarding the Uighurs can be found in the Han Chinese’s portrayal of the Islamic faith and the Muslim people. In a text titled the “Hui Jiangzhi”, which was written in the early 1770s, the author offers a scathing critique and portrayal of Uighur Muslims, describing their character as “suspicious and unsettled, crafty and false.” and asserting that they perpetually indulged in copious amounts of wine and sex for which they had an insatiable appetite. Furthermore, the text asserted that the Uighurs were lazy, proud, boastful, and thus “need someone to rely on in order to survive.” This portrayal of the Uighurs and their culture as base and heathen can also be seen as a pretext for future Han Chinese attempts to incorporate them into the greater Chinese geo-body, as the Han could claim the need to introduce genuine civilization to the backward and weak minority ethnicities so that they may also enjoy the fruits of modernity.

Within China proper, the Qing rulers also sought to establish a classification system in order to distinguish the various groups of people under their control. The Eight Banner System *(ba qi zhi du) (八旗制度)* implemented by the Manchus during their conquests of northern China.

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20 Jia, 4
21 Ibid. 6
22 Ibid. 7
during the early 17th century lasted until the empire’s collapse and served to create the backbone of the Qing dynasty’s hierarchical social structure. The banners each represented a different branch of the Manchu armies. These banners grew in number as the Qing conquered its neighbors and incorporated them into the empire. This process of racial integration by the Manchus served the dual purpose of consolidating their position within Chinese society as well as to preserve a vital element of their own distinct identity, which they forced upon the people that they conquered. Through the implementation of the banner system, the Manchus sought to create a unified state in which those who served under the banners were to be the primary providers of peace and security to the empire. The Banner system served as the primary sociopolitical framework for the organization of Manchu society during the Qing dynasty. Individuals who served under the Qing banners were considered to be of a higher social standing than ordinary Chinese, and this served to create tensions amongst the Han Chinese, with the ordinary folk seeing the Han banner men as traitors to their empire. Towards the end of the Qing dynasty when Han Chinese nationalism began to rise, it became popular opinion amongst the Han that “anybody who was really a Chinese and really a bannerman was really a traitor.”

Indeed, in order to draw a distinction between the Han Chinese that had chosen to serve the Manchus and those who had remained loyal to the Ming, the Kangxi Emperor portrayed Manchu rule as benevolent and righteous, and “some Chinese could recognize righteous rule and direct their loyalties to the Qing empire” while “others maintained a mistaken and morally befuddled loyalty to the corrupt Ming.” The Qianlong Emperor, however, had a very different view on the former Ming officials who now served the Manchu. He believed that “loyalty was

23 Crossley, 337
24 Ibid. 290
loyalty, no matter to whom it was directed.”25 Through his acceptance of the former Ming officials as part of the Qing Empire, Qianlong simultaneously consolidated his political capital within the Empire as well as expanded the definition of what it meant to be “Chinese” into a multi-ethnic concept that included the Manchus as well as the Han Chinese. This reinterpretation of Chinese identity also helped legitimize the Qing as the rulers of the Chinese Empire.

Within China proper, there were also signs of the Hua-Yi dichotomy during the Qing dynasty. The Manchu dynasty was one of the few non-Han dynasties in Chinese history, and this played a significant role in fueling anti-Manchu sentiment throughout Qing rule. One example of such sentiment was the movement to restore the Ming (fan qing fu ming) (反清复明) throughout the Qing dynasty. This movement served as an example of the Han Chinese’s refusal to be subjugated to Manchu rule. Furthermore, the movement can be seen as an affirmation of the Han’s belief that their minzu formed the ethnic core of Chinese civilization. The numerous secret societies and anti-Manchu organizations that were established during the Manchu domination of China proper served to underpin the deep anti-Manchu sentiments harbored by a large number of Han Chinese. Those who served under the Qing banners received preferential treatment by the Imperial court, much to the chagrin of the vast majority of Han. The movement experienced a crescendo as it assumed a violent manifestation during the Taiping Rebellion of 1850 in which Han Chinese nationalists lead an uprising that very nearly toppled the Qing dynasty. In this particular rebellion, the Taipings were noted to be the first rebels to “refer to the Manchus as a ‘race of demons’, with Manchu emperor Xianfeng tagged a ‘Tartar dog’ of ‘barbarian origins.’”26 The rebellion can be seen as a display of Han Chinese ethnic chauvinism in which the subjugated

25 Crossley, 291
26 Leibold, 29
Han sought to reassert their control over Chinese society. Indeed, social uprisings such as the Taiping Rebellion were a constant thorn on the side of the ruling Manchus, and served as a reminder to the rulers that the Han Chinese were still the dominant ethnic group despite the fact that the Manchus had taken over the sociopolitical center of Chinese society.

During the later years of the Qing dynasty, the empire began to decline as a result of internal bureaucratic corruption in combination with western incursion. It was during this period of time that the overarching concept of Chinese identity previously imposed by the ruling Manchus took a drastic shift as nationalist movements shook the empire during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The weakened Qing dynasty was plagued by a series of defeats at the hands of foreign powers such as the United Kingdom (the Opium Wars of 1839-42 and 1856-60) and the Empire of Japan (the First Sino-Japanese War from 1894-95). While previously the definition of Chinese was an individual who chose to serve the Manchus, the anti-Manchu movement completely reversed this previous interpretation as the explicit assertion of Han Chinese ethnic nationalism reached a crescendo with the toppling of the Qing dynasty in 1911. While previously the term “Han traitor” (han jian) (汉奸) referred to an individual who betrayed the Qing empire, now the term was applied to individuals who had worked for the Qing dynasty and therefore betrayed the Han Chinese by assisting the Manchu invaders. Radical youths such as Zou Rong (1885-1905) brought forth numerous instances of Han mistreatment at the hands of the Manchus. In his writing “The Yangzhou and Jiading Massacres” written in 1903, he describes how “the Manchu bandits came through the passes into China…they slaughtered our ancestral grandfathers and their uncles and brothers…when a son cannot take revenge for his murdered
father or brother, he must pass this responsibility to his own son." Indeed, the Han Chinese never truly seemed to have gotten over the psychological trauma of having their empire defeated and subjugated by the well-organized Manchus from their northeastern region. This shift in the definition of loyalty in the Chinese context signified the advent of a particular type of ethnic nationalism that designated the Han Chinese as the sole legitimate representatives of China. This anti-Manchu sentiment underpins a strong sense of ethnocentric ideology on the part of the Han, as it would appear that they had always held the belief that they represented the genuine essence of Chinese civilization, which in their view had merely been temporarily interrupted by the Manchu “barbarians” during their conquests.

Before the fall of the Qing, Sun Yat-Sen published a pamphlet in conjunction with a number of Chinese intellectuals in the Revive China Society (xing zhong hui) (兴中会), which was the first Chinese revolutionary society established in 1894 by Sun Yat-Sen. The pamphlet published in 1900 enumerated the “crimes” committed by the Manchu dynasty. Among the accusations of government corruption and incompetence were the Qing’s decision to wantonly abuse their power with regard to the treatment of their subjects. Sun asserts that the Manchu court had become increasingly hypocritical and corrupt during the last decades of imperial rule. He claims that “the important matters of governance are ultimately decided by the Manchus” who “slaughter frequently to assert their power.”

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stakes his claim to establish a new government that would restore order to a China that had been subjected to humiliation from foreign powers.

The Chinese revolutionaries’ principle goals were set forth in the Tongmeng Hui Revolutionary Proclamation of 1907. The document proclaimed that it was time to “raise the righteous standard of revolt in order to expel an alien race that has been occupying China.”29 However, unlike previous revolutions, the members of the Tongmeng Hui would “strive not only to expel the ruling aliens…but also to change basically the political and economic structure of our country.”30 The Tongmeng Hui laid out a set of four principles that would serve as the political framework upon which the revolution would be carried out. The principles listed in order were the “expulsion of the Manchus from China…restoration of China to the Chinese…establishment of a Republic…and equalization of landownership.”31 There would be a transitional period in the new Chinese Republic in which the military would control Chinese society and the people would be subjected to military rule. Then after a period of three years, “the stage of provincial construction will then begin” in which the inhabitants of the various provinces would “[elect] as their representatives deputies in the district council, and the people in the district.”32 The military government would then relinquish its control of the government after a period of six years. The document ends by urging all the inhabitants of China “as the descendants of the Huang-ti (黄帝)…[to] regard one another as brothers and sisters and assist

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30 Cheng, 203
31 Ibid.204
32 Ibid. 205
each other regardless of the difficulty of the circumstances.” The most important component to the success of the revolution would hinge on the cooperation of the so-called Military Government. The goal of this revolutionary movement by the Chinese intelligentsia would be to fundamentally alter the Chinese political system, replacing millennia of dynastic, family-lineage based rule with a genuine democratic form of government for the first time in Chinese history. Through this transition process, the people of the new Chinese republic would replace the emperor as the source of sovereignty in Chinese society.

In order to achieve his goal of transforming Chinese society and bringing the country into modernity, Sun proposed a set of political reforms for the potential post-Imperial government. Among the changes that the new (hypothetical) government would enact would be the relocation of the capital to “a more spacious and open location” and an increase in the number of government officials in the new central government that would be formed. In addition, the family members of those who died in the service of the government would be taken care of. Furthermore, Sun’s proposed government would “not use coercive methods to obtain information” and would also forbid the use of “cruel methods in delivering death.” Thus, Sun Yat-Sen established the nascent blueprint for a Republican style of government nearly a decade before the collapse of the Qing. The particular anti-Manchu rhetoric that emerges as a constant theme in his writings discussing Chinese identity would serve as the cornerstone for Sun’s overarching ethnic policy in the new Republic of China.

The end of the Qing dynasty and the beginning of Republican governance in China ushered in a new age of national consciousness for the inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom. The Chinese revolutionaries who had brought down the last dynasty in Chinese history held a wide

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33 Cheng, 206
34 Meng, 457
range of views for the future of the Chinese nation with regard to territorial delineation. For some intellectuals such as Zhang Binglin, granting certain groups territorial autonomy seemed to be the best way to construct the new China. Zhang advocated for a system in which Chinese territory would be divided “into small ‘kingdoms’ (wang guo) (王国), each to be ruled independently and further divided into circuits (dao) (道) 35 This would in effect completely deconstruct the previous imperial system in terms of the expansive geopolitical scope of the Qing dynasty as well as the plethora of ethnicities that previously were considered to be integral parts of the Manchu Empire. Zhang’s approach differed radically from other Chinese ethnic nationalists, such as Liang Qichao, one of the early advocates for a strong, centralized government that would incorporate all the various ethnicities in the Chinese geo-body into the new Chinese nation. Liang believed that foreign elements could in fact be assimilated into Han Chinese society. He cites the Spring and Autumn Annals (chun qiu) (春秋), which asserted that “barbarians could be changed and that changing them was a central process of civilization.” 36 Indeed, even with the collapse of the last Chinese dynasty, there were still a number of social elements that lingered from the dynastical era, namely the perpetuation of a Han-centric conceptualization of China, which develops into a strand of powerful ethnic nationalism that is promoted by the founder of the Republic of China, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen. Part of the Qing imperial contribution to the formation of contemporary Chinese identity is the “formation of an ethnocentric or Sinic political and cultural community around which the new Chinese nation-

35 Crossley, 351
36 Ibid. 355
state would be imagined.”

For the new Chinese Republican government, it was time for the Han to reclaim their place as the center of Chinese society once again.

The Chinese ethnic nationalists’ approach to the construction of their new nation bears a striking resemblance to the Jurchens of the Later Jin (1626-36) that engaged in a series of territorial conquests during the decline of the Ming dynasty. Following their conquest of the vast majority of Northern China, the Jurchen employed a policy that called for the nominally equal treatment of the so-called “immigrant” populations that were now part of the Later Jin. Nurgaci (r.1616-26), a Jurchen ruler who took part in the conquest of the Ming dynasty after uniting the various Jurchen tribes established a social system which attempted to make “immigrants-whether they had willingly come or been coerced in some manner-level with the natives.” Indeed, the Jurchen also attempted to assimilate the various ethnic groups within their newly conquered empire, requiring individuals to “show their submission to Nurgaci by having their heads shaven in the Jurchen style, adopting Jurchen dress, and performing the curtsy…” so that “invidious distinctions among the khan’s population should be avoided.” The Guomindang leadership in their quest to unify China would utilize these same principles in an attempt to erase the distinctions between the Han Chinese and the various ethnicities of the Chinese frontier.

37 Leibold, 19
38 Crossley, 179
39 Ibid. 179
III. Chinese National Identity in Republican China (1911-49)

Sun Yat-Sen, known to many as the father of modern China, was a key figure and the first leader of the new Chinese political body that emerged from the revolution. Sun’s particular conceptualization of the new Chinese society was a new China that had the Han people (hanzu) (汉族) forming the sociocultural heart of the new Republic, and the “people of the frontier” as the “branches” of the larger Han Chinese tree. This particular racial distinction was stressed by Sun in his early rhetoric with regard to the new “people” of the Chinese republic, which expanded to include the former “masses” that were subjects of the Son of Heaven during the dynastic era. Sun asserted that the “frontier populations” such as the Mongolians, Tibetans, and Uighurs were “backward” civilizations that must be prodded forward by the Han to elevate their status in Chinese society. It would seem that there appears to be a prevalent theme of nominal unity without genuine incorporation of the vast majority of the non-Han peoples into mainstream Chinese society. Indeed, with the Han minzu assuming a dominant role in contemporary Chinese society, this raises the question of whether modern China is developing into an ethnic state despite its inclusive rhetoric with regard to the non-Han peoples inhabiting the Chinese geo-body. The Hua-Yi dichotomy, which is made concrete and exemplified by the Chinese tributary system, serves to provide the foundational basis for the primary issue being explored in this work: the question of whether Chinese identity at its core is an ethnically driven sociopolitical concept, with the concept of being “Chinese” becoming synonymous with the majority Han minzu, who demographically constitute the overwhelming majority in Chinese society today.

Following the success of the Xinhai Revolution that brought an end to the Qing dynasty in 1911, Sun Yat-Sen adopted a Han-centric interpretation of the core of Chinese society that was echoed later in the political rhetoric of both the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang) as
well as the Chinese Communists. The primary problem facing Sun and his colleagues involved “physically incorporating the frontier minorities into the nation-state.” To solve this problem, Sun decided to “construct a new national imaginary, one that would fold all the peoples and territories of the former Qing Empire into a unitary Zhonghua minzu.” Indeed, he asserted that with the establishment of the new Chinese republic, the Han must take on the responsibility of defending and protecting the minority populations of China’s frontier from foreign aggression because the minorities “no longer possess the ability to defend themselves.” In accordance with his philosophy, Sun ordered the Outline for National Reconstruction written by the Comintern representative Borodin in 1923 to be free of “all explicit mention of minority independence…its place taken by a more paternalistic and vaguely worded statement of the national government’s responsibility to ‘cultivate’ the ability of all China’s ‘domestic, small, and weak minus’ (guo nei ruoxiao minzu) (国内之弱小民族). Borodin’s presence in the Republican government can be viewed as an attempt by the Soviet Union to influence Chinese sociopolitical development along Russian (specifically Leninist) lines. Sun endorsed the idea of national unity in the new Chinese republic and also was “greatly inspired” by the ideas presented in Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Point plan that called for national self-determination amongst newly-created countries following the end of the First World War (1914-1918). Nevertheless, Sun also attempted to promote the establishment of a “race-state” or guo zu (国族) through the ethnic policy of assimilating the Tibetans, Mongols, Hui, and Manchus into the larger Han minzu “[to construct]

40 Leibold, 43
41 Ibid. 43
42 Ibid. 57
43 Ibid. 56
the biggest possible race-state.”44 Sun believed that the minority nationalities were to be assimilated because they were considered “subgroups of the Han Chinese.”45 In support, Sun’s colleagues such as Dai Jitao claimed, “the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan people belong to a single, ancient, race.”46 However, this particular conception of Chinese demographics being can only be considered a theory, as it was “without basis in biology, anthropology, or genetics.”47 Furthermore, Sun’s policy of ethnic assimilation in China also promoted a quasi-hierarchical social structure that nominally established the equality of all inhabitants in China, but classified the “frontier population” as groups that were somewhat different and distinct from the dominant (and ruling) Han people. Indeed, Sun sought to create a country in which there was a very clear sociopolitical center that was comprised of the most populous nationality in the Han, while giving the “frontier population” the ability to elevate their own status by learning and adapting to the social customs of the Han people. This social divide between the Han Chinese and the inhabitants of the Chinese frontier exemplified the pervasive center-periphery relationship that was a defining characteristic of dynastic China. Thus, under the Republic of China, all the various ethnic groups in the former Qing Empire were considered to collectively form the new body that was the “Chinese people”, a broader and more inclusive scope that is in stark contrast to the traditional Hua-Yi (outsider) dichotomy, which served to separate and even alienate those individuals outside the Chinese Empire by labeling them as barbaric elements that were not fit to mingle with the more cultured Han.

44 Leibold, 57
45 Wolff, 115
46 Leibold, 121
47 Wolff, 115
Sun Yat-Sen’s overarching political philosophy centered on the Three Principles of the People (san min zhu yi) which stated that all individuals were to be given the basic rights of livelihood, democracy, and nationalism. In 1924, a year before his death, Dr. Sun gave a series of lectures in which he discussed how the Three Principles would be employed by the Guomindang to build the new Chinese nation. In the fifth lecture, Sun Yat-Sen discusses the pervasive issue of national unity. Sun asserts that, “once our 400 million people have become unified as a minzu, we will be able to resist foreign incursion.” In his call for collective unity amongst all the inhabitants of the greater Chinese geo-body, Sun adopts an approach to Chinese national identity that is both expansive and vague. Indeed, what is important to note in his lecture is the particular way he characterizes the demographic composition of the Chinese nation. Sun’s particular interpretation of Chinese identity revolves around a geopolitical entity in which all the various “tribes” and ethnicities come together and embrace a common “Chinese” identity in order to create the new Chinese nation. In his lecture on February 24th 1924 regarding the Three Principles, Sun strongly asserts that in order for the Chinese nation to become a modern and strong nation, there must be “simultaneous development of the military and national culture.” The concept of the “development of national culture” pointed out by Sun can be seen as rather indicative of his ethno-centric (specifically Han-centric) approach to resolving the question of Chinese national identity and constructing the Chinese nation. For Sun, the core of the Chinese nation revolved around the Han minzu, with “cultural development” referring to the advancement of the other minzus in Chinese society. It can be seen here that Sun’s particular conceptualization of the Chinese nation was very much centered on the Han ethnic group.

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49 Meng, 119
Examples of Sun’s subtle hierarchical ethnic policy during the early years of the Republic can be found in a report drafted in 1923 by the new government’s Russian advisor Mikhail Borodin. When the document was first reviewed, it was “fiercely opposed by several [Guomindang] party veterans who felt Borodin’s rather broad reinterpretation of the sanminzhuyi betrayed the original meaning."50 In particular, the GMD leaders were very uncomfortable with Borodin’s idea of granting the frontier populations the right of self-determination before the Chinese revolution was finished. In response to this criticism, Borodin had to significantly rephrase his manifesto for it to be approved, Indeed, Sun Yat-sen even suggested that Borodin’s draft be replaced with a document, “Outline for National Reconstruction” that emphasized a rather pedagogical and paternalistic approach to the frontier question, making it the national government’s responsibility to “cultivate the ability of all China’s ‘domestic, small, and weak minzus” to ‘self-determination and self-rule.”51 The vague language used in Sun’s proposed outline highlights once again the Han-centric view adopted by the government of the early Republican era. Although the GMD nominally recognized the rights of these minority populations, the party refused to grant them the right to political secession. Thus, it can be claimed that the GMD under the leadership of Sun Yat-Sen adopted a rather broad scope when referring to the “Chinese people”, opting to construct an expansive definition of the demographic constituents of China by including all of the frontier populations in the larger Zhonghua Minzu sociopolitical construct. The right of national self-determination, however, was addressed with much more vague language in the form of the GMD manifesto. Indeed, it seemed that “national self-determination was a principle that could apply only to the majority Han minzu.”52

50 Leibold, 55
51 Ibid. 56
52 Ibid. 57
After Sun’s death in 1925, the GMD under the leadership of Chiang Kai Shek trumpeted the message of the inhabitants of China uniting together as one nation to repel the Japanese invaders. While Chiang preached national unity following the Manchurian (Mukden) Incident in 1931, he also advocated a rather pragmatic approach to solving the frontier question, asserting that China must first consolidate the national government’s power before dealing with these issues. In a speech given in 1934 to the people of Nanchang, Chiang implored to his audience to live their lives by four values in an attempt to try and promote social change in Chinese society, which was saturated with blatant political corruption and social inequality. In the speech, Chiang promoted his particular brand of Chinese nationalism, which emphasized the concept of self-improvement in order to strengthen the nation as a whole. He hoped that by observing these virtues, “beggary and robbery will be eliminated and that the life of our people will be productive.”

Chiang’s early approach to crystalizing Chinese national identity stressed the need for the Chinese people to become more civilized as a cohesive group. Chiang asserts that there is a divide between civility and barbarianism. Although Chiang made the speech in order to consolidate much needed political capital for the Guomindang government, there were still residual elements of age-old concepts such as the Hua-Yi dichotomy in his rhetoric, as he calls upon the nation to “civilize” itself in order to build a modern nation, implying that there is a particular standard to which all Chinese inhabitants would do well to adhere to. Thus, there would be certain elements and groups that would need to have this particular standard introduced to them so they too could become civilized along with the rest of the nation. Indeed, in a time when the new nation was yet again threatened by a foreign power, this time in the form of the

Japanese, it was imperative for Chiang to instill a sense of national unity amongst the people of the new Chinese nation.

In Chiang Kai-Shek’s Republic of China (1928-49), the central government sought to consolidate its political capital immediately after the end of the Northern Expedition (1927-28), which marked the end of the warlord era in China. Chiang’s government essentially perpetuated the ethnic policies advocated by Sun Yat-Sen, using inclusive rhetoric with regard to the minorities, while being rather vague regarding their socio-political status. Indeed, Chiang wanted the frontier populations to be a part of the Chinese geo-body, but still very much considered the Han majority to constitute the primary ruling class in Chinese society. Chiang was willing to grant the frontier population a certain degree of sovereignty. Examples of Chiang’s rather pragmatic ethnic policy while in power can be found in the government’s attempts to bring the various frontier groups into the Chinese geo-body through a series of pragmatic political decisions beginning with the assimilation of Inner Mongolia in 1934, where Chiang promised the region self-rule during the early days of the Chinese Republic. Chiang believed that it would be best to emulate his imperial predecessors’ frontier policy by granting the frontier regions their request for self-rule so that they wouldn’t “turn to the imperialists for help and invite further foreign interference in China’s internal affairs.” However, Chiang had intentions of eventually incorporating the frontier regions into China, as he claimed that the Chinese must “[strengthen] our national power while quietly waiting for the opportunity to recover our lost territories, stabilize the frontier and revive our country.” It was prudent for the Chinese to stabilize the frontier issue for the time being while biding its time and waiting for the opportunity to assert their control over the territories after dealing with foreign incursions. Thus, Chiang’s

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54 Leibold, 66
55 Ibid. 66
interpretation of what constituted the Chinese people was essentially the same definition as Sun’s perception, with Chiang granting the frontier populations a temporary degree of political self-determination, whereas Sun explicitly limited self-determination as an exclusive right of the Han people.

Despite granting the frontier population a degree of individual autonomy and self-determination, the Guomindang government under Chiang still refused to grant these areas full autonomy. Chiang also perpetuated the “‘colonialist-imperialist posture’ towards Tibet, Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang), and Mongolia”\(^56\) by sending delegations and in some instances troops to the territories to assert Chinese rule. This approach was strikingly similar to the traditional approach utilized by the Chinese dynasties, most notably during the Later Jin dynasty (1616-1636) founded by the predecessors of the Manchus, the Jurchens. During the regime of both the Guomindang as well as the Jurchens, the social status of the frontier population can be argued to be inferior to that of the ruling ethnic group, with the Han wielding the bulk of Chinese political capital and power in the Republican government and the Jurchen using their status as the ruling class to impose certain policies of ethnic assimilation within their empire. Indeed, it would seem that in both cases the individual groups possessed the necessary military backing to impose their respective will upon the conquered population. In the case of Nurhaci, the Jurchen took advantage of a decline in Ming power to conquer much of northern China. In the case of the Guomindang, they had the advantage of a combination of military strength in the NRA as well as a legitimate pretext to incorporate the minority groups in order to form a united front to resist foreign incursion in the form of the Japanese, who had encroached and expanded into northeastern China during the early 1930s.

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\(^{56}\) Wolff, 119
There were signs of political disconnect between China and its frontier regions throughout the Republican Era. The Manchurian Incident of 1931 gave rise to a large-scale “national salvation movement” (jiuguo yundong) (救国运动). Indeed, in an attempt to weaken the newly formed Republic of China, the Japanese had begun “appealing to the Mongols, Chinese Muslims, and other frontier minorities to ‘liberate’ themselves from the yoke of Chinese domination.” The perception that their “frontier regions” were threatened was shared by many Chinese ethnic nationalists, who advocated for the creation of what they called a “single identity from amongst China’s numerous parochial, ethnic, and class identities” as a way of uniting the nation at the expense of cultural erasure amongst the frontier population. Sun Yat-Sen had stressed in his 1924 lectures on the Three Principles that it was “crucial to first ‘reawaken the learning as well as the traditional morality that we once possessed.’” Indeed, the Chinese Nationalists in this case echoed Sun’s ethnic policies, attempting to once again forcibly assimilate the various ethnicities and nationalities in China to create a single, cohesive nation-state. This desire to consolidate and once again simplify Chinese national identity by the racial nationalists within the Guomindang underpins the Han-centric mindset that was prevalent amongst a large number of Chinese government officials during the early Republican period. Indeed, it seemed that the concept of “Chineseness” had once again gravitated to the Han Chinese that made up the overwhelming majority of the population. As we will see later on, there were numerous tensions laying beneath the government’s call for unity that would serve to underscore the less than harmonious relationship between Han China and its peripheries.

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57 Leibold, 116
58 Ibid. 116
59 Ibid. 117
One example of Japanese efforts to deepen the internal divisions in China was through the creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo following the Mukden Incident of 1931. The Japanese sought to turn Manchuria into a colony of their empire, and chose to use the pretext of suppressing Chinese dissidents in Manchuria after an alleged attack on Japanese railroad networks. At that time in Japan, the government had become increasingly influenced by militarists as a result of the economic hardships brought about by the Great Depression. During such a time, “the words of a demagogue tend to command a larger following than in normal times.”60 The extremists in the Japanese military promoted their agenda at home, asserting “that Manchuria must be brought under the control of Japan, and that at home the time was ripe for a complete rejection of party politics and a thorough reconstruction of the government.”61 The army officers who promoted this nationalistic rhetoric played an important role in the Mukden Incident. As an example, in the testimony of Tanaka Ryukichi at the Tokyo Trials, he mentions that at a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff in August 1929...a plan for developing Manchuria into a self-sufficient area was distributed among those who attended the conference.”62 The goal of the plan was to “inculcate the notion that Manchuria was the lifeline of Japan.”63 Japanese Army high command had not been given notice of the army’s actions. Immediately following the Japanese attack, Consul Morishima of the Japanese Consulate General at Mukden “tried unsuccessfully to relay the information to (Tadashi) Hanaya.”64 It would seem that the interests of the militant elements of the Japanese government prevailed over the moderate faction. This

61 Ibid. 133
62 Ibid. 133
63 Ibid. 133
shift of the internal political status quo would eventually precipitate the beginnings of the Sino-Japanese conflict.

After the Japanese took over northeastern China, they declared the establishment of the Great Manchukuo State (da man zhou guo) (大满洲国). This declaration by the Japanese military served to directly challenge the Chinese claim to their northeastern region. The Mukden Incident not only presented a challenge for the new Republic in protecting its territorial interests, but also presented the Guomindang with a rather complicated task; to somehow unite both China proper and the frontier regions in the name of national salvation to counter the Japanese threat. The Guomindang government’s task was further complicated by their ongoing civil conflict with the Chinese Communist Party, which had formed in 1921. The Communists were disillusioned with the Guomindang’s ineptitude and had amassed a considerable following to pose a direct threat to the new Republic. In the face of a common threat in the form of the Japanese, the two belligerent parties put aside their differences (at least formally speaking) and formed the United Front in 1937 after the Imperial Japanese Army attacked the Marco-Polo Bridge (known as Lugou Qiao in China).

The full-scale Japanese invasion of China following the Marco-Polo Bridge Incident on July 7th, 1937 and the beginning of the Second World War in Asia was a significant factor that further exposed the rather deep divisions between the Han Chinese and the frontier populations and forced the newly established Republic of China to hastily construct “a new national identity that would incorporate all the peoples of the former Qing Empire.” Following the Imperial Japanese Army’s invasion of Manchuria in September of 1931, there was suddenly a collective awakening of the Chinese national consciousness as both the GMD and the CCP called for all of

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65 Leibold, 137
China to come together as one in resistance to the external imperialist threat posed by the Japanese. During this crisis, many Chinese academics such as Fu Sinan and Gu Jiegang were of the view that it was a time when “collective identity, not individual consciousness, mattered most.”\(^66\) The Japanese portrayed themselves as liberators for the people of the Chinese frontier by promising them “national self-determination from Chinese domination and protection as part of a Japanese-led Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.”\(^67\) Chinese territorial claims to areas such as Manchuria were questioned by Japanese academics, who pointed to historical records which showed that “throughout Chinese history, very few Chinese dynasties had “consistently and fully controlled the frontier regions of Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Manchuria.”\(^68\) Thus, Chinese claims of being the inheritors of the territory of the Qing Empire were significantly weakened during the Second Sino-Japanese war. In addition, the Japanese army “began dropping propaganda leaflets announcing their government’s support for the creation of an independent Huihui state throughout Xinjiang and the Gansu corridor”\(^69\) Through a combination of military expansion and inciting internal ethnic conflict between the Chinese government and the frontiers, the Imperial Japanese Army revealed the severity of ethnic fragmentation that existed in China.

Furthermore, the Japanese also attempted to promote various independence movements in China’s southern borders, where they “actively supported the Thai leader Phibun Songkhram’s call for reviving the ancient Kingdom of Sipsong Panna among the Tai peoples of southern China.”\(^70\) Indeed, the Japanese secret agents went to extreme lengths to “[play] up the racial differences between the frontier minorities and their Chinese overlords” by promising to offer

\(^{66}\) Leibold, 137  
\(^{67}\) Ibid. 137  
\(^{68}\) Ibid. 119  
\(^{69}\) Ibid. 137  
\(^{70}\) Ibid. 137
support to tribal and religious leaders in their efforts to break away from Chinese control.”⁷¹ The Guomindang would respond to this Japanese attempt to strike a deathblow to the Nationalist government by essentially forcing the concept of the Zhonghua minzu upon those involved in Chinese academia. Individuals who “dared to suggest that the minorities were a distinct minzu or possessed an unrelated culture was likely to be called unpatriotic or, even worse, a traitor to his or her people,”⁷² a hanjian (汉奸). The rather extreme measures that the Nationalist government was forced to take revealed in part the dubious degree of genuine unity that existed between Han China (China proper) and its frontier territories. The government’s insecurity regarding the overall national cohesion of the newly established Republic was also revealed in its campaign to nominally eradicate cultural differences in the name of national unity and resistance.

The Chinese Communist Party consistently advocated for a united front against the Japanese that centered on the idea of mobilizing the masses to resist the Japanese. In a speech titled “Win the Masses in Their Millions for the Anti-Japanese National United Front” made on May 7th, 1937, Mao claimed that the only way for the Chinese nation to consolidate internal peace was to “fight for democracy”⁷³ and claimed that the Communist Party itself has no other interests aside from “[defeating] Japanese imperialism in a common effort by uniting with all those members of the bourgeoisie and the Kuomintang who favor resistance.”⁷⁴ Mao asserts that a key reason that the Japanese have not been defeated was due to the fact that there were certain factions of the Guomindang, as well as other traitors and pro-Japanese groups that had been

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⁷¹ Leibold, 137
⁷² Ibid. 138
⁷⁴ Ibid.1937
“endeavoring to prolong civil war in China.” Mao advocated for an end to the GMD-CCP hostilities in his speech, warning that if Chiang Kai-Shek continued his encirclement campaigns against the Chinese Communists, it would result in Chiang’s government “[drawing] closer to the Japanese imperialists and the pro-Japanese group.” Through this speech, Mao Zedong portrayed the Communist Party as a group of individuals who were willing to temporarily set aside internal political differences in the name of resisting foreign incursion in the form of Japanese imperialism. By calling for the unity of the masses regardless of their sociopolitical affiliations or ethnic background, the Chinese Communist Party had effectively become the Chinese nationalists that the country so desperately needed during a time of sociopolitical chaos.

The Japanese campaign to exploit the ethnic tensions between the Han Chinese and the people of the frontier further exacerbated the internal problems that the Guomindang faced, as it sought to simultaneously fight the Japanese, contain Communist expansion, and quell the Japanese-supported minority uprisings throughout the Second Sino-Japanese War. What is more, the uprisings symbolized a fundamental rejection of and refusal to embrace the Han-centric nationalism that the Republican government sought to promote as a unifying force during the formative years of the Republic of China. It seemed that the perennial peripheral status of China’s frontier population had in a sense made them different and underscored the Han-centric sociopolitical scene that was Republican China. Indeed, it would seem that the concept of the Hua-Yi dichotomy was alive and well, manifesting itself in the Japanese-supported minority bids for independence.

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75 Mao, 1937
Although the Japanese attempted to exploit the aforementioned divisions within Republican Chinese society, they were not as successful as they had hoped to be. The Guomindang acted swiftly to prevent the minority bids for independence from being successful. Through the adaptation of a “loose-rein strategy aimed at drawing the frontier and its elites towards the political center”, the Guomindang were able to maintain the image of nominal unity within the Chinese Republic. For instance, the Nationalist government constantly “asserted its sovereignty over the threatened frontier regions of the former Qing empire and resisted attempts by the British (in Tibet), Russians (in Xinjiang and Mongolia), and Japanese…to invade and dismember the Chinese state.”

Although not always successful, this constant assertion of territorial sovereignty allowed the Republican government, the sociopolitical center of the new Chinese society to “create the illusion of cosmic unity and moral superiority.” Both the GMD and CCP elites understood the need for shrewd diplomacy with regard to the territorial status of the country’s frontier regions. It was imperative that there was a semblance of national unity in such a time of internal crisis, and the Chinese central government once again underplayed the differences of the various ethnic groups in the name of unity. Indeed, the Chinese state consistently asserted its dominion both passively as well as actively over its frontier regions throughout Chinese history, and this perpetual narrative serves to underpin the overarching center-periphery relationship between the ruling Han minzu and the other ethnic groups that inhabit China.

Following the collapse of the Qing dynasty and during the early years of the Chinese Republic, while the central government was busy consolidating its newly obtained power, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama officially declared that Tibet was from that point onwards independent.

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77 Leibold, 79
78 Ibid. 79
from the Chinese government. The Dalai Lama began to train Tibetan forces to defend their territory. Indeed, the Dalai Lama was “strongly opposed to any Chinese presence in Lhasa.” He also had fears of what Soviet-style Communism would do to threaten the Buddhist faith in Tibet. He had already “witnessed what the communist system had done in Mongolia.” However, Tibet was still a very small and weak state and thus needed to “develop good diplomatic relationships with its two powerful neighbors, China and India.”

The areas of Mongolia and Manchuria were of particular importance for the Chinese in this cultivation of a new national identity due to the fact that the Nationalist government’s expansive definition of the Chinese people included the various frontier populations, who must also take part in this greater “liberation movement” of what the Guomindang called the “Oriental minzu (dongfang minzu) (东方民族),” meaning the people of the East, perhaps referring to the entire geographic extent of the Qing dynasty. As an example, during Sun Yat-Sen’s tenure as the president of the Republic, he attempted to incorporate Outer Mongolia into the Chinese geo-body by using “the presence of Soliyn Danzan, the chairman of the USSR-backed Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Government at the Guomindang’s Reorganization Congress to highlight the common historical destiny of the Chinese and Mongolian peoples.” It was within this larger ideal of national unity that these “racial nationalists” in the Guomindang attempted to promote the idea of each and every Chinese ethnic group sharing a common history and a common destiny. Indeed, Sun’s particular vision of Chinese society and his dream of a single cohesive Chinese “nation-state” were echoed by his successors in the Guomindang, who used Sun’s
particular approach to ethno politics to address the issue of the Chinese frontier populations and how they would be included in the new Chinese nation. This particular approach to the delineation of Chinese identity by the early Guomindang serves as an example of the overarching theme of cultural erasure of the minority populations that had defined the ethnic policies of Qing China under the Manchu emperors.

Despite the government’s attempts to portray all the Chinese minzus as sharing a common root, not all members of the Chinese intelligentsia favored this expansive interpretation of national identity. For instance, the intellectual Gu Jiegang called into question the historical accuracy of the common origins version of Chinese history that was promoted by the Guomindang. Gu believed that the minority frontier minzus must mingle together with the Han majority in order to “infuse a bit of fresh blood into the veins of the Han majority.”84 Gu’s approach to fostering national unity by the “doubting of antiquity” ran directly counter to Sun Yat-Sen’s idea of minzu assimilation whereby the minority populations would be gradually integrated into the larger Han minzu to form a cohesive national unit through the dissemination of the idea that all Chinese shared a common ancestor. A number of Guomindang as well as other scholars uniformly rejected Gu’s interpretation of the origins of the Chinese people and his advocacy for inter-minzu mingling out of fear that it “could undermine the apologue of racial and cultural homogeneity central to their attempts to construct a single, unified Zhonghua Minzu.”85 Indeed, the idea that the frontier populations were in fact of different origin than the majority Han minzu was collectively rejected by both the Guomindang Nationalist government as well as by Chinese ethnic nationalists. The people of the Han minzu were still considered to

84 Leibold, 124
85 Ibid. 125
be the “genuine” representatives of the Chinese nation long after the Republican revolution that sought to create a new beginning and empower all the inhabitants of the Chinese geo-body.
V. National Identity in Maoist China (1949-1976)

After the Chinese Communist Party emerged victorious from the Chinese Civil War (1927-49), the leadership sought to establish a new society in which all remnants of the old China were to be replaced with a new spirit of Maoist revolutionary ideals that would form the cornerstone of the sociopolitical atmosphere of Maoist China. As Chairman of the new People’s Republic, Mao Zedong sought to use his personal prestige amongst the Chinese peasantry as the fuel for the sociopolitical movements that he was planning. One of the first orders of business for the newly-established People’s Republic was to undertake the task of classifying the various ethnicities that lie outside China proper and create a system by which these minority ethnicities were to be gradually integrated into the new People’s Republic. However, Mao’s policy of systematically incorporating the Chinese minorities had mixed results.

Mao Zedong officially declared the establishment of the People’s Republic of China on October 1st, 1949. After asserting control over the mainland in 1949, Mao Zedong proceeded to “liberate” the Tibet area by sending in the People’s Liberation Army in 1950. Indeed, Mao believed that “the legitimacy of the government of the PRC rested upon its ability to restore Chinese unity.” For Mao, “unifying China,” meant first securing China’s borders. From a geopolitical perspective, Mao sought to “[create] a buffer zone at the edge of empire.” Mao decided that the boundaries of the new People’s Republic would extend to the Southern Himalayas so that China would be protected against perceived foreign threats such as “Britain, the USSR, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Asian republics of the Soviet Union.” Furthermore, Mao was incentivized to take a different approach with regard to the issue of

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86 Wolff, 128
87 Ibid. 128
88 Ibid. 128
minority autonomy in China in opposition to the Leninist model, which emphasized regional autonomy for the various ethnic groups within the Soviet Union. This was evidently due to the fact that he had experienced first-hand during the Communists’ Long March “the intensity of anti-Chinese sentiment among the minorities, especially in the Tibetan areas of China’s western provinces.”

Mao’s experience also significantly influenced his particular approach to dealing with China’s frontier problem. Through a combination of paternalism and shrewd political calculation, Mao Zedong ensured that the Han Chinese would be the group who would wield undisputed social and political control over the entire Chinese geo-body. The frontier populations were presented with the choice of either agreeing to join the central government and peacefully return to the “motherland” or be forced to return through military intervention. There was very little that the minorities could do in the face of such overwhelming pressure from the central government.

With regard to the area of Tibet, the Communist Party asserted that the region had been under the oppression of foreign imperialist forces during the early Republican era (in this case the British), and needed to be “liberated” from such oppression. It was under this particular pretext that the Communist Party sent People’s Liberation Army units into Tibet to assert its control over the territory. In what was known in China as the Tibetan Liberation movement, the Chinese Communist Party sent its battle-seasoned troops into Lhasa after failed negotiations between Chinese and Tibetan authorities. The PLA overwhelmed Tibetan defense forces within two weeks and were able to establish government control over the region, once again bringing the Tibetan people into Chinese oversight and control. Indeed, although the Communists had nominally recognized the autonomy of the frontier regions during the height of the Second Sino-

89 Wolff, 131
Japanese War, they nonetheless reverted to a Han-centric approach when they took control of China and sought to reunify the nation, which necessitated the reintegration of territories such as Xinjiang and Tibet back into the Chinese geo-body. The Communists in this case were not much different from the Guomindang with regard to their approach towards the frontier regions, and the integration of Tibet into the People’s Republic once again highlighted the imperial conceptualization of the Chinese geo-body, and emphasized the age-old concept of a Sino centric China in which the Han minzu are the model upon which the untamed frontiers were to emulate. Indeed, the sociopolitical and cultural center of Communist China remained very much unchanged, with Chinese national identity essentially synonymous with the Han Chinese.

Despite its actions after seizing political power, the Communist Party did make an attempt to bestow nominal equality between the Han Chinese and the frontier nationalities. In his 1953 essay “Criticize Han Chauvinism”, Mao alludes to the various “problems” in the Party with regard to the pervasive mentality of Han cultural superiority amongst many cadres within the Party. Indeed, he asserts that “Han chauvinism exists almost everywhere” and Mao implores that “mistakes in this respect must be corrected at once.”\textsuperscript{90} Mao also suggests that one way to handle the issue of minority discrimination in China is to send delegations from the central government who are “familiar with [the Party’s] nationality policy and full of sympathy for our minority nationality compatriots.”\textsuperscript{91} Mao’s call for the Communist Party to be better educated with regard to understanding the sociopolitical issues posed by Han chauvinism marks perhaps the first major shift in tone with regard to the status of the minority groups in contemporary Chinese history. Indeed, the use of phrases such as “full of sympathy” underpins a paternalistic tone by

\textsuperscript{90} Mao Zedong. “Criticize Han Chauvinism.” Published March 16\textsuperscript{th}, 1953. \textit{Marxist.org} Accessed 30\textsuperscript{th} December 2015. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_25.htm

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
the Communist government in regard to their relationship with the frontier population. Nevertheless, while Mao attempted to instill a sense of minzu equality in the new People’s Republic, there was still a pervasive theme of “othering” by the Han Chinese. As we will see later on, Mao’s actions do not completely coincide with his romantic and idealistic rhetoric. Indeed, Mao himself had rather disparaging views towards certain groups of minorities.

The Chinese Communist Party sought to construct its overarching philosophy regarding Chinese national identity upon a socio-political construct that emphasized anti-Western and anti-imperialist sentiment amongst the Chinese populace. Indeed, the Communists sought to portray themselves as the true Chinese nationalists to the rural populace. The Guomindang were labeled as imperialist reactionaries who had failed the Chinese nation during the Japanese invasion and thus did not have the right to control the destiny of the Chinese nation. It was the Communists who fought a rather effective guerrilla campaign against the Japanese invaders during the Second World War, and it was the Communists once again who defeated the Guomindang to “liberate” the Chinese peasantry from the yoke of capitalist and imperialist oppression. Although there was no want of egalitarian rhetoric employed by the Chinese Communists, the Party’s actions following their rise of power paint a rather different picture with regard to their vision of the sociopolitical center of the new Chinese society. The Communists initially made an attempt to show that they were more sympathetic to the people of the frontiers by nominally ameliorating the discrimination against the frontier population. In his 1958 essay “National Minorities”, Mao claimed that “all our minority nations should trust each other, no matter what nationalities they are.”

Communism and how much.” Initially, Mao believed that there was no need to distinguish the various ethnicities and nationalities within China; all that mattered was the people’s acceptance of Communism as the guiding social principle for the Chinese nation moving forward.

According to Mao, the new People’s Republic would be founded upon the principle of a “People’s Democratic Dictatorship” in which “the four progressive social classes that theoretically constituted the united front of the Yan’an era- the proletariat, the peasantry, the petty bourgeois, and the national bourgeoisie” would form the political core of the new government. Furthermore, the true leaders of the new Chinese society would not be the proletariat (in contrast to the orthodox Marxist interpretation), nor would it be the peasantry, the social group that formed the backbone of the Chinese Communist movement and helped bring about victory over the Guomindang. For the chairman, the only entity that would be fit to exercise such “proletarian hegemony” would be the Chinese Communist Party. The Party would be the principle entity that would direct the energies of the masses towards the development of a China that was “‘wealthy’ and ‘powerful’ in a hostile world dominated by highly industrialized countries.” However, Mao’s sociopolitical blueprint for the development of Chinese society could not be achieved until the country was wholly unified once more. The Chinese Communist Party embarked on the task of integrating the vast frontiers of the Chinese geo-body into the new People’s Republic. The far western region of Tibet would become Mao’s first integration project.

As part of Mao’s Tibetan integration policy, he instructed his representatives in Tibet to adopt a “go slow” policy with which they would “win over the ‘patriotic upper strata’ of Tibetan

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93 Mao, 1958
95 Ibid. 126
By using this top-down approach to establishing relations with the Tibetan leadership, Mao hoped to “isolate those members of the elite who harbored ideas of Tibetan independence.” In contrast to the traditional Communist approach of using grassroots efforts to develop relations with inhabitants, Mao understood the relatively vertical social structure of Tibetan society and decided to appease the Tibetan religious elite, a group that held enormous sociopolitical clout and influence in Tibetan society. This approach by Mao is very similar to the approach used by the Manchus after they had conquered China proper. The Qing sought to gain the support of the Chinese intelligentsia in order to consolidate and secure their sociopolitical position as the rulers of the Chinese empire. It was during this integration effort that traditional Han Chinese conceptions of Tibetan society once again surfaced, as there was a titanic clash of cultures between the PLA (People’s Liberation Army) and the Tibetan civilians. The soldiers’ “lack of familiarity with Tibetan customs caused tension and misunderstanding.” Indeed, the Han Chinese that were sent to Tibet to accelerate the region’s integration with the Chinese motherland still saw their supposed compatriots as “feudal and backward.” This particular perception by the Chinese Communist representatives to Tibet underscores the transcendent nature of the traditional Hua-Yi dichotomy that had defined Imperial China’s relations with the territories that were its peripheries, with the Son of Heaven serving as the center of the Chinese universe, and all of the barbarian elements depicted in traditional Chinese maps as lying outside of the celestial empire. While the Qing Empire sought to utilize Confucian philosophy to distinguish themselves from the uncultured “barbarians”, the Chinese Communists employed their political ideology as the new benchmark for the frontier peoples. 

96 Wolff, 148
97 Ibid. 148
98 Ibid. 149
99 Ibid. 149
on the part of the Communists underpins the paternalistic approach utilized by the Communist Party in their efforts to integrate Tibet into greater China. Indeed, the existence of a fundamental cultural barrier between the Chinese Communists and the Tibetans serves to raise doubts of the genuine unity of the Chinese nation as espoused by both the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party. Although the CCP attempted to promote the idea of a unified multiethnic state, it would seem that the significant cultural differences between the Han Chinese and the Tibetans, along with Tibet’s rejection of Chinese hegemony ultimately serves to weaken the narrative of unity espoused by the Chinese Communist Party.

Following the events of 1950, the newly established Communist government set out to organize and classify the various peoples of the Chinese frontier in order to conduct the PRC’s first census. The government sent out teams of investigators and researchers to the minority areas to reorganize the ethnicities of the frontier, creating numerous new “minzus” based on dialectical differences amongst the various recognized ethnicities expanded from 39 in 1954 to 54 in the span of a decade. Thus, it can be seen that the Chinese government was rather intent on integrating the various frontier populations into the new People’s Republic. The first encounters between government representatives and the minorities such as the Tibetans produced a less than cordial atmosphere for the CCP’s policy goal of gradually incorporating the frontier populations into greater China. Indeed, the cultural barriers and distrust that the Tibetans had for the Chinese soldiers who were sent there to assert the central government’s presence in the Chinese frontier underscored the perennial nature of the relationship between the majority Han and the inhabitants of China’s peripheral regions. It seemed that even the leaders of Communist China like Mao and Zhou Enlai were of the opinion that the Tibetans were “the most backward, the
most reactionary, the most barbarian, and the most dark.” This government effort to portray the Tibetan people as representing an essentially backwards and primitive culture that needed to be lifted from its current feudal state into modernity and civilization represents an explicit assertion of Han chauvinism. This Han chauvinism also served in part as a political pretext for government intervention and presence in the region. Indeed, a significant factor behind the strained relationship between the Han Chinese and the Tibetans lies in a fundamental misconception on the part of the Chinese communist government with regard to the actual nature of Tibetan Buddhism, which was one of the primary targets by the Chinese Communists as they sought to integrate the region. The definition of “Chinese” in the Mao era can be characterized as inclusive, as Mao sought to promote the idea of solidarity amongst the various social classes in Chinese society in an attempt to further unify the Chinese state. Despite this insistence, however, Chinese government policy towards the region of Tibet still exhibited a hierarchical nature as the Tibetan people were considered to be inferior to the Han by the Communists.

Tibetan sentiments with regard to what they regarded as Chinese territorial incursion are found in the autobiography of the 14th Dalai Lama. In his autobiography *My Land and My People*, the 14th Dalai Lama describes Tibet’s interactions with the Chinese Communist government following the Chinese Civil War. In 1959, when the Chinese sent the People’s Liberation Army to Tibet in order to “liberate” the area, the 24 year old Dalai Lama attempted to call upon the support of a number of western powers including Great Britain and the United States in order to retain Tibetan independence from China. Unfortunately, the responses to this call for help were “terribly disheartening” with Great Britain “[expressing] their deepest sympathy for the people of Tibet and regretted that owing to Tibet’s geographical position, since

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100 Wolff, 164
India had been granted independence, they could not offer help.” On a similar note, the United States did not wish to receive the Tibetan delegation sent there. The People’s Liberation Army then swiftly overran the poorly-equipped and trained Tibetan armed forces. Lacking international recognition, the people of Tibet had to look for other means to preserve their independence in the face of tremendous pressure from the Chinese government, which wanted them to “come back to the Motherland”. The United Nations, which Tibet relied upon in hopes of securing their status as a nation, chose to shelve the Tibet question. Here, the Dalai Lama points out that the predicament was partly the result of Tibet’s lack of initiative immediately after it gained independence from the Chinese in 1912. Indeed, the Tibetans were “content to retire into isolation” and not seek any formal legal recognition from the international community for Tibetan independence and nationhood. This would return to haunt the people of Tibet decades later, when the Chinese once again sent troops to reassert their control over Tibet after the Chinese Civil War.

The Dalai Lama goes on to describe the various activities of the Chinese army during its occupation of Lhasa. When the Chinese first sent their military to Lhasa, the leadership assured the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people that they were just there to help Tibet modernize and would not interfere with its internal affairs. However, as more and more Chinese officials and troops began to arrive in Lhasa, it put an enormous strain on the local Tibetan economy. This instance was one of many flashpoints that underscored the uneasy relationship between the Chinese and the Tibetans. According to the Dalai Lama, the Chinese soldiers’ demand for food caused widespread inflation, as “the prices of food-grains suddenly soared up about ten times; of

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102 Ibid.
butter, nine times; and of goods in general, two or three times.” Due to this sudden demand for large amounts of grain, the people of Tibet were pushed to the brink of starvation. In addition to the food strain on the people of Lhasa, the arrival of the Chinese also brought a massive cultural clash between Buddhist Tibet and the formally atheist state of Communist China.

One particular practice by the Chinese the Tibetans found most offensive was their complete disregard for the very important cultural nuances of Tibetan society. One such example is the burning of dead animal bones by Chinese soldiers. This was extremely offensive to the religious beliefs of the Tibetans and served to arouse their ire towards the Chinese soldiers occupying their land, which the Tibetans saw as “an antagonistic foreign element” that would ultimately be “useless as agents of reform.” When the Dalai Lama informed Chinese officials of these offenses, they responded by asserting that it was the responsibility of the Tibetan leadership to put an end to the local hostilities towards the Chinese soldiers. The People’s Liberation Army was not a welcome presence in Lhasa, and the Tibetan people’s reaction to the PLA’s intrusion on their daily lives serve to underpin the pervasive tension that defines the Han Chinese’s relations with their frontier population. Indeed, it can be seen here that the Chinese Communist Party did not genuinely consider the needs of the Tibetan people during their occupation of the territory.

After extensive failed negotiations, the Chinese Communists finally ran out of patience with the Tibetans. The Chinese officials in Lhasa ordered the Tibetan army to help them put down the revolt by the Khampas of Tibet’s eastern region. The request was rejected outright by the Tibetan cabinet, which would not “send out a Tibetan army to fight against Tibetans who

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103 Howarth, 91
104 Wolff, 151
were committing no worse crime than to defend Tibet.”105 Due to this refusal, “drastic measures would be taken to crush the opposition to Chinese rule.”106 Tibetan government officials convened and denounced the Seventeen Point Plan, asserting that the Chinese had broken it. Furthermore, Tibetan government officials made the bold demand that the Chinese must withdraw from Lhasa. The Kusung Regiment (the Dalai Lama’s bodyguards) endorsed the declaration made by Tibetan officials and announced that Tibet would no longer accept Chinese authority in Lhasa. This was followed by a declaration from the Tibetan army that they would no longer follow orders given to them by Chinese officers. As expected, the Chinese authorities labeled the Tibetan soldiers who had defied their rule as reactionaries once again. The use of such political rhetoric once again underpinned the volatile relationship between the Chinese center and periphery. The Chinese Communists sought to utilize Marxist political philosophy as a medium to introduce modern civilization to the Tibetan people as well as exert the Party’s control over its western frontiers.

The people of Tibet staged numerous protests against the Chinese government throughout the PLA’s occupation. The Chinese authorities chose to label such protesters as “reactionaries” that must be destroyed so that order could be restored in Tibet. Indeed, the Chinese were able to back up their incisive political rhetoric with military force. Anti-Chinese sentiment was pervasive throughout the PLA’s occupation of the Tibetan region, and serves to simultaneously underpin the Han-centric approach by the Chinese central government with regard to the nationality question as well as the Tibetans’ fundamental rejection of the government’s attempt to assimilate them into Han Chinese society. As a result of the Tibetan government’s refusal to cooperate with the Chinese central government, the PLA began extensive shelling of Lhasa. The

105 Howarth 161
106 Ibid. 175
Dai 59

chaos forced the Dalai Lama to abandon the Tibetan capital and flee to India to seek refuge. The Chinese occupation of Tibet represented an assertion of the Han-centric world view held by a large number of Chinese officials in the central government. The desire to retain the geographical scope of the Qing Empire by the Communists formed a critical pillar in the national policy of the People’s Republic. It would appear that for the Communists, the Tibetan region constituted an area that was inherently a part of the traditional conceptualization of the Chinese geo body, and therefore needed to be brought back into the motherland. The policy of sinicization promoted by the Communist Party during the Mao era perpetuated the Han-centric sociopolitical construct that was established by the Guomindang during the Republican era.

The Chinese Communist Party, much like their Guomindang predecessors, once again adopted a rather paternalistic and patronizing approach in dealing with its minority population. During the Mao years, the Chinese government was rather static and stubborn with regard to their attempts to incorporate the frontier populations such as the Tibetans into Han Chinese society. Though granting the Tibetans nominal autonomy, the various agencies established by the Chinese central government in the autonomous regions indicate that the Chinese still have a significant presence and also exert a considerable amount of influence in local affairs. For instance, the Preparatory Committee for the Autonomous Region of Tibet (PCART) was “meant to spread reforms and integrate Tibet into the administration of Greater China.” But the PCART was in actuality “a temporary administrative structure meant to facilitate transition from rule by the Dalai Lama to rule by the Communist Party.” Furthermore, Chinese identity in the People’s Republic beginning from the Mao era has served to systematically limit the degree of autonomy for the frontier regions. Mao himself used Stalin’s approach to the various ethnic

\[107\] Wolff, 151
groups within the Soviet Union as a model for Chinese frontier policies. In the USSR, Stalin had adopted a policy of integration with regard to the different ethnic groups within the Soviet Union from about 1922 to 1928. During the first phase in dealing with the issue of ethnic identity in the Soviet Union, power was shared jointly between the minorities and Russians. However, this policy changed drastically beginning in 1929, when Stalin “became disillusioned with his attempt to grant local autonomy and integrate minorities into the mainstream gradually.” Thus, the Soviet Union adopted an assimilationist ethnic policy from 1929 to 1953, an approach that Mao sought to imitate. The Soviet model significantly influenced early Chinese Communist minority policy. The Soviet Union provided the PRC with a significant amount of technical and military assistance during the early years of Communist China, allowing the USSR to exert a considerable amount of political leverage on the new People’s Republic, which Moscow viewed as a junior partner. This treatment at the hands of the Soviet Union would lead the Chinese Communists to adopt certain measures in a bid to eradicate the deep sense of inferiority that they faced relative to the more advanced western nations, including their comrades in the Soviet Union.

Nine years after the Chinese Communist Party seized power in the Mainland, Chairman Mao Zedong initiated the Great Leap Forward in 1958. The campaign sought to substantially increase Chinese industrial capabilities and production. Mao set the goal of catching up with western powers such as England and the United States. In the spring of 1958, the CCP launched a massive propaganda campaign in preparation for the Great Leap. According to the account of Yin Zeming in central Hunan province, steel furnaces were growing at an incredible pace. By the fall of 1958, “12,378 local blast furnaces were built in [the Shaoyang Special Administrative

108 Wolff, 139
109 Ibid. 139
This movement instigated by the Chinese Communists perhaps underpinned a deep sense of China’s inferiority in comparison to the “western imperialists”. Indeed, it would seem that Mao understood that despite the Party’s string of success since its inception in 1921, China as a country was still in desperate need for modernization and advancement if it was going to transform itself into a first-class world power. The ultimate goal of the Great Leap was to surpass the capitalist West and thus prove with concrete results the superiority of Maoist political ideology.

During the Great Leap, Mao emphasized the importance of willpower in achieving the objectives and quotas set by the central government. It was the collective spirit of the Chinese people led by Mao’s political philosophy that would propel China forward on the road to modernity. The Leap would in effect provide the groundwork for ending the Hundred Years of Humiliation that China experienced at the hands of the Japanese and western powers during the late Qing era and throughout the early Republican era. With his approach to the Great Leap, Mao sought to once again harness the power of the peasant masses, an approach that brought him immense success during the initial stages of the Communist revolution. The Communists sought to succeed where the Nationalists had failed; they would be the Party that would implement the necessary policies to revive the Chinese nation after decades of being subjugated to the will of foreign powers. The Great Leap served a dual purpose for Mao to prove to the United States that the Communist path of social development was superior to the capitalist path. Furthermore, the Leap would allow Mao to prove to the Soviet Union that Beijing was more than just a junior partner to Moscow, and sought to achieve pure Communism before his neighbor to the north.

Despite the optimistic rhetoric employed by the Party, the Leap did not go according to plan. It was during this period of time that the Communist land reform policies truly began to take shape and make its presence felt in the areas inhabited by the minorities. The cadres sent by the Communist Party began to enforce collectivization policies within the frontier areas. As a result, large tracts of land were reallocated for state use. The minority populations viewed the Great Leap as a movement that was “being imposed upon them by outsiders in an attempt to destroy their culture and way of life.”

In an interview conducted by the Tibet Oral History Project, the interviewee, an 81-year old Tibetan by the name of Taishi Sonam recounts his experience of the Great Leap Forward in the highlands. According to Sonam, the Chinese “took away one’s rights like eating, drinking. One had no freedom.” Taishi also recalls the formation of the “People’s Communes” (ren min gong she) (人民公社) and how the Chinese “took away everything. Should you fail to obey what they ordered, you would be arrested and imprisoned…”

The Great Leap proved to be a full-spectrum social disaster on a national level, culminating in the deaths of millions of people and the stagnation and perhaps even regression of Chinese social development.

Following the failure of the Great Leap Forward from 1958-1962, Mao Zedong was temporarily dislodged from power as more moderate leaders such as Liu Shaoqi took over the reins of the Communist Party and began to implement economic reforms in an attempt to help China recover economically. During this period, Mao bided his time and waited until he felt that the nation was ready for another massive social upheaval. In accordance with his political

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113 Ibid.
philosophy of perpetual revolution, Mao sought to once again purge Chinese society of practices that he considered to be archaic and out-of-date. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966-76 signaled Mao Zedong’s return to paramount political power after a brief absence. The movement sought to destroy the “Four Olds” of Chinese society, “old ideas, culture, customs, and habits’ that ‘the exploiting classes’ [used] to corrupt the masses”\(^{114}\) and instill new “revolutionary ideals” in the Chinese populace. Utilizing his immense cult of personality and his God-like status amongst the Chinese people, Mao was able to engage with and completely obliterate the credibility of many of his political enemies. One of Mao’s earliest writings, “An Analysis of Class in Chinese Society” was written in 1926, and would become a cornerstone of Maoist political ideology. In his analysis, Mao claimed that a significant portion of Chinese society was comprised of “the semi-proletariat [consisting] of five categories: the overwhelming majority of the semi-owner peasants, the poor peasants, the small handicraftsmen, the shop assistants, and the pedlars.”\(^{115}\) This particular group of people along with the nascent industrial proletariat would form the backbone of the Chinese Communist revolution. By grouping a variety of individuals into a single sociopolitical category, the Communists created a mechanism that was at once very rigid and very fluid in terms of classification. Although the idea of a counter-revolutionary element was well-defined, the particular characteristics of such an individual was subject to the terms of how the Communist Party (and by extension Mao Zedong himself) viewed the people.

\(^{114}\) Meisner, 172

One of the primary objectives of the Cultural Revolution for Mao was the denunciation of his political enemies through a series of highly publicized struggle sessions (*pi dou hui*) during which individuals deemed as “counter revolutionaries” were heavily criticized (and in some instances even beaten) by large crowds. This was very similar to the *su ku* (*诉苦*), or speak bitterness meetings during the Great Leap Forward in which large masses of peasantry gathered to berate the wrongdoings of the landlords (*di zhu*) (*地主*), a term that was created by the Communists as a label for what they considered to be one of the undesirable social elements. The individuals subjected to public criticism were forced to confess their wrongdoings and ask for forgiveness from “the people”. These practices were characteristic of the Maoist insistence on internal psychological struggle using “self-reflection” as a means to eradicate the “backwards” thinking amongst the Chinese populace, including the national minorities. Despite this attempt by the Chinese Communists to establish an ideological basis through the establishment of different social classes for the new Chinese society, “the social classes engaged in this struggle were never clearly defined.”\(^{116}\) Through the Cultural Revolution, Mao promoted a brand of martial nationalism in which the people of Chinese society were to pour all their efforts into purging and completely wiping out the symbols of ancient China, which Mao regarded and characterized as feudalistic and backwards.

During Mao’s reign over Communist China, his revolutionary ideology formed the basis for Chinese national identity. Mao’s insistence of perpetual revolution to constantly weed out and purge “counterrevolutionary elements” in Chinese society resulted in Chinese nationalism incorporating a number of martial characteristics. Indeed, due to the “feudal” image given to the frontier populations, they were seen as a major impediment in the Communist drive to modernize

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\(^{116}\) Meisner, 162
through the Cultural Revolution. Despite this view towards the frontier population, the Chinese propaganda machine sought to once again unite the Chinese populace, regardless of nationality in a herculean attempt to fundamentally change the sociopolitical structure of Chinese society.

The Cultural Revolution put Tibetan society under a substantial amount of duress and pressure. The Communists labeled Tibetan culture as an example of the feudalism that must be wiped out. During the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards defaced a large number of Buddha statues and the Panchen Lama was subjected to a number of struggle sessions. In addition, the overwhelming majority of Tibet’s monasteries were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The large-scale destruction of Tibetan religious symbols and the persecution of religious leaders represented the Chinese Communists’ attempt to forcibly assimilate the frontier minorities through the erasure of their culture. For the Communists, it was time to “destroy the old world and forge a new world” (da sui jiu shi jie, chuang li xin shi jie) (打碎旧世界，创立新世界).

The Revolution extended its reach across the vast Chinese frontier, with the Party’s policies affecting the people of the Tibetan plateau as well as the inhabitants of China proper. A Tibetan elder by the name of Gadak recounts how “religious texts were burned, icons were thrown out [of the monasteries], and people were banned from wearing jewelry.” Gadak asserts, “it was during the Cultural Revolution that religion was destroyed” The Chinese also called monthly meetings in which the local residents were “[threatened] and [subjected] to thamzing (struggle session). That happened six or seven times a year.” Gadak also recalls how

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118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
The Chinese cadres “used to say, ‘There is no religion. It is a lie. This icon cannot save you.’”120

The full-scale attack on traditional Chinese culture not only destroyed many symbols of ancient China, but also severely damaged minority culture through the forced reform in many areas of the Chinese frontier. Through this attack on traditional Tibetan culture and religion, the Chinese Communist Party sought to utilize the universal nature of Communist ideology to replace ethnic bonds with class distinctions as a way of gradually eradicating a culture that was inhibiting social progress. The formation of class distinctions within various minority societies would also make it substantially easier for an authoritarian government such as the PRC to exercise control over its frontier territories. The Cultural Revolution was an explicit assertion of Maoist revolutionary ideology in which his particular definition of Chinese revolutionary spirit served to once again marginalize minority culture by labeling their practices as feudal and backwards.

Struggle sessions were a pervasive practice and a defining characteristic of both the Great Leap Forward as well as the Cultural Revolution. During these sessions, “class enemies” such as landlords as well as religious figures like the Panchen Lama were subjected to humiliating and degrading treatment at the hands of the local peasantry, who were encouraged to “speak bitterness” (su ku) against their oppressors. The perpetual revolution and social upheaval promoted by the Maoist state and Party propaganda efforts had the ultimate goal of eradicating China of feudal elements that the Chinese Communists considered to be a hindrance to overall social progress, such as Tibetan culture and religious practices, which the Communists considered to be reactionary and a road block to modernity in Chinese society. The hyper aggressive approach to social revolution and radical change that Mao implemented during the

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Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution perhaps underpinned a deep sense of insecurity and inferiority on the part of the Chinese Communists, as the leadership seemed rather desperate to generate progress for the sake of progress. Despite the herculean propaganda effort by the Communist Party and Mao’s enormous cult of personality, the two massive social movements produced less than optimal results for the Chinese people, and resulted in severe damage for Chinese social infrastructure and traditional culture as well as immense decimation of minority culture.
VI. National Identity during the Deng Xiaoping era (1978-1992)

After Mao’s death in 1976, there was a brief period of internal chaos as a number of factions struggled to control the Communist Party. Mao’s chosen successor was Hua Guofeng, who attempted to curb the excessive political violence that was a result of the Cultural Revolution. Hua initially brought about a moderate degree of political reform by first ousting the Gang of Four, the primary political faction responsible for many of the initiatives during the Cultural Revolution. The removal of this group officially signified the end of the movement. However, due to Hua’s insistence in following Maoist principles, he was quickly outmaneuvered and removed from power by Deng Xiaoping, who had been subjected to a number of purges during the Cultural Revolution. Deng would introduce a number of new policy changes, particularly in the areas of economic reform. These reforms signaled a drastic change in the overall direction of development with regard to Chinese nationalism and national identity as China entered the contemporary era in world history.

After Deng ascended to the position of paramount leader of the People’s Republic in 1978, he instigated a series of economic reforms and promoted a series of slogans that focused upon individual achievement for the Chinese people. The slogan “it does not matter whether a cat is black or white as long as it catches mice” underpinned the rather pragmatic approach that Deng took in putting China on the path of socioeconomic recovery following the Mao-induced disasters during the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution. The first important step that the Deng administration took to revitalize the Chinese economy was getting rid of the agricultural collectives that had been a staple of Maoist China. Following the breakup of collectivized agriculture in 1979, “by 1984, some 98 percent of agricultural production was from independent economic units operating under the new ‘responsibility system’ for leasing of land to individuals.
or groups.” Through adopting sayings such as “to be rich is to be glorious” it would seem that Deng attempted to instill a greater sense of individualism into the collective Chinese mentality in stark contrast to the Mao-era policies that called for greater cooperation and promoted the collective spirit of the masses. The overarching nature of the stream of Chinese national identity as portrayed by Deng’s policies suggests that during the period of reform beginning in 1978, the Chinese populace were encouraged to seek personal gain and success as a means of contributing and augmenting to the overall well-being and growth of the Chinese nation.

During Deng’s time in office, he was responsible for drastically increasing China’s Gross Domestic Product. Deng allowed local municipalities in China to focus on profitable export items to boost local economies. By adopting such capitalist practices and integrating them into the Chinese economic system, Deng displayed a high degree of pragmatism with regard to economic liberalization as a way to increase Chinese industrial production and speed up the country’s economic recovery. Through the more individualistic approach utilized by Deng during his reign over China, the Chinese Communist Party attempted to reestablish their credibility as the ruling political entity in China.

As the country’s overall economic output and quality of life steadily increased during Deng’s administration, the Chinese people began to develop a new sense of national pride through the country’s economic growth and success as a major player in the global economy. In the process of economic modernization and national development, Chinese society also experienced a significant wealth gap between the rich and poor. Indeed, with the development of the Chinese economy, a plethora of traditional social views once again resurfaced, as sentiments

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such as “peasants are backwards” and “your economic failure is your own fault”\(^\text{122}\) served to partially characterize the new China that was emerging as a result of Deng’s economic and social reforms. Using such language as a pretext for the existence of wealth gaps amongst the Chinese populace underpins the significantly more individualistic (and increasingly materialistic) stream of national pride that manifested itself during the Deng era. This sense of economic privilege experienced by a segment of the Chinese population once again brought to the surface the need to “develop” the “backwards” national minorities and bring them into the modern era. In Deng’s era, individual economic gain and material acquisition gradually overrode the relatively rigid society dominated by political ideology that characterized the Mao years. For China, the new high point of modern civilization almost became synonymous with material wealth. Thus, the Hua-Yi dichotomy assumed a new form in Deng’s China, as the increasingly affluent urban Han Chinese once again were serving as the new models of modernity for the relatively less-developed minority groups.

Chinese Communist Party policy in the late 1970s during the beginning of Deng Xiaoping’s administration with regard to the Tibet question was characterized by an emphasis on cultural assimilation as opposed to allowing each individual ethnic group to retain their own unique cultural identity. The idea of “sinicization [as] civilization” underpinned Chinese Tibetan policy into the Deng era. The ultimate goal of the Party was to slowly assimilate the Tibetan people and have them “absorb ‘Chinese-ness gradually.’”\(^\text{123}\) This particular approach echoes the Guomindang under the leadership of Sun Yat-Sen, as Sun had also advocated for a policy of assimilation with regard to the minority frontier peoples. Indeed, China had adopted the


\(^{123}\) Wolff, 172
assimilation model as part of its minority policy as opposed to a “melting pot” or a “salad bowl” approach, in which the various ethnic groups could at least retain some aspects of their unique cultural identity. During Deng Xiaoping’s time as China’s leader, he began to adopt a comparatively more lenient stance towards Tibetan affairs. He allowed Tibetan to be taught as part of elementary education. The pursuit of a more ethnically sensitive policy towards the people of China’s frontiers suggests that the Communist Party had decided to adopt a salad-bowl approach with regard to the Tibet question and allowed Tibetan culture to be promoted as part of a multi-ethnic China. The General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yaobang further pushed for the new language policy introduced by Hu called for the “Tibetization” of the Chinese Communist Party whereby the goal for the Party was “within a few years, two-thirds of the cadres would be Tibetan” and “Chinese cadres would be required to study the Tibetan language.”

Indeed, Hu Yaobang had finally realized that the CCP had mishandled the sensitive Tibet question, opting for explicit and rather coercive methods of assimilation during the Mao years. Thus, in an attempt to remedy the situation, Hu “ordered the Party’s propaganda arm to educate the military on Tibetan religion and minority policy.” Despite these measures taken by Hu, there still existed a fundamental issue that proved to be a thorn in the establishment of amicable Sino-Tibetan relations in the modern era; the question of religious freedom for the Tibetan people. Indeed, the Chinese government’s firm belief that all of its frontier minorities would eventually choose to integrate themselves with the motherland. However, despite the government rhetoric and its relatively more relaxed social policies, it was still an undisputed fact that “Tibetans remained Tibetans” and that “assimilation had not occurred.”

124 Wolff, 176
125 Ibid. 177
126 Ibid. 177
The Chinese policy shift in Tibet during the Deng administration was followed almost immediately by a wave of Han Chinese emigration to Tibetan territory. This massive influx of highly trained workers put the Tibetan people at a disadvantage as the newly arrived Han and Hui Chinese had “superior skills, higher educational [levels], and Chinese language skills.” Indeed, the influx of Han Chinese into Tibetan territory can be seen as an effort by the Chinese central government to gradually integrate Tibet into the Chinese geo-body. The Han Chinese presence in Tibet led to widespread resentment from the Tibetan people and also lead to “accusations that the PRC was turning Tibet into a multi-ethnic region where Tibetans were in danger of becoming a minority in their homeland.” The Tibetan government-in-exile based in Dharamsala, India contended that what the Chinese were doing in Tibet amounted to cultural genocide. In opposition, Beijing contended that this integration and cultural mixing was in fact a “good model for development.” According to an article published in January of 2015, the Chinese government had authorized 280,000 additional Han emigrants to the Tibet Autonomous Region, and Tibetan exiles claimed that “the region was home to about 7.5 million Han Chinese compared to 6 million Tibetans.” Although the Chinese presence in Tibet resulted in greater urban development and a general improvement in infrastructure, it also brought about environmental concerns for the Tibetan people. The Chinese government had also moved a number of their nuclear facilities and nuclear waste onto the Tibetan highlands against the wishes and request of the Dalai Lama, who expressed his concern for the fragile state of the Himalayan

127 Wolff, 178
128 Ibid. 178
129 Ibid. 178
region, in which three nuclear powers had territory; India, Pakistan, and China. Indeed, the potential environmental impacts that could result from the concentration of nuclear material in the region. The potential for nuclear contamination was rather high and millions of people across Asia would be affected by the Chinese government’s policy of relocating nuclear waste sites to the Tibetan plateau. Indeed, “what happens in Lhasa does not stay in Lhasa.”

The aforementioned policy instigated by the Chinese Communist government represents yet another point of contention between the Tibetans and the Han Chinese, as the Chinese in this case once again did not seem to take Tibetan interests and concerns into account when implementing the government’s modernization policies in the region. In this particular instance, Chinese security interests overrode Tibet’s environmental concerns. It would seem that the Chinese efforts to foster friendlier relations with the country’s compatriots were partially successful (Chinese development did manage to attract a greater interest in the region amongst international agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund and the World Food Program). The Chinese government’s effort to further integrate Tibet into Han Chinese society during the Deng era can be described as an approach that further promotes the idea that the Han Chinese were to be the social model upon which all the other ethnicities in China were to emulate. Indeed, it would seem that not all of the inhabitants of the Chinese nation were as “Chinese” as the central government would have liked them to be.

One of the more notable development projects initiated by the Chinese government during the Deng era is the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet railway system, first began in 1984. The railway would link Xining and Golmud in Qinghai Province with Lhasa, covering nearly 700 miles of land across mountainous terrain. The Communist Party established the “Qinghai-

\[1^{31}\] Wolff, 180
Dai 74

Tibet Railway Company” in September of 2002. The project would cost approximately $2.3 billion, and Chinese economists “believe that the railway will yield a negative rate of return (the returns will not even cover the current paying-out costs).”\textsuperscript{132} Given this seemingly unprofitable economic investment by the Chinese government, it would suggest that “most of the benefits must be in non-monetary terms.”\textsuperscript{133} The construction of the railway system in this case can also be seen as a means for the Chinese central government to “bring in military personnel and weapons swiftly in case of a foreign attack, possibly supporting aggressive policies along Tibet’s southern border and suppressing an internal uprising.”\textsuperscript{134} With the construction of the railway, there has also been a drastic shift in demographics in areas that once had Tibetans as a dominant majority. For instance, in the case of Golmud, the first city to be linked as part of the railway project, the population in the city of 200,000 is only 1.8% Tibetan (Golmud was formerly a pastoral land that was inhabited by only a few hundred Tibetan nomads)\textsuperscript{135} Thus, it can be seen that some infrastructural projects such as the Qinghai-Tibet railway can function to serve multiple purposes, simultaneously “developing” the Tibetan region and making the region more accessible for the Chinese government, allowing the Communist Party to exert a higher degree of control over the region.

The Deng era of Chinese history placed a strong emphasis on pragmatic and rapid modernization of the Chinese economy and social structure. As a result of Deng’s dramatic economic reforms, the China that he laid the groundwork for experienced the fastest growth rates in the country’s history. With the rapid rise of the quality of life for a large number of Chinese citizens, the perennial dichotomization between “backwardness” and “civilization” once again

\textsuperscript{132} Heath, 219
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid. 219
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid. 219
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid. 220
found itself into the sociopolitical framework of Chinese society. Now, the people of the Chinese frontiers, along with the Chinese peasantry, were considered by many city dwellers to be backwards and in need of modernization. Indeed, along with the Deng administration’s effort to initiate economic reform, “the disparity in standards of living between China and the minorities widened.” Furthermore, a more systemic problem existed in the frontier regions in the form of remnants of those who supported Mao’s Cultural Revolution. These individuals retained their power following the Revolution, and were not completely removed from their posts until the 1980s. Mao’s dream of eliminating social inequality in Chinese society did not exactly produce the optimal results that he had been hoping for.

The pervasive and relentless push to “modernize” China underpinned Chinese social policy throughout the Deng administration. However, the rapid pace of economic reform began to outstrip political reform. Indeed, the overall social development in Chinese society during Deng’s administration resulted in an exponential increase in political corruption within the Communist Party. To compound the complexity of the political situation, there was a sharp divide between the reformist faction and the old guard conservatives within the Communist Party. The reform-minded Party members supported Deng’s approach to modernization and his vision for the cultural and economic development of China, asserting “to get rich was glorious” and that it was possible to limit the potential harms of the economic reform. These individuals endorsed Deng’s economic policies, but did not quite agree with his notably more conservative stance with regard to political liberalization. Although Deng had appointed a number of liberal-minded individuals such as Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang into influential positions within the

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136 Wolff, 173
Party, he still exercised extreme caution with regard to any sign of drastic political reform within the CCP. Deng was of the belief that economic and political reform should and need not occur simultaneously for China to develop. It was Deng’s “ability to side with the conservative wing of the CCP in political matters but with the radical reformers in the economic sphere”\textsuperscript{138} that allowed him to exert a significant amount of influence within the Party and consolidate his political status and power.

In accordance with his vision, Deng laid out what he called the “Four Cardinal Principles” in a speech given at a CCP forum on March 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1979. Deng asserted that in order to achieve the goal of national modernization, China must “keep to the socialist road, uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat, uphold the leadership of the Communist Party, and uphold Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.”\textsuperscript{139} From this particular declaration, it is very clear what Deng’s ultimate goal and intentions were. The CCP would still maintain a monopoly on political power and carry out the task of dictating the particular direction that Chinese national identity would take during the country’s transition into modernity. Deng sought to utilize capitalist elements as part of the process in achieving a communist society.

Although Deng’s socioeconomic reforms were drastic, he emphasized that China itself must not deviate from the core socialist values that Mao sought to promote as part of his political campaigns in the 1960s. The media dubbed the potential deviation as “bourgeois liberalization” through which China was becoming increasingly westernized and thus be in danger of having its traditional values eroded by modernization with western influence. The state newspaper, the \textit{People’s Daily} published an article that attacked this idea, asserting that to “completely

\textsuperscript{138} Mackerras, 33
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid. 21
westernize” would amount to “abandoning socialism in China in favor of capitalism.”

Thus, although Deng himself encouraged economic liberalization as a means of promoting social progress in Chinese society, he still very much wished that the essence of Chinese national identity be rooted in a particular set of social principles that the Communist Party would dictate to the people.

Deng Xiaoping’s policies played an important role in shaping contemporary Chinese national identity through its emphasis on individual achievement as the way to strengthen the country. Through his endorsement of adopting a capitalist approach to economic management and development, Deng created a rather interesting paradox in which there was unchecked corruption as a result of the liberalization of the economy while attempting to retain a degree of control through the perpetuation of a totalitarian political system. This economic and political combination is a significant contributor to how contemporary Chinese citizens, particularly the burgeoning middle class, have developed their particular set of social values. Indeed, this particular desire for wealth by any means has led to what Chinese political dissident Liu Xiaobo describes as “the cancerous overgrowth of the rational economic man” in contemporary Chinese society. While Deng unquestionably modernized China’s economy and drastically improved the standard of living for a large segment of the Chinese population, the unchecked economic growth created a number of social issues that significantly impacted the development of contemporary Chinese identity and the core social values upon which a people live their lives. These values formed the basis of modern Chinese society, a society that the minority peoples of China’s frontier have been encouraged to integrate into through what the CCP terms as “ethnic

140 Mackeras, 37
intermingling”, a process by which the different minzus that inhabit China would gradually meld together over a long period of time.

This particular approach to addressing the nationality problem (which had proved to be a pervasive thorn on the side of generations of Chinese government leaders) differed drastically from the explicit policy of assimilation promoted by the Guomindang government. With the PRC’s approach, the government has sought to “recognize the cultural differences between the Han and the ethnic minorities.” This particular characteristic of the PRC’s ethnic policy has its roots in the Confucian concept of “harmony with differences” and is the basis upon which the Chinese government has promoted the idea of China as a unified multiethnic entity. Despite this attempt to recreate contemporary Chinese identity by the Communist Party, the fact that the government has chosen to adopt a paternalistic approach in the treatment of their “weaker minority brothers” by providing them with social and economic incentives in conjunction with claims of equality creates a fundamental sense of hierarchical social inequality. Indeed, the preferential treatment of minority populations in contemporary Chinese society brings back certain elements of the imperial tributary system in which the inhabitants outside China proper were given vast quantities of goods and other incentives by the Imperial Court in return for cordial relations and the security of China’s borders.

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Following Deng’s retirement in 1992, his successor Jiang Zemin became the president of China in 1993. Jiang’s particular approach to shaping Chinese national identity centered upon his overarching economic and political framework that he dubbed the “Three Represents” (san ge dai biao) (三个代表), which included economic development, cultural development, and political consensus. Jiang asserted that these three principals were to serve as the pillar for the development of contemporary Chinese society. As part of Jiang’s reforms, he purportedly wanted to make the Communist Party more accessible to a greater number of people. In addition, Jiang’s administration saw the return of Hong Kong (1997) and Macau (1999) to the People’s Republic. The return of the two regions to Chinese administration symbolized an important step in ending the “century of humiliation” at the hands of foreign powers as Chinese territorial sovereignty was restored and the terms of the first “unequal treaty” expired. During Jiang’s administration, he also dealt with a number of issues that concerned the status of the country’s minorities.

Throughout the Deng administration, the Chinese government placed a significant amount of focus into the cultural and economic development of the minority populations. Programs were put in place to ensure that minority youths could become bilingual in their native tongue as well as Chinese. Jiang Zemin continued to implement the policies first put forth by Deng during his administration. In addition, Jiang sought to “stress the development of the country’s Western provinces.”

Following his rise to power (courtesy of Deng Xiaoping) in 1990, Jiang paid a visit to the frontier regions. During this period, the ethnic tensions that

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plagued China’s northern neighbor, the Soviet Union necessitated an attempt by the Chinese government to tighten its grip on the country’s frontier population and ensure the territorial integrity of the People’s Republic. During his visit, he promised to implement “special policies and flexible measures” in the case of Tibet. Nevertheless, Jiang still adhered to the principle that “Communism could unite disparate minority groups.” Jiang’s particular approach to the minority issue in this case once again exhibits Han-centric views. Indeed, although Jiang was considered to be much more cosmopolitan in comparison to his predecessors, his visits to places such as Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia “inhibited a narrow, Han-based outlook on the minorities as inferior, tributary nations.”

Despite the effort during Jiang’s administration to ensure that minority populations such as the Tibetans retained their cultural characteristics, the requirement that all the minorities learn the Chinese language would serve as the principle linguistic policy during Jiang’s era. In 1987, the Tibetan Autonomous Region enacted a series of policies which “[called] for Tibetan to be the main language in schools, government offices, and shops.” However, the Chinese government in 2002 rescinded these policies. Similarly, in contemporary Chinese society, during the past few years, the Communist Party has insisted that minority language education be centered on “using Chinese as the main language of instruction, while a minority language is taught as a separate subject.” Despite the formal policies initiated by the CCP, Tsering Wosser, a Tibetan journalist

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144 Heisey, 25
145 Ibid. 25
146 Ibid. 25
148 Wong. 28th November 2015.
living in Beijing noted that during her stay at a kindergarten that supposedly promoted bilingual education, “she could hear the children reading aloud and singing all day- in Chinese only.”

What is more, the Chinese government has recently ordered the closure of a number of Tibetan monasteries over the past two years. The monasteries are the traditional institutions in which ordinary Tibetans as well as young monks learned the Tibetan language. The Chinese government seems to be of the belief that if they enforce the teaching of Chinese as the primary language in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, it would in effect “change their views” In the face of the government’s efforts to explicitly promote the proliferation of the Chinese language in minority areas, the Tibetans who had learned the language prior to the Chinese occupation of Lhasa in 1951 have made attempts to preserve their culture through disseminating the language to their children. However, many of the schools that had once taught the Tibetan language were forced to shut down on the orders of the Chinese government.

According to a Chinese White Paper published in April of 2015 regarding the issue of Tibetan regional autonomy and indigenous culture, the Chinese government implied the social backwardness of Tibetan religious practices and culture. Indeed, to raise an example of such a religious ritual, the White Paper uses an instance in which “food will be offered to the hungry ghosts, for which a corpus of fresh intestines, two skulls, some mixed blood and a whole human skin are urgently needed.” The paper uses the example above in an attempt to highlight and reinforce the Han Chinese conception of the barbaric, feudal, and backwards nature of Tibetan society. Indeed, the paper asserts that the fundamental nature of Tibetan society is one in which

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149 Wong. 28th November 2015.
150 Ibid.
religion and politics had merged to create a repressive society that was ruled by religion and in which “religious power enjoyed absolute supremacy.” The White Paper uses this particular characteristic of Tibetan society to emphasize their claim that Tibet served as the “largest fortress of serfdom” in East Asia. Despite this claim, it appears that the Chinese had misinterpreted Tibetan Buddhism and its religious symbols. Indeed, the use of human skulls, which the Han Chinese regarded as barbaric and crude, was in reality a symbol of “impermanence and a reminder of the impermanence of life.”

The Chinese government’s fundamental misunderstanding of particular elements regarding Tibetan religious practices served as a pretext for intervention in the area. Chinese propaganda was “essential to the Chinese claim to Tibet and is part of a pattern of exaggerated territorial claims on China’s part.” This rather paternalistic and even condescending treatment of the Tibetans and their culture once again echoes the Han-centric nationalism that was espoused by Sun Yat-Sen and his followers during the early years of the Republican Era. The Han man’s burden of prodding these “backwards’ cultures into modern civilization manifests itself in the Chinese government’s rhetoric and actions in the Tibet Autonomous Region during the early 1950s through the 1960s. By adopting this rather paternalistic approach to the Tibetans, the Communists essentially echoed Sun’s racial and ethnic policy, portraying Chinese historical development “with a single, dominant Han majority at its center.” Indeed, the Chinese

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153 Ibid.
154 Wolff, 165
155 Ibid. 166
156 Leibold, 174
another blatant example of the Han chauvinism that had characterized the overarching political view and philosophy of Imperial China. The thinly veiled disdain for such religious practices once again raises the question of the degree to which the Chinese government and the Chinese people themselves see Tibet as genuinely a part of the cultural heritage of the supposedly all-encompassing Zhonghua Minzu. Thus, it can be argued that the particular definition of the “Chinese people” and the socio-political center of Chinese society was still very clearly a Han-centric concept. The minority populations such as the Tibetans were being treated in a very patronizing way by the Han central government. This “othering” of the Tibetans by contemporary Chinese Communists underpins a rather pervasive practice by the majority Han Chinese in their treatment of their minority brethren.

The paternalistic approach taken by the Chinese elite towards the Tibetan people serves to project Han Chinese cultural superiority over the “backwards” cultures of the Chinese frontier. The treatment of Tibetan culture by the Chinese central government serves to exemplify a microcosm of the overarching government policy towards minority groups as a whole. The contemporary Chinese government’s decision to portray Chinese minorities as “different” through policies such as enforcing the particular way they are supposed to dress while appearing on national television serves as a symbol of the historical Hua-Yi dichotomy that has defined Chinese civilization for millennia.
VII. Concluding Thoughts on the Essence of Chinese Civilization and Identity

Throughout the duration of Chinese history, from the birth of Chinese civilization on the banks of the Yellow River to the gates of Zhongnanhai today, the core of Chinese civilization was a heavily ethnically defined concept from its inception. The Imperial government maintained relations with the regions surrounding the Chinese Empire, but did not explicitly incorporate these territories into the Empire for the vast majority of Chinese civilization. Rather, as evidenced in the early portion of this paper, the Chinese Empire sought to establish a Sino-centric world order in which the “barbaric” elements that lay outside the boundaries of the Middle Kingdom were to be subjugated by the center of all culture and civilization; the heart of China proper.

This particular Sino-centric conceptualization of the universe had its origins beginning with the Han dynasty (202BCE-220AD), the dynasty that gave the Han Chinese their name. The Han dynasty’s considerable contribution to Chinese society in the form of technological innovations, territorial expansion, as well as the arts and literature contributed to the dynasty’s overall legacy in the context of Chinese civilization. The Sino-centric policies and worldview first established during the dynasty were perpetuated by its successors, the majority of which were ruled by ethnic Han Chinese with the exception of the Liao, Jin, Yuan, and Qing dynasties. In particular, during the Qing dynasty, the concept of “Chinese” was significantly blurred by the domination of a non-Han ethnic group in the Chinese sociopolitical sphere. The Manchu’s attempts to retain their own ethnic identity while simultaneously justifying their right to succeed the ethnically-Han Ming dynasty resulted in a unique dilemma in which the Manchus were never able to fully legitimize themselves to the Han Chinese. This resulted in the ultimate success of the anti-Manchu movement and the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, marking the end of the dynastical era in Chinese history.
The Xinhai Revolution marked the end of the dynastical era of Chinese history and resulted in the rise of Han Chinese nationalism and national consciousness. It is important to note here that among the core pillars of Sun Yat-Sen’s declaration of revolution was anti-Manchu sentiment, as evidenced by his writings from 1909 and 1910. Republican China’s policies towards the frontier regions during the early Republican era as well as Chiang Kai-Shek’s administration were fairly consistent with Sun Yat-Sen’s view towards the minorities. Sun had asserted that the different non-Han nationalities within China proper and the frontier regions were in fact sub-groups of the larger Han ethnic group and stressed the “unity of the five races” in the construction of the new Republican state. The Guomindang government that succeeded the Imperial Court called for the unification and assimilation of the various ethnicities, claiming that all the different ethnic groups in China had a common origin as the first pretext for the Republican government to implement its ethnic policy.

Furthermore, Sun Yat-Sen himself asserted that the various minority groups were in fact all sub-groups of the larger Han ethnicity and should be brought back into the Zhonghua Minzu family. Chiang Kai-Shek’s particular approach to dealing with the people of the frontier did not differ significantly from Sun. Chiang chose to establish government control over the frontier regions. As Leibold has pointed out, Chiang’s ultimate objective was unification of Chinese territory; this was a political goal that he was willing to use a wide array of methods to achieve. The Northern Expedition in 1928 eliminated the vast majority of Chiang’s military and political opponents in China proper, but the frontier regions still was not considered unified.

The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and China proper in 1937 exposed the fragility of the Chinese government’s grip on its sovereign territory. Albeit largely unsuccessful, the Japanese attempts to incite incidents in southern China still gave the Guomindang
government a considerable amount of trouble, as they had to put down rebellions by a number of minority groups throughout the war. These internal conflicts in conjunction with the Japanese threat contributed to the overwhelming issues that plagued the Republic from its inception to the final defeat of the Guomindang in 1949. However, the relatively low rate of success in the Japanese-sponsored independence movements attests to the swiftness of the Guomindang in suppressing such movements, which would have exacerbated the problems faced by the Chinese during the war. Nevertheless, the ability of the Japanese to exploit the ethnic tensions within China attests to the rather tenuous unity between Han-dominated China proper and the frontier regions.

The People’s Republic of China established by Mao Zedong adopted a policy of nominal equality amongst the country’s frontier peoples and the majority Han Chinese. Mao advocated for the fair treatment of the different ethnic groups in China through his writings such as his essay warning against Han chauvinism in Chinese society. Despite this call for intra-ethnic unity, Mao still made his views on the minorities well-known through the labeling of Tibetan frontier culture as something that was dark and backwards. During Mao’s conversations with the Dalai Lama during the 1950s, he warned the Tibetan spiritual leader with regard to the dangers that religion could potentially pose to a society, labeling Tibetan Buddhism as a poison that could corrupt the masses. During the Mao years, the Chinese Communist Party put a considerable amount of attention and effort into radically changing the essence of Chinese identity and culture. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was Mao’s attempt to unleash a titanic social movement that sought to eradicate all elements of feudalism and imperialism in their totality. It was during the Cultural Revolution that Tibetan culture came directly under attack as a preeminent symbol of the backwardness that had hindered China for millennia and perpetuated
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the Century of Humiliation at the hands of the west. The Cultural Revolution saw the destruction of a number of Tibetan religious symbols such as the Buddha statues that served as the ultimate symbol of Tibetan culture. The oral testimony of a number of Tibetans who had lived through the decade of the Cultural Revolution attests to the significant amount of cultural destruction that occurred as a result of the Chinese Communists’ titanic social movement from the mid 1960’s until Mao’s death in 1976. The portrayal of Tibetan traditional culture as backwards and the denunciation of Tibetan Buddhism as a major impediment to national development serve to underpin the perpetuation of the Hua-Yi dichotomy. The Chinese authorities demanded that the Tibetans relinquish their religious views and beliefs, openly mocking them for their religious convictions. Likewise, the Tibetans viewed the Chinese Communists as representatives of an invasive “alien” culture, as Tibetan land was “occupied by people who had no right.”

Following Mao’s death, the party leadership transferred into the hands of the Gang of Four as they engaged in a power struggle with Hua Guofeng, who sought to implement moderate reforms. After the Gang was ousted from political power, Deng Xiaoping gradually seized control of the Communist Party and denounced Hua for his supposed laxity in dealing with internal affairs. After Deng rose to power, he initiated a significant social reform program in which a number of capitalist elements were incorporated into the Chinese socioeconomic structure. Deng’s slogan “to be rich is glorious” formed the overarching social philosophy of his era. During Deng’s tenure as the paramount leader of the People’s Republic, his economic reform policy (gai ge kai fang) (改革开放), literally meaning “reform and open up”, significantly raised the standard of living for a considerable amount of the Chinese populace.

The Deng administration sought to remedy some of the political excesses that were initiated

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during the Mao years. In addition to his domestic political reforms, Deng became the first Chinese Communist leader to import certain western social characteristics (primarily economic) into Chinese society.

Deng’s economic policies resulted in a widening of the wealth gap between the urban Chinese and those of the countryside. The increasing economic disparity between the urban elite and those living in rural China manifested itself in the development of a new conceptualization of backwardness, as noted earlier by George T. Crane in his essay “Special Things in Special Ways”. The urban-rural divide can also be seen as a mechanism that underpins a broader center-periphery relationship between the relatively modern urban areas and the less sophisticated rural and frontier regions of China. Furthermore, Deng’s desire to ultimately Sinicize the frontier regions through the process of ethnic intermingling suggests a Han-centric approach with regard to Chinese ethnic policy that can be traced back to the dynastical times. Wolff’s analysis of the Chinese policy towards the Tibetans during the Deng administration can be seen as an example of the Han Chinese’s desire to allow ethnic differences to gradually fade away, culminating in the acceptance by all the inhabitants of the Chinese geo-body of their “Chinese” identity.

Jiang Zemin first toured the Chinese frontier regions in 1991, the year when the Soviet Union collapsed and split into 15 republics. The geopolitical fragmentation of the world’s largest communist state served as a warning for the incoming Chinese leadership. Accordingly, Jiang made his stance very clear during his visit: although the Communist Party would consider a series of flexible policies in their treatment of the minorities, Jiang still considered Communism as the glue that would hold the various nationalities of the Zhonghua Minzu together. Here, it would seem that Jiang’s rhetoric echoes that of the Mao era. For the Chinese Communist Party, it would attempt to use political ideology as the main tool of the leadership’s assimilation of the
minority frontier peoples. While the Guomindang stressed the racial unity and common origins of the Zhonghua Minzu in their attempt to unite the frontiers with China proper, the Chinese Communists relied significantly on the ideological clout of Communist political philosophy in conjunction with military force in their attempt to incorporate the peripheral regions into the country. Despite the inclusive rhetoric that was employed by the Communist Party during the Mao, Deng, and Jiang eras, the Communist Party’s insistence that the frontier regions adopt Communism as the path to modernity did not resonate well with a number of national minorities, particularly the Tibetans.

Although the methods of incorporation employed by the Imperial Court, Guomindang, and the Chinese Communists in their bids to formally incorporate the Chinese frontiers, their policies towards the minority peoples have largely remained ethno-centric. The Manchu Qing dynasty, despite being one of the few non ethnically-Han Chinese ruling clans, still adopted Chinese concepts such as the Mandate of Heaven to legitimize their rule. Despite this attempt, the Ming restoration movement (*fan qing fu ming*) (反清复明) served as a constant reminder to the Manchu ruling elite that the Han ethnic majority did not welcome the idea of a non-Han racial group replacing them as the ruling class in Chinese society. During the Republican and Mao eras, the leadership adopted a paternalistic approach to the frontiers, claiming that it was the responsibility of the Han Chinese to help the “small and weak” minorities in their quest for modernization. In Communist China, there appeared to be a fundamental contradiction with regard to official Party rhetoric concerning the treatment of minority peoples and the particular way that the Communist government chose to handle the minority question. The Han people have been the perennial representation of the apex and sociopolitical core of Chinese society and civilization.
It would be an overgeneralization to call China a Han Chinese nation. However, the historical geopolitical boundaries of Imperial China show little initiative in the incorporation of present-day China’s western territories for the vast majority of the dynastical era of Chinese history. Furthermore, the Republican definition of the geographic extent of China was based upon the territorial expansion of the Manchu Qing dynasty, a ruling group that was systemically rejected as the legitimate rulers of the Chinese Empire, as evidenced by the perennial Ming Restoration movement that was present during the reign of the Manchus. Indeed, it would seem that the Han Chinese chose to accept the geopolitical legacy of a ruling dynasty that the majority of Han Chinese had consistently rejected as legitimate heirs to the Ming. The Xinhai Revolution served as an explicit assertion of Han Chinese national consciousness, as anti-Manchu sentiment was one of the driving ideological pillars behind the movement.

The region of Tibet serves as the quintessential example of the intense culture clash between Han Chinese and the national minorities. The Chinese invasion of 1950 and the deleterious aftermath of the Cultural Revolution once again underpinned the fundamental cultural barriers that existed in a nominally unified multi-ethnic state. Although the leaders of contemporary China have made attempts to foster more inclusive and egalitarian relations between China proper and the frontiers, the authoritarian nature of the government bars any drastic policy changes with regard to regional autonomy for ethnic minorities. The history of Han-minority relations, particularly those between the Han and Tibetans has been colored by a notable theme of culture clash as the Chinese incorporated territories towards the end of dynastical era as the Manchu empire engaged in territorial conquest in China’s western regions. These ethnic tensions were largely tempered by governmental authorities during times of relative peace. However, the collapse of dynasties brought forth the ever-present ethnic divisions within
the Chinese geo-body. The numerous independence movements in areas such as Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet following the collapse of the Qing dynasty serves as a testament to the underlying ethnic tensions in the supposedly unified multi-ethnic empire.

The historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* written by Luo Guanzhong during the Ming dynasty opens with the words 天下大势，分久必合，合久必分 (tian xia da shi, fen jiu bi he, he jiu bi fen), translating to “the universe, after a long period of division, will be united, and after a long period of union, divided.” This has been a defining characteristic of Chinese civilization from the dawn of the Shang dynasty and into the contemporary era. The Republic of China succeeded the Qing dynasty, and after the Northern Expedition, united China once again. Following the Chinese Civil War, the People’s Republic has effectively asserted control over China proper and its frontiers. As of the present moment, the minority question and the ethno-political tensions that come packaged with it have been mostly kept under control by the Communist government. Despite the history of ethnic tensions, “the past is not always a reliable guide to the future, and national and ethnic identity…can be a chameleon-like creature.”

The Chinese Communist Party should seize upon the opportunity presented to them, as China’s rise to international prominence will give the ruling Han Chinese a chance to strengthen intra-minzu relations. The resurgence of China as a global power and the relatively stable sociopolitical atmosphere within China itself presents the Communist Party with the best chance to encourage the frontier population to embrace the concept of the Zhonghua Minzu. More importantly, the particular approach that the present Communist Party leadership takes with regard to strengthening these bonds will be a significant factor in determining the Party and greater China’s ability to withstand a political legitimacy crisis. If the CCP can effectively promote the

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idea of the collective rise of the various nationalities within its borders as a single cohesive group, it will not only augment its own credibility as the legitimate heirs to the Guomindang, (a legitimacy status that has been severely marred by the political turmoil of the Mao era as well as the Tiananmen incident during Deng Xiaoping’s administration), but also perhaps reduce the probability of a potential internal political crisis in which China is divided once again. If the Communist Party can find a way to effectively balance Han and minority interests and tone down instances of Han chauvinism towards the people of the Chinese frontiers, the concept of a multi-ethnic Zhonghua Minzu may gradually become a genuine reality. The fate of the Chinese Communist Party may very well hinge upon its attitude and treatment of its minority brethren.
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