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CULTURE, THE NATION, AND CHINESE MINORITY IDENTITY

The story of the nation is often conceived of as a *Bildungsroman*, a narrative of self-journey and self-discovery. As the story is told in accounts of political nationalism or in academic theory, the development of the nation first entails the coming into consciousness of a national self and then the recognition and establishment of the nation's identity through relations and tribulations with others. If the journey is successful, the story ends with the integration of internal elements within a harmonious, well-ordered whole. The particulars of that journey vary from case to case. Some nations find what Homi Bhabha calls their "narrative of national unfolding" in anti-colonial revolution, and others in the gradual incorporation of culturally disparate elements via state-building and modernization, while still others claim their birth within the ignominy of defeat.[1] Whether depicted as conscious and politically willed, or in terms of evolutionary, "natural" development, the nation's struggle to emerge is believed to unite heterogeneous pre-national elements into a self-aware, autonomous, and sovereign entity.

Themes of narrative and the individual have figured prominently in nationalist thought and scholarship. This congruence between notions of personhood and models of the nation is not surprising, given that concepts such as autonomy, sovereignty, and will, not to mention the body politic,

have their origins in Western thinking about the individual, the sovereign self. The very concept of national identity owes its existence in part to an Eriksonian notion of psychosocial identity drawn from psychoanalysis.[2] Theorists and nationalist leaders alike speak of nations following a course of development and maturation that often entails identity "crises." These crises, such as war, civil conflict, famine, invasion, and economic depression, challenge national integrity and require for their resolution a revised self-concept and stance toward other political actors.

For the nation, it is culture rather than a "personality" of selfhood to which the task of effecting unity and identity is delegated. That is, in romantic and modernist versions of the nation and some ostensibly post-modernist ones as well, something called "national culture" functions as the glue that holds the national unit together. Shared culture is viewed as a prerequisite to national consciousness and identity. It is the bedrock upon which the authority, legitimacy, and identity of the nation rests. This national culture may be modern and industrial; popular or developed as a defensive elite strategy; a residual feature of ancient collectivities; and genuine, imagined, or wholly constructed. Regardless of its nature, this shared culture is inseparable from the nation and its idea. Without the common symbols, myths, practices, and norms these express, the "we-consciousness" comprising national identity lacks any concrete basis—"imagined" though it may be.[3] In fact, without shared symbolic and cognitive reference points, no truly national identity can be generated. The invocation or creation of such a culture, therefore, is considered one of the central tasks facing would-be nation-builders. Paradoxically, shared culture is also seen as an indicator of national unity, as well as its cause, a notion whose circularity in no way hinders its appeal. National membership and identity are established, expressed, and maintained through adherence to certain specified cultural practices and ideals.

This account does not claim that successful nations are marked by the absence of nonnational cultural, civic, religious, or other political identities. As delineated in narratives of nationalisms and in much academic thinking, however, the process of national or nation-state development is expected to break down and absorb disparate sub-national or pre-national identities and communities, subsuming them within a coherent whole. To the extent that alternative, sub-national cultural identities persist, the nation is imperfectly formed, defective, or not yet complete. To extend the metaphor of the individual further, the persistence of alternative identities as rival spheres of authority and membership indicates schizophrenia, a

failure of self-integration stemming from some genetic or environmental trauma.

There are a number of ways in which this shared culture may come into being. Nineteenth-century Romantic thinkers such as Fichte and Herder characterize the nation as the embodiment of a distinct national spirit or essence, one that achieves full expression when joined with the sovereign territorial-political entity of the state.[4] In the twentieth century, scholars began to explore the role of developmental, evolutionary processes in generating national culture. Proponents of this approach, mainly those working in the tradition (if it can be called that) of modernization theory, argue that large-scale processes of modernization and industrialization uproot residents of a territorial state by eroding traditional loci of membership such as the clan or tribe, thereby making individuals available for reintegration into the newly emergent nation. At the same time, these processes provide de-centered individuals with common experiences, educational homogeneity, and an interconnectedness that produced a sense of membership in a specific community. Because these transformations occur within the boundaries of the territorial state, the collective identity they engender is a national one.[5]

Though modernization theory as a whole has been widely criticized for its teleological assumptions and Western biases, the process model of national identity formation remains influential. Many of its assumptions underpin Ernest Gellner's influential *Nations and Nationalism*. Gellner pinpoints industrialization as the generative cause of national identity. He argues that the individuating and homogenizing processes of industrialization, combined with the spread of standardized education and literacy, endow citizens of the modern state with a common culture and shared self-image:

> When general social conditions make for standardized, homogeneous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities, a situation arises in which well-defined educationally sanctioned and unified cultures constitute very nearly the only kind of unit with which men willingly and often ardently identify.[6]

The convergence of a standardized, industrial culture with the already delineated boundaries of the state prompts the emergence of nationalist consciousness and movements.

Other scholars emphasize the centrality of political leadership in creating cultural cohesion and the sense of "we-ness" on which national identity

rests. Political elites, for example, can help forge cognitive and symbolic community among disparate individuals and groups. This approach derives from the theories of Max Weber, who highlighted the power of gifted, charismatic political leaders to create and bestow new cognitive and evaluative frameworks in times of cultural crisis. In doing so, the charismatic leader creates a new symbolic-cultural repertoire and identity with which individuals and groups can navigate experience.[7] Some analyses that draw on the Weberian approach emphasize the role of both processes and politics in national identity formation. Structural processes uproot people from their traditional memberships and identities, while political elites and parties recommit themselves within the emergent national entity.

Despite the significance of politics and processes, cultural homogeneity is the vehicle through which the nation is conceived and created, according to scholars emphasizing politics over process. Michael Hechter, for example, argues that boundary lines between ethnic and national groups result not from preexisting cultural identities or quasi-evolutionary processes, but from political institutions of control. Yet he also asserts that national cohesion requires cultural sameness to ensure that "individuals of a given nationality have certain values in common."[8] In the event that "micro-ecological variations" within territorial boundaries generate cultural differences, would-be nation-builders must work to overcome these.

This way of thinking about culture and the nation has an intuitive appeal that is enhanced by the fact that actual nation-builders stress the importance and role of shared culture. In China, after the CCP's ascent to power in 1949, for instance, cultural cohesion was of major concern to the communist leadership. It was not traditional culture the CCP sought to promote, which was after all something to be struggled against, but a new revolutionary culture expressed through conformity to socialist ethics and demonstrations of Maoist devotion. By wiring up every last mountain hamlet to a nationwide system of loudspeakers, establishing a single time zone, educating the masses, attacking feudal superstition, and promoting class struggle, the CCP demonstrated faith in the power of social communication and in the need to undermine traditional identities to build the new People's Republic.

Ultimately, however, the explanatory power of these models of nation and culture is limited. They assert or imply that shared identity is directly proportional to and dependent on a shared culture, and that the persistence of intra- or sub-national cultural difference compromises the integrity of the nation-state. In doing so, they encounter problems when trying

to account for much nationalist phenomena in the contemporary world. These formulations fail to account for what is so crucial for nationalism and national identity: the mythmaking, the invention of tradition, the creation of what Prasenjit Duara calls "narratives of descent."[9] The framing of nationality in terms of cultural idiosyncrasy so often depends on the magnification of minute, even fictitious differences among people whose everyday lives are remarkable for their sameness. Much contemporary separatism and interethnic hostility spring from environments in which there is a wide "complementarity of social communication," to use Karl Deutsch's formulation.[10] Conversely, minute similarities are often emphasized by social actors seeking to create cohesion in the face of glaring differences.

Post-modern approaches to questions of cultural identity and membership are not immune to the problems of the models discussed so far. To a certain extent, they incorporate the same assumptions of identity and culture, although they typically valorize the fragmented and the particular rather than the national. While some contemporary analyses of globalization propose the emergence of supra- or transnational identities that explode nation-state boundaries, others predict the nation-state's implosion—the fragmentation of large national entities into micro-level ones. In the words of Zygmunt Bauman, "Exit the nation, enter the tribe."[11] The globalization of consumption and information has, argues Kenneth Gergen, "saturated" the self, spurring its fragmentation and fracturing national memberships and identities.[12] Many proponents of this view have been influenced by Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari, theorists of the self who stress the constructed and contingent character of identity and who argue that the narrative unity of the self is an effect of power that obscures the fragmentary nature of actual experience.[13]

These post-modern approaches inform and enrich much contemporary scholarship on the post-Mao resurgence of localized cultural identities. Yet in valorizing particularity and viewing attempts at cultural or ideational integration as hegemonic effects of power, they run the risk of essentializing the difference and distinctiveness of minority identities and culture. Implicitly or explicitly, post-modern approaches rely on the same exclusionary model of culture and identity as does modernization theory, one that places the national in opposition to the minority. In doing so, the possibilities for syncretism and interpretation are underestimated. Certainly the political motives underlying these approaches tend to support the protection of distinct minority cultures and identities, and so are com-

mendable. Yet post-modern approaches imply that particularistic, local-ized identities are sacrosanct, hermetically sealed constructs, incapable of being melded with national identities and values without being silenced or erased. Theoretical assumptions render post-modern scholars of cultural identity unable to account for how minorities may interpret the "national" in ways that expand its meaning and application.

One problem with these models of the nation and national identity for-mation is that they simply fail to explain certain features of minority cul-tural politics, in China and elsewhere. They furthermore hold pernicious implications for cultural minorities in general, for they are grounded on an assimilationist conceit—on the idea that sub-national, nondominant cultural identities and practices must be subsumed within an ultimately superior national identity if the nation is to achieve and maintain integ-rity. This conceit further entails that the promotion of minority identity and cultural practice must logically be viewed as subversive of the proj-ect of national identity formation. Cultural practices and institutions that promote identification with extra-national or transnational units are even more suspect, for they undermine the unity upon which national identity is based. In addition, state support for minority culture is, logically, irratio-nal self-sabotage.

These dilemmas are not simply academic. They infuse popular and offi-cial views, and thus the policies implemented to deal with minority and majority populations. The debate in the United States over multicultural-ism and its supposedly "Balkanizing" effects is one example of how theory, policy, and everyday life intersect.[14] Suspicion of cultural difference and the desire to eliminate that which will not conform motivated Serbian policy throughout the 1990s, and continues to hinder integration in the Balkan states. These ways of thinking about identity and the nation limit our ability to fully understand certain political and cultural phenomena. Alternative interpretations of cultural activism cannot be conceived, or if they can, they cannot be reconciled with existing theory. Disturbingly, the simple attribu-tion of ethnic strife to diversity or difference can lead to the blame for ethnic cleansing or religious violence being laid at the feet of its victims.

These dilemmas have led a number of theorists to propose alterna-tive ways of thinking about culture, minorities, and the nation-state. One approach has been to foreground the cultural and multicultural compo-nents of citizenship as opposed to its legal-political aspects.[15] Theorists such as Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, for instance, justify the pro-tection of cultural minorities in Western democracies in terms of liberal

philosophy and practice. Both Taylor and Kymlicka argue that the protection of minorities and minority cultures logically follows from liberalism's basic tenets. For Taylor, minority rights and protections grow out of fundamental liberal values of tolerance and mutual respect.[16] Kymlicka, meanwhile, argues that liberalism's celebration of liberty itself necessitates such protections. Liberalism, he argues, expounds a notion of the good life in which individuals have the freedom to make rational, informed choices regarding their own lives. However, we cannot make rational, informed choices if we do not know who we are or what we want. Culture provides us with that knowledge, insofar as it constitutes our values and our very selves. Culture is the "context of choice"; it provides us "a range of meaningful options" and, in so doing, creates the preconditions for freedom.[17] For these reasons, we should recognize the contribution that minority cultures make to the achievement of shared political goals in liberal democratic states.

Unfortunately, Taylor's and Kymlicka's efforts to justify a space for minority cultural autonomy are hampered by a number of insufficiently examined issues. In considering which minority cultures deserve respect and protection, both theorists exclude the fragmentary and partial from their discussions. Taylor, for instance, dismisses from consideration any "partial cultural milieux within a society as well as short phases of a major culture."[18] Kymlicka argues that the liberal nation-state need not protect all cultures and cultural practices, since to do so would be impossible. Rather, he argues that only "societal cultures" deserve such treatment, because only these provide the "context of choice" that he claims makes liberal freedom possible. A societal culture is one that "provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres."[19] Fragments of cultures, "dying" cultures, religious minorities that are geographically and economically integrated into larger political communities, etc., are not Kymlicka's concern. Yet it is often those groups who do not meet his criteria that are most in need of political protections or are agitating for autonomy and separation.

Neither Taylor's nor Kymlicka's framework really help us think about some of the most vexing cases of cultural politics, including state-led efforts to suppress minorities and minority culture. Part of the problem lies in these theorists' mostly uncritical use of the models of nation and culture outlined above—models that turn cultural minorities into what Homi Bhabha calls "'foreign bodies', in the midst of the nation."[20] Kymlicka states

outright that he accepts the Gellnerian approach to the nation and national identity.[21] Even while trying to carve out a space for minority cultures justified in terms of liberal utility, the model he employs rests on assimilationist underpinnings.

As stated, these models of culture are predicated on the idea of culture as coherent, and as creating coherence in the body politic, whether it is a nation or an ethnic group. These models also imply that cultures are relatively discrete, distinct, and separate, as well as the property of differentiated social and political entities. But are they? Is culture coherent? Does culture create cohesion among those who share it and participate in it? Are cultures bounded entities, "owned" by their bearers? Certainly these assumptions are widespread, and their influence on our understanding of the nation, ethnicity, and other forms of political community is profound. As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson argue,

> just as central as the concept of "culture" has been what we might call the concept of "cultures": the idea that a world of human differences is to be conceptualized as a diversity of separate societies, each with its own culture. It was this key conceptual move that made it possible . . . to begin speaking not only of culture but also of "a culture"—a separate, individuated cultural entity, typically associated with "a people," "a tribe," "a nation," and so forth.[22]

This conceptual move has shaped much social scientific research (and social science disciplines themselves) by making it "possible to bound the ethnographic object." One corollary of these assumptions is that communication across cultures—that is, among ostensibly bounded cultural groups—is difficult, even impossible. Because shared meanings cannot be produced, shared values cannot be created or assumed, except by accident. A shared identity is thus out of the question.

ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF CULTURE AND THE NATION

In place of a model of "culture as order," as Gupta and Ferguson put it, some recent scholarship underscores the partial and fragmentary aspects of identity and practice. Proponents of this view take aim at the idea of culture as societal glue, as the source, basis, and indicator of identity and cohesion. Rather than view cultures as coherent, bounded systems of meaning and value, these scholars instead stress the mutual interpenetration of cultures, their porosity rather than their purity.

One effort to rethink these issues centers on the notion of "hybridity," a concept that has garnered a great deal of attention in post-colonial political and cultural theory. Hybridity emphasizes that identities, knowledge systems, and cultures are heterogeneous mixtures of different elements, and are lived as such. Hybridity, however, is more than just another way of saying that cultures are syncretic—it is, or aims to be, counter-hegemonic. For Paul Gilroy the hybridity of black identity in Great Britain challenges hegemonic, racially "pure" (i.e., white) constructions of British national identity, as well as the very idea that identities are pure and absolute. In this reading hybridity destabilizes the exclusionary power-structures propped up by these assumptions.[23] Yet the concept is problematic in part because it may posit the very wholeness or system it aims to counter. As Terry Eagleton points out, "hybridization presupposes purity. Strictly speaking, one can only hybridize a culture which is pure."[24] It is also not a given that hybridity is inherently transgressive or subversive. Claims of hybridity may in fact gloss over questions of power, domination, and the ways in which some cultural institutions and discourses are backed by tremendous political, legal, and economic might while others are not.[25] Nevertheless, the point that cultures or discourses are less bounded and coherent than is often assumed is necessary and valuable.

The weaknesses of hybridity indicate the need for a closer look at the role of power, domination, and resistance in matters of cultural belief and practice. These issues animate the work of several scholars who take aim at the model of culture as societal glue. For example, Sherry Ortner's studies of Sherpa religion and Himalayan mountaineering highlight the asymmetries of power in cultural practice and their implications for shared meaning. Ortner emphasizes the variability of culture, by showing how cultural practices like ritual change over time, as practitioners negotiate shifts in the distribution of political and economic power. She also questions the extent to which shared meanings are either preconditions or the product of cultural practice. What Ortner finds is that the absence of shared meanings, the lack of agreement over the significance of symbols, can facilitate cooperation and cohesion. For instance, Ortner demonstrates how Sherpas have managed to get Western climbers to comply with the staging of certain religious rituals despite the Sherpas' subservient position to the mostly Western climbers, and despite the fact that these rituals criticize climber behavior. Furthermore, despite their joint participation, Sherpas and climbers view these rituals in quite different ways. For Sherpas, they are aimed at appeasing mountain gods for the sins the climbers—and their

Sherpa assistants—intend to commit. This indictment of mountaineering is not, however, apparent to the climbers. Instead, climbers value ritual participation for other reasons: it seems to appease the Sherpas and please the monks, which makes expeditions run more smoothly; it is politically correct and provides climbers a sense of cultural virtue; and superstitiously, it makes sense to play it safe. Climbers' ritual participation also satisfies an orientalist "yearning for solidarity and even identity with the Other," the exotic object of fascination, in this case Sherpas.[26]

Ortner's analysis pokes holes in the idea that shared cultural practices facilitate understanding and collective identity. Shared meanings are noticeably absent from the rituals she scrutinizes. In fact, insofar as Sherpa rituals criticize the whole climbing enterprise and its attendant violations, these rituals seem to require miscommunication and the absence of shared meaning. Transparency and undistorted social communication are neither established nor desired. Coherence of action (e.g., the act of climbing) is facilitated by Sherpa rituals, but it is a coherence that both expresses and criticizes power asymmetries and identity differences among the players.

While cultural identity and practice cannot be interpreted as the effects of power alone, Ortner's analysis shows that examining power struggles and differences can tell us about meaning in cultural practice—and meaning can tell us about power. Historian and anthropologist Nicholas Dirks pursues a related tack in his exploration of Hindu ritual in rural India.[27] Dirks' analysis is in a sense the converse of Ortner's. Where Ortner reveals how the absence of shared meaning may facilitate social cooperation, Dirks shows how agreement over the meaning of cultural practice can induce competition and conflict. Specifically, he demonstrates how shared norms and cohesive cultural identities, albeit identities shot through by factional and caste division, make ritual the site and focus of struggle.

The events under consideration in Dirks' study, annual festivals of the Hindu god Aiyanar, involve complex interactions and cooperation among different caste groups. A superficial reading of the festival suggests that it affirms and upholds existing hierarchical, unequal relations among castes. In other words, it appears to promote caste interdependence and to celebrate the status quo. Yet further investigation reveals the regularity with which festivals are disrupted, postponed, and cancelled because of conflicts over the right to stage festivals and in what fashion. A ritual event seen from one angle as system-affirming had in fact sparked years of competition and chaos as caste and village groups sought control of symbolic resources. Conflict ensued precisely because participants agreed on the

ritual's meanings and symbolic value—the struggles were serious because everyone understood the stakes of the festival. Far from engendering social cohesion, shared meaning was at the heart of intergroup competition.

Dirks is sensitive to the difficulties in reading ritual for its counter-hegemonic implications. He cites Terry Eagleton, who points out that the public ritual that critiques power relations (e.g., carnival) is ultimately "a *licensed* affair . . . , a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art."[28] Still, Dirks argues that social science has too often underscored the system-supporting effects of ritual, while underplaying "the social fact that ritual constitutes a tremendously important arena for the cultural construction of authority and the dramatic display of the social lineaments of power." "Ritual," he points out, "has always been a crucial site of struggle," precisely because of the "centrality of authority to the ritual process."[29]

To a certain extent, Ortner and Dirks are suggesting different things about cultural practice, its implications, and its effects. In the first example the subservient, economically dependent Sherpas use a variety of strategies to manipulate climbers into ritual cooperation. They do so without the latter having fully understood the nature and meaning of their participation. Ritual cooperation in turn facilitates practical cooperation during dangerous climbing expeditions. In the second case, a rural Indian religious event that seems to affirm caste identities and hierarchies in fact violates them and is itself the focus of conflict. Like Chinese Red Guard factions contending for control of revolutionary rhetoric, participants in these events fight to control religious symbols because they agree on their significance. Yet Ortner and Dirks are not so much taking opposite points of view as showing different ways in which culture and power, and culture and politics, interact. They undercut the notion that meanings and symbols are "possessed" by self-contained groups in any settled, established way, even though actors may struggle for possession. Their work also contests rigidly functionalist readings of culture that portray it as societal glue. Taken together, they show that while shared cultural identity is neither an inherent or necessary basis of cohesion, conflict and lack of cohesion do not indicate the absence of a shared identity.

Similar insights emerge in analyses of power, identity, and governance in the Chinese case, including Prasenjit Duara's *Culture, Power and the State*, an analysis of state-building and decline in the late Qing and Republican periods. In this work, Duara argues that the authority of the Qing state was affirmed and enhanced at the local level through what he calls the

"cultural nexus of power." This cultural nexus was an interconnected web of lineage organizations, marriage networks, religious associations, irrigation societies, and other linkages comprised of symbolic as well as material resources. In Duara's account, these heterogeneous, overlapping, diverse organizations and practices augmented political cohesion and imperial legitimacy. Yet the cultural nexus was also a site of contest, competition, and the pursuit of local interests among local gentry, Taoist priests, village headmen, and other members of the local elite. In fact, competition helped legitimize authority. "The pursuit of these particular symbols by various groups," notes Duara, "enabled these symbols to provide a common framework of authority. More important, it did so even while very different, and sometimes conflicting, interests continued to be pursued."[30]

Duara's observations combine the insights of both Dirks and Ortner. On the one hand, during the late Qing shared cultural meanings sparked conflict and competition among the local elite, even as they fostered cooperation. On the other, the heterogeneity of institution, identity, and interest, rather than clear congruence between center and locality, enabled imperial authority to function. Like Dirks and Ortner, Duara also shows how cultural practitioners may turn to those outside the cultural group (e.g., the British Raj, the Qing state) in their drive to control symbolic practice, and they may borrow outside cultural elements to justify their actions regarding competitors. All three of these scholars stress the need to examine localized, marginal cultural practice and identity in light of broader power relations and entities, including states and nations.

HETEROGENEITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE CHINESE NATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The role of local, sub-national identities in the formation of larger social movements has long been the subject of research by scholars of Chinese politics and society. For example, in her analysis of labor-movement formation in Shanghai, Elizabeth Perry demonstrates the centrality of native-place ties and associations to working class activism. According to Perry, the persistence of regional, linguistic, and even cultural differences among Shanghai workers contributed to labor activism and labor movement formation. Thus, the erasure of difference was not a prerequisite for a working class movement. Instead the tenacity of differences added to the movement's vibrancy.[31] In an analogous vein, Bryna Goodman has shown how native-place identity and organization mediated the nationalist cause in Shanghai

from the 1850s to the 1930s.[32] Referring to Goodman's work, R. Bin Wong argues that people in Shanghai "linked with others from their home districts into a new kind of native place organization to promote the community-transcending goal of a 'nation.'" The Chinese nation, Wong argues, may have been an abstraction, "but it was concretized on different spatial scales."[33]

The contemporary Chinese minority cultural revival is fertile ground for investigating how national or societal norms and identities are "concretized" in distinct, local ways. It raises questions regarding how sub-national identities and activities relate to central and national ones. For one thing, official party-state involvement in this resurgence presents interesting, even counterintuitive phenomena for investigation. Despite decades spent suppressing anything that smacked of tradition, government units in China now play the role of patron, curator, and consumer of minority culture and cultural institutions. The state now encourages minorities to develop their ostensibly unique cultural identities and codifies these in policy, education, history, and the arts. It even tolerates and promotes some cross-border, transnational religious, and cultural cooperation. Yet the minority case is neither unproblematic nor lacking in contradictions, including potentially irresolvable conflicts between imperatives of cultural promotion and social control and between modernization and cultural authenticity.

Minorities' participation in cultural revival stems from an array of motives and interests. To a great degree, cultural revival is an end in itself, a way of expressing meaning and membership. Yet much minority cultural activism, such as linguistic promotion and religious education, expresses claims derived from a Chinese political identity, a conception of minority membership in the Chinese national community. The cases of the Dai, Bai, and Hui thus show that sub-national cultural identities are not inherently at odds with national identity, nor are they necessarily eroded by state- and nation-building processes or replaced with a new national identity. Rather, such cultural identities mediate the nation-state-building process and can serve as the vehicle or framework through which the nation is experienced. As such, national identity can retain the distinctive cast of these cultural identities.

In a sense, the idea of the Chinese nation, and the values, norms, and goals this idea comprises, function in the manner of "master frames," as Snow and Benford call them: cognitive, normative, and interpretive schema that help social movement actors identify political challenges and mobilize support to tackle them.[34] Such master frames allow social actors to identify problems and issues, attribute them to specific causes, and mobilize individuals and groups to meet these challenges and find solutions through

collective action. In the case of Chinese minority nationalities, certain ideals and values linked to Chinese national identity and membership—specifically, those of modernization, economic development, and minority autonomy—perform these functions. National ideals and values frame the challenges facing minorities and provide an interpretive schema through which their cultural endeavors are justified and understood.

Minorities' localized cultural activities can also function as a kind of citizenship practice. Citizenship has usually been understood as a legal-juridical concept, as a rights-bearing status or category. Yet citizenship can also be viewed in more participatory terms, as sets of behaviors and even rituals through which political membership is established and demonstrated. Sociologist Margaret Somers has proposed that citizenship be viewed as "a set of institutionally embedded social practices . . . contingent upon and constituted by networks of relationships and political idioms that stress membership and universal rights and duties in a national community."[35] She further argues that modern citizenship "is not in practice exclusively a national and universal institution. Rather, citizenship practices emerge from the articulation of national organization and universal rules with the particular and varying political cultures of local environments." In other words, citizenship norms and duties are mediated by local concerns, local institutions, and local cultural identities.

The application of the rights-laden concept of citizenship to Chinese politics is fraught with problems, given the lack of a tradition of rights in Chinese political thought or practice.[36] Yet the participatory, practice-based version of citizenship makes sense in the Chinese context. This version of the concept is appropriate, if not necessary, for understanding membership in a variety of nonliberal and revolutionary settings from late eighteenth century France to post-1949 China.[37] The Maoist understanding of political community, for instance, was nothing if not participatory—not to mention performative, as recurring spectacles of rectification and criticism made clear. The articulation of minority identity both embraces and contests the content of Chinese national identity, the limits of Chinese citizenship, and the privileges this membership bestows.

IDENTITY AND CULTURE
WITH (MINORITY) CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

These contentions raise several interrelated questions. First, how should the words and behavior of Chinese minorities be interpreted? Do minorities'

cultural endeavors really have anything at all to do with the Chinese nation and national identity? Is there a Chinese national identity? If so, what is it, and what aspects of it resonate with minorities in their pursuit of particular cultural identity-based agendas? Finally, are there ways in which conceptions of Chinese identity or the behavior of the state limit minority efforts to claim membership and its privileges?

It may be that this minority cultural resurgence has little or nothing to do with Chinese membership and identity, except to repudiate them. If so, the only relevance of Chinese political identity for the revival is as something for minorities to slough off, as they recover from the Maoist socialist interlude and get back to the business of being who they "really" are. Minority cultural ferment may also entail the unearthing of heretofore repressed "subaltern" voices. In other words, the revival is a form of resistance against hegemonic categorization (including ethnic and national categorization); its proponents seek to establish local collective identities free of the totalizing influence of Chinese socialist discourse and power. The explosion of minority-centric cultural activism in China perhaps indicates that the hegemonic edifice is beginning to crumble.

The idea of Chinese minorities as subalterns animates a number of influential recent studies. These works respond both to the remarkable post-Mao (re)discovery of minorities and their special characteristics by researchers, tour companies, and the party-state, and to an earlier generation of minority studies that framed the "nationalities question" in terms of assimilation and control.[38] This more recent research stresses the great variety of cultural practices and identities, and the multifarious ways in which the state is experienced at the local level. At the same time, they argue that minority cultural production expresses and enhances state dominance and Han-centric nationalist impulses.

This line of argument is exemplified by Louisa Schein's studies of cultural politics among the Miao.[39] Schein analyzes official practices and interactions among Han and Miao, as well as popular depictions and artistic representations. Melding Edward Said's notion of orientalism with Michael Hechter's concept of internal colonialism, Schein details how gendered and subservient depictions of minorities play out in experience, as feminized minorities (and minority females) are rendered products for official Han consumption. Where Said linked the Western orientalist impulse to capitalism and imperialism, Schein argues that Chinese "internal orientalism" derives from noncapitalist and even noneconomic forces. Yet like Said she argues that orientalism is productive: it consists not merely in the

representation of how things are, but enacts and reproduces identities that maintain asymmetrical power relations.

Schein argues that this internal orientalism marginalizes minority nationalities to such a degree that they are essentially silenced. The fetish creation of a feminized, eroticized Miao subject, moreover, is inseparable from what Schein sees as a Han or Chinese national identity crisis. Chinese internal orientalism is carried out by a denatured, de-cultured, homogenous Han subject bereft of authenticity and meaning. For this Han subject, the minority "other" functions as a "surrogate and underground self" embodying qualities valued yet discarded by the subject responsible for its creation. As a result of this productive imagining, the minority nationality in some important ways ceases to exist, and a Han-generated, passive fetish object usurps its place.

A similar argument is advanced by Dru Gladney in his analysis of representations of minorities in popular art and culture (though not in his examinations of Chinese Muslim identity).[40] Gladney asserts that these representations help construct a sexualized, submissive, primitive, feminized minority object, which dialectically entails the construction of a Han-centric Chinese identity—the Chinese nation. The discourse of minority representations thus parallels a discourse of national identity that is both Han and Chinese; minority representations imply and even produce a dominant, active, advanced, masculine Han Chinese subject. Insofar as a Chinese national subject is established whose qualities oppose those of the feminized, submissive minority object, minorities are excluded from full membership in the imagined community that is the Chinese nation.

The implication here is that a minority cultural resurgence is deeply problematic—a trap that limits minorities to second-class status, or worse. Expressions of minority culture are inherently suspect, since minorities are assumed to speak only when they have the approval of their cultural and political superiors. As Stevan Harrell explains,

> as long as peripheral peoples agree, at least on the surface, to the terms of definition and scaling imposed by the civilizers, the civilizees will be granted a voice to speak to themselves and the world about the success of the project. In this sense, the answer to whether the subaltern can speak is that the subaltern can speak on the sufferance of the civilizer. Voice is granted on the provision that it will speak in favor of the project, or at least in the project's terms.[41]

A further implication is that it is a mistake to think that minorities are or desire to be full members of any Chinese national entity. What membership

minorities do possess is neither meaningful nor self-generated, laden as it is with infantilizing, orientalizing effects. Minorities experience only a passive, mute, "othered" status in unequal relationship with a Han-dominated Chinese state.

Many other studies of minority cultural revival reject this characterization of minorities as mute and passive. Gladney's research of the Hui Muslim experience details the variety of self-generated Hui identities across China, as well as active, engaged, vocal Hui efforts to advance their interests. Similarly, Erik Mueggler's *The Age of Wild Ghosts* shows how members of the Yi nationality, despite their poverty and marginality, resist state power in their efforts to overcome past traumas inflicted by the Chinese state. In this work, Mueggler explores the "hidden transcripts" of Yi culture encapsulated in oral history, narrative, poetry, and song for what they reveal about Yi identity, memory, and experience under socialism. In particular, he demonstrates how revived Yi cultural practices challenge the totalizing effects of official policy and socialist identity construction.

In making his case, Mueggler draws on James Scott's distinction between the public and private transcripts of subordinate social groups.[42] According to Scott, subordinate groups are constrained and coerced into echoing the rhetoric of their oppressors. Yet they may also use that rhetoric to achieve subversive ends. Thus there exists a discrepancy between the public activities of marginalized social actors and what those actors say and do away from the gaze of power. Mueggler plumbs Yi funerary rituals, poetry, storytelling, and exorcism rites for what they reveal about the Yi experience under Maoism and the manner in which the Yi "imaginary" reflects and refracts the socialist party-state.

Mueggler demonstrates that for these minority residents of a poor, remote, mountain hamlet, much about the post-Mao era is hardly "post" at all. Systems of production and ownership have shifted from the collective to the household, and the utopian vision of Maoist socialism has faded. But for the Yi of his study, the past remains eternally present in the form of "wild ghosts," the troubled spirits of the thousands who died during the famine of the Great Leap Forward or who met equally traumatic and unnatural ends during the violence of the Cultural Revolution. In other words, the trauma of Maoist catastrophes continues to haunt contemporary Yi existence. Yi revival includes efforts to process and make sense of their experiences under socialism, and to exorcise these traumas.

The issue of trauma and responses to it are not the sole province of minority cultural practice. Studies by Patricia Thornton, Nancy Chen, and

Xu Jian on post-Mao *qigong* sects also highlight the link between popular Chinese spiritual and religious practices and efforts to overcome the psychic, political, and physical wounds of both past and present. Like the Yi with their exorcism, practitioners of *qigong* and Falun Gong wield these as anti-materialist critiques of Maoist-Marxist discourse and the science-and-economic-development ideology of the reform era.[43] Thus, in demonstrating how revived Yi cultural practices serve to process and resolve trauma, Mueggler's work points to ways in which the socio-political experiences of minorities overlap with those of Han Chinese. Yet the picture of the Yi that emerges is of an intensely marginalized, outsider minority whose cultural endeavors are ultimately ineffectual. Yi cultural revival may even be exacerbating their marginality insofar as resurgent practices inhibit their participation in market-oriented agrarian reforms. It seems accurate to characterize the Yi as marginal, but is their marginality a function of their minority culture and status, or of the crushing poverty and isolation that afflict many other communities, Han and minority alike?

There are very good reasons for framing the "nationalities question" in terms of marginality, subordination, and otherness. First, it makes sense given contemporary political matters, matters which themselves influence how the question gets raised. For example, the global prominence of the Tibet question and the sufferings of Tibetan people support the notion that Chinese identity is forcibly yet superficially imposed on minority peoples. Uyghur and Kirgiz separatist violence in Xinjiang and Beijing, which have received attention in the Western press, bolsters this view. The breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia further underscores the seeming primacy of sub-national ethnocultural identities and the shallowness and fragility of more inclusive, national ones. There are also good practical reasons for the consideration of minorities *as* minorities. China's opening to the West and the removal of travel restrictions to remote and previously closed areas of the country have allowed access to and promoted interest in disparate peoples about whom so little has hitherto been known.

There are other important reasons for focusing on minorities as minorities, and for assuming that cultural activism entails a rejection of a Chinese political or politico-cultural identity. The government insists that Chinese identity and membership is ethnically neutral, a citizenship rather than an ethno-cultural category. This is the reasoning behind the oft-stated claim that China is a "multiethnic, multinational" nation-state. But the category "Chinese" does have ethno-cultural components; it is, or can be, an ethno-cultural as well as a citizenship designation. To portray the state or nation

as ethnically or culturally neutral is to misperceive or ignore these features of Chinese identity. One of the key insights of Schein, Mueggler, Gladney, and Harrell is that the ostensibly neutral, universalistic socialist state is imbued with Han-centric ideas and Han chauvinism. The multiethnic character of China is, for example, rendered suspect by many of the policies the state has pursued in the process of state-building, such as the use of targeted Han emigration to incorporate and pacify minority-inhabited areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang. Even Chinese applications of Marxist-Leninist doctrine have expressed elements of Han chauvinism. Seemingly neutral or universalistic ideologies of modernization and development, such as those that underpinned the policies of the Maoist and the post-Mao reform eras, can be used to justify one group's political, cultural, ethnic, or linguistic dominance of minority peoples.[44] To assume that Chinese identity and membership are ethnically neutral is to obscure how the values used to justify state policy rationalize and reinforce Han dominance.

The potential for incongruence between ethnic and national identity is apparent when the nation is considered as multidimensional. The "nation" conveys a sense of the people who comprise it, and on one level, nation is an aggregate body. It is, however, not merely equal to the sum of its parts; it has a wholeness and identity of its own. Yet the nation also functions as an idea that can be manipulated as a tool of state-building and as a mobilizing force. The nation's members can also turn the idea back upon the state as a weapon of critique, an idealized community by which to measure the success or failure of the regime entrusted with the nation's well-being. As an idea, the nation is manipulated and made resonant to its members through reference to cultural and historical, if not ethnic, markers. If the cultural, historical, and ethnic components of the nation conflict with the ethnic identity of its members, the legitimacy of the nation as an inclusive body is at risk. Furthermore, when ethnic identity links individuals to the culture, history, and ethnicity of a separate nation-state, their sense of membership within their nation of residence may be compromised.

The scholarship discussed above has raised important questions regarding the assimilationist underpinnings of an earlier generation of studies about Chinese *minzu*.[45] These approaches have much to say about the genesis and significance of the cultural activity and activism that this study documents. By detailing the reemergence (or emergence) of minority cultural practice, religious networks, and community bonds that are sometimes transnational in scope, this scholarship has also shown the strength and complexity of minority experiences in a socialist state often believed

to have stamped out such difference. These studies are also a useful corrective to much of the social scientific literature on China that, because of practical concerns, sheer numbers, and theoretical bias, tends to privilege the experience of the Han. Moreover, minority cultural activism at times does involve the excavation of subaltern practices and collective identities interred by Maoist anti-traditionalism and social reorganization. The identities and institutions analyzed in this book can and do serve as a basis for resistance in thought and action against the state, its representatives, and its policies.

Yet to assume that minorities' use of official discourse is merely a public transcript concealing a hidden "true" one raises several questions. First, this distinction is based on Scott's analysis of the rhetoric of clearly subordinate groups, such as black slaves. The question of whether minority nationalities are genuinely subordinate is an open one: in many cases minorities enjoy preferential policies and regional political power despite (or because) of their numerical inferiority relative to the Han. Second, certain national ideals and goals enjoy a legitimacy not necessarily accorded the current political regime or its representatives. These ideals may in fact form the basis of the critique that minorities aim at discredited policies and officials.

Minorities' cultural endeavors cannot be assumed to be always and everywhere merely about minorities as minorities or to necessarily entail a repudiation of a Chinese political identity and membership. To argue thus is to essentialize minority cultural politics as simply anti-nation, separatist, and constitutive of ethnic nationalism. Such claims also presume minority identity to be morally and temporally primary to national identity—thereby falling prey to the same assumptions built into the models of nation and nationalism discussed in the first part of this chapter. Although minority cultural activism can involve resistance, it is erroneous to assume that it necessarily does so, or that all forms of resistance repudiate the ideals, values, and privileges of a Chinese political identity. On the contrary, resistance and criticism may embody such values and ideals and imply standards by which its critics judge the state and its representatives.

Fortunately, some scholars have begun to consider Chinese minorities not just as passive "others" or mute subalterns, but as critical subjects actively involved in the fashioning of their own histories and identities. For example, Litzinger demonstrates how Yao intellectuals and elites have used tradition to position a Yao subject favorably within a discourse of progress and civilization. Litzinger also confronts the question of how minorities are perceived, in scholarship as well as Chinese policy. He asks,

What happens when minorities are no longer seen as simply reacting to or always already resisting the Chinese state but rather as central agents in the cultural politics of the post-Mao nation? What might the anthropology of post-Mao nationalism look like if it refuses to find in the ethnic subject the perfected example of authenticity or resistance?[46]

Similarly, Gillette's work reveals how the urban Hui of Xi'an critically engage with national projects of modernization and development, and how they appropriate "modernity" as a norm and an ideal. Gillette's analysis of Hui consumption practices shows the extent to which Hui have absorbed the values and ideology of the post-Mao state. At the same time, they wield their interpretation of modernity as a critique of the Han people and the Han-dominated state, and as a justification of Hui beliefs and customs. Transnational Islam serves as a touchstone of legitimacy; by situating their own religious practices within the discourse and practice of global Islam, Hui counter Chinese and Han views of the Hui as a backward minority.[47]

MEANING AND PRACTICE OF CHINESE NATIONAL IDENTITY

These insights lead to another set of questions: What is Chinese identity? Of what does such an identity and membership consist? How do minorities' words and actions reveal a concern with their status as members in a national community? Answering these questions is a prerequisite for demonstrating how contemporary minority cultural activism taps into notions of national identity even as it enhances local and transnational minority self-conceptions. However, it is impossible—and conceptually dangerous—to pin down the components constituting Chinese identity. Such an attempt risks positing the very thing this chapter criticizes: the idea that Chinese national identity is a bounded, coherent entity comprising an equally bounded, coherent, and unique cultural core. As Rey Chow argues, "In the habitual obsession with 'Chineseness,' what we often encounter is a kind of cultural essentialism . . . that draws an imaginary boundary between China and the rest of the world."[48] Still, it is possible to illuminate recurring themes in ongoing debates concerning the meaning of being Chinese and the character of the Chinese nation. These issues have vexed Chinese intellectuals and Western scholars from the nineteenth century to the present. The eclipse of revolutionary Maoist socialism has again brought questions of Chinese culture and national identity to the fore.

China's disastrous and humiliating encounters with the nation-states of the West, beginning with the Opium Wars, made the question of what constitutes the Chinese nation a salient one to both Chinese and outside observers. One of the most influential analyses of the problem of Chinese nationalism was formulated by Joseph Levenson in his three-part study, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*. Levenson argues that prior to the Western incursion, Chinese identity was a cultural rather than a national one. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century, Levenson says, when the Chinese were forced to recognize the military and technological superiority of the West, the identifying aspects and the meaning of being Chinese were not tied to membership in an ethnic or quasi-ethnic collectivity known as the nation.[49] Rather, Chinese identity was a function of participation in the civilization and practices of China. China, Levenson argues, was not at this time a nation. Rather, it was a cultural collectivity whose boundaries were established by correct practice rather than territory or blood. As Myron Cohen explains, "[being] civilized, that is being Chinese, was nothing less than proper human behavior in accordance with cosmic principles."[50]

The criteria for membership in this culturalist entity were quite different from those generally ascribed to membership in a nation. One's behavior, one's adherence to principles and standards of etiquette and propriety, marked one as member or outsider, either civilized or barbarian. These principles and standards could be learned. While descent and kinship influenced opportunities to learn principles and standards, descent and kinship did not preclude or guarantee membership. As a result, so-called barbarians, those beyond the pale of Chinese civilization and territorial boundaries, could in theory be—and sometimes were—"educated up" to the status of civilized Chinese.[51] They could also rule. Since the standards of governance also rested on those culturalist principles and practices that could be learned, "legitimate rule was not limited to ethnic Chinese; aliens who accepted and exemplified Confucian norms might also rule."[52]

One corollary of Levenson's account is that Chinese culturalism could not survive the repeated humiliations at the hands of Western imperialist powers. The Western incursion struck at the roots of culturalism's presuppositions regarding the superiority of Confucian principles and practices. As James Townsend explains, Western imperialism "had only to demonstrate that its formidable military power carried an explicit challenge to the Chinese view of the world by agents who assumed their own cultural superiority."[53] Not only was Chinese cultural superiority undermined, the

view of China as civilization par excellence was undercut by attacks that rendered it just one state among many, and a weak one at that.

A second corollary is that the demise of culturalism gave birth to Chinese nationalism. As long-established notions of Chinese identity and membership collapsed, political elites and intellectuals began considering what might take its place. Nationalism emerged as political leaders, intellectuals, and students tried to reconceptualize state, culture, and people, and began to think of China as a political entity within the international state system. Since foreign imperialism meant encounters with Western nationalisms, many Chinese came to view nationalism as a contributing factor in the West's power and technological capacity. The "logical outcome of the crisis," Townsend observes, "was rejection of culturalism and development of a nationalism that would provide a new basis for China's defense and regeneration."[54]

Not surprisingly, modernization—of government, society, economy, and culture—has been a trope of Chinese nationalism since its beginnings. The encounter with Western powers armed with technologically superior weaponry made traditional Chinese forms of learning and education suspect. Many Chinese nationalists repudiated traditional culture outright or called for its modification and the adoption and adaptation of Western learning. The student-led May Fourth Movement of 1919, for instance, a thoroughly nationalist protest against the annexation of Chinese territory by Japan, involved calls for the abandonment of Confucian education, its replacement with a curriculum based on Western science, and the creation of a "new culture" based on scientific learning.

Modernity, argues Leo Ou-fan Lee, became the "guiding ethos" of an emerging vision of China, a newly imagined Chinese national community.[55] Yet there was great regional, occupational, and even gendered variation in how this ethos was understood, expressed, and lived. In his analysis of urban civic boosterism in Republican Lanzhou, David Strand encapsulates the variety of ways of being modern, and being Chinese:

> Broad participation in China's development has long been more than a matter of state control or popular protest. One could become Chinese in the modern sense by joining a demonstration or a party, but also by training for a profession, opening a local museum, or marketing a local resource. These latter, more local and pluralistic enterprises should not be equated with democracy or a localism invariably hostile to national authority. But they do comprise sites

where social capital can be invested in ways that foster diversity, criticism, and a measure of autonomy.[56]

In other words, being Chinese and being modern have long been contested concepts, even if what they stood for was widely embraced. Those who both embraced and contested these ideals pursued a range of activities through which to demonstrate the modernity of themselves, their localities, and their nation.

It is easy to see official appeals to tradition and custom as bids for power and authority. Yet the manipulation of symbols of modernity and scientific progress can also serve those purposes. Although Chinese elites have appealed on many occasions to tradition, modernity has served as the touchstone of twentieth and twenty-first century political legitimation. Partly as a response to popular political currents, Chinese leaders have frequently attacked tradition as the source of all that stultified and retarded Chinese power and prestige, while valorizing modernity.

In the twentieth century, both the Nationalist and Communist leaders identified tradition as the counterweight pulling against the forward movement of modernizing strategies. The Nationalists led campaigns against popular religion and instituted assimilationist minority policies.[57] The Maoist socialist vision was shot through with ideals of modernity and progress. The promise of this vision to break through China's political, cultural, and technological stagnation accounted in great part for its appeal among intellectuals and the masses. Since the Republic was established in 1911, Prasenjit Duara argues, "the Chinese state has been caught up in a logic of 'modernizing legitimation' where its raison d'être has become the fulfillment of modern ideals."[58]

One of the noteworthy features of the Maoist vision, however, is that the charismatic and eschatological so often supplanted the scientific and technical in the pursuit of ostensibly modernizing ideals. Grand campaigns like the Great Leap Forward were marked by efforts to circumvent the laws of economics, agriculture, and even physics, and to overcome the limitations of the material world through voluntarist fervor. Voluntarism and revolutionary ardor indicated commitment, while plodding rational calculation and attention to technical feasibility were criticized as incrementalist and dangerously bourgeois. That projects such as the Great Leap and the Smash the Four Olds campaigns were driven by decidedly unscientific, irrational motives in no way undermines this point. Rather, the emotional,

almost romantic adherence to ideals of modernization and modernity—
and the concomitant revulsion toward the traditional, the superstitious,
the "old"—underscore the centrality of modernization and technological
progress as values, beliefs, and even ritual practices central to Chinese
national identity and self-understanding.

The end of the Maoist era and the inauguration of Deng Xiaoping's
reforms ushered in a welcome spirit of pragmatism and technically
grounded experimentation. This pragmatism, this willingness to employ a
variety of methods to achieve goals regardless of whether they are "white
or black," has entailed a more tolerant, experimental, and less ideologically
driven approach to matters of culture and local practice. The effects of this
pragmatism on minorities, and the way it plays out in state-minority rela-
tions, are the subject of this book. The state is perfectly willing, however, to
suppress religious and other cultural practices if they are deemed a threat.
Minorities are as vulnerable as any other social group in Chinese society
to the vicissitudes of a *fang–shou* cycle: the practice of letting go with one
hand while tightening up with the other. The current period is different
because the state's interests are framed not in terms of Marxist-Leninist-
Maoist ideology but rather in more naked terms of order and control.

This reform-era pragmatism, with its emphasis on "expert" rather than
"red," does not indicate the demise of values, nationalist or otherwise, in
guiding Chinese policy. If anything, the ideal of modernization and the
obsession with that goal have intensified as revolutionary socialism has
fallen by the wayside. At times this concern with modernization emerges
in the form of indictments against China's failure to adequately modern-
ize, examples of what Geremie Barmé describes as a "tradition of self-
loathing."[59] These self-indictments underscore the fact that to modernize,
as to get rich, is glorious. Consequently, Chinese citizens are exhorted to
do their part in modernizing themselves and their society. That modern-
izing impulse extends to agriculture, industry, markets, governance, family
planning, education, social life, and thought and culture.

Chinese national identity (or Chineseness, for that matter) is neither
uncomplicated nor definitively established. Some efforts to formulate a
new Chinese nationalism have appealed outright to exclusionary ethnic
and racial ideals and symbols, such as the dragon, the Yellow River, and
the ostensible common descent of the Han people.[60] Even Deng Xiaoping's
modernization-fixated regime resuscitated Confucianism in the mid-
1980s to fill the void left by the demise of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ide-
ology after Mao.[61] Many of these nostalgic formulations are attempts to

destroy tradition in order to save it. Appeals to distilled racial symbols may also be efforts to preserve an identity based on an abstract idea of tradition while dispensing with specific traditions that impede national objectives. Appeals to modernity and to culture are often part of the same package; nostalgia is harnessed while outmoded, archaic practices are abandoned in favor of efficacious, modern ones.

The preeminence of the modern ideal notwithstanding, Chinese ideologues, reformers, and intellectuals have regarded modernization warily. It is seen as destructive of much that is unique to China, and thus constitutive of national identity. Some appeals to tradition are explicitly hostile to modernization, or at least ambivalent toward it, as exemplified by the "search for roots" (*xungen*) movement in Chinese art and literature.[62] The *xungen* movement, Leo Ou-fan Lee writes, "typifies the defense of traditional Chinese culture by Chinese intellectuals as a whole. It is a new wave of 'culturalism' which permeates traditional thought in that it sees Chinese culture as the 'focus of loyalty' and the remedy for the country's ills."[63] Viewing modernization "as a threat to both its tradition and national identity," these *xungen* writers, filmmakers, and artists have sought "to bring out 'the Chinese essence' from local customs, rituals and folklore."[64] Despite these reversions to tradition, ideals of modernity and modernization are still paramount in Chinese society.

The modernizing impulse extends to minority nationalities. To a large degree, the "nationalities question" has been reframed in terms of the goal of modernization. Issues of order, stability, and central political control predominate in regions known for their restive minorities, such as Tibet and Xinjiang. But even here, these pressing matters are bound up with modernization, especially in the economic sense, insofar as economic change is viewed as a solution to the problems generating resentment and strife. The Chinese government is particularly concerned about growing economic disparities between the interior and western regions of the country, where most minorities live, and the wealthy provinces along the eastern and southeastern coast. Narrowing that gap by stepping up the pace of reform in minority areas is the primary response to this problem.

The socialist market economy is increasingly viewed as the answer to minority backwardness, and, ironically, as the means of furthering national integration. The socialist market economy is not without its problems, as illustrated by the regional disparities just mentioned. Yet many academics and officials view the market as capable of achieving what the Maoist socialist project tried but failed to achieve: completion of the task of

nation-building. Numerous official and academic publications from the early 1990s onward describe how the market is breaking down local barriers and regional differences. According to these reports, the expansion of the socialist market links minority groups in a web of commodities exchange, thereby enhancing the interdependence and mutual reliance of the Chinese people. More often than not these publications cite *The Communist Manifesto* to demonstrate the market's unifying power. With the increasingly free flow of cheap commodities, the socialist market economy is breaking down all Chinese (minority) walls of cultural and geographic isolation, thereby drawing even the most backward *minzu* into contemporary Chinese civilization.

This emphasis on the modern has created a dilemma for Chinese minorities by engendering a new form of Chinese culturalism, or neo-culturalism. In Levenson's distinction between culturalism and nationalism in the development of a Chinese nation, the former refers to a mode of membership based on adherence to standards of civilized behavior. According to Levenson, the transition to nationalism involved the repudiation of many of these standards and a quest to replace them with a national identity. This quest entailed the elevation of modernity and modernization, of science and progress, as national ideals.

Indeed, Levenson's culturalism-to-nationalism thesis has come under criticism in recent years. For instance, Pamela Crossley's analysis of Manchu legitimation strategies contests the view that Qing adaptation of Chinese culture was unidirectional or indicative of sinicization.[65] These criticisms notwithstanding, culturalism persists, and, unlike the culturalism identified by Levenson, contemporary Chinese neo-culturalism is organized around demonstrations of modernity and modernization. The Chinese modernizing vision still entails standards of appropriate, civilized behavior to which Chinese citizens are expected to conform, but the good Chinese is a modernizing Chinese, the model worker a modern one, and technical progress is spoken of as a kind of revolutionary duty. The emphasis on behavioral standards, on adherence to civilized conduct, remains; what has changed is the content of those standards. That content is, or aims to be, modern.

Like other Chinese citizens, minorities are expected to work at modernizing themselves. The problem for minorities, however, is that a competing culturalist notion of what it means to be a minority also exists, a notion organized around authenticity, cultural integrity, and tradition. The minority stereotypes that Schein, Gladney, Harrell, and others dissect encapsulate both images and behavioral standards. As they point out, minorities

are portrayed as and are expected to be backward, childlike, feminized primitives, in need of the developmental assistance of the elder brother Han. Some members of minority groups accept these depictions and the dependent relationship to the Han such depictions imply, while others acknowledge them but bemoan those who accept them. One senior Dai cadre I spoke with lamented the lack among the Dai of the "struggle spirit" (*fendou jingsheng*) necessary for economic development. In his view, Buddhist fatalism and the relatively easy life afforded by the fertile climate of Xishuangbanna had made the Dai complacent. For another Dai man working in tourism, this backwardness was not a problem: "We Dai have always relied on . . . the more advanced Han for their technical expertise."[66] Thus, while some members of minorities dislike these stereotypes, the view of the Han as the advanced elder brother *minzu* is a widely accepted notion, at times even a useful one.

These representations and stereotypes are not entirely negative, nor are they conditions from which minorities need to be extricated—although the drive to modernize would indicate otherwise. The sensual immediacy and proximity to both nature and culture widely attributed to minorities are admired qualities. Minorities are seen as repositories of authenticity, a vanishing commodity in a nation-state that has undergone remarkable change in the last half century, and which saw the destruction of many of its traditions during the Maoist era.

The incompatibility of competing neo-culturalisms presents unique difficulties for minorities, both in their efforts to claim full citizenship and membership and as members of the Chinese body politic. To the extent minorities modernize, they lose what makes them distinctive, which also constitutes the officially codified identity by which they are bestowed citizenship in the larger Chinese nation. To the extent they do not modernize, they are inferior citizens.

Much contemporary cultural activism of the Dai, Hui, and Bai is motivated by the desire to recover or reestablish traditions suppressed during the Maoist era. Yet the tactics of these groups in promoting religious, linguistic, artistic, and other cultural practices, and the ways they justify and conceive of their endeavors, suggest that they are trying to overcome competing neo-culturalist notions of membership and identity. Their activities are not based on simple nostalgia for a past long gone. Instead they evince a concern with economic, social, and cultural development that is filtered through the lens of minority identity and experience. The Chinese ideal of modernization, along with state guarantees of minority autonomy, are

interpreted in ways specific to their concerns and used as justifications for their cultural activism.

Of course, justifying their actions in this manner is good symbolic politics. Minority cultural activists have good reasons for couching their cultural endeavors in terms sanctioned by the state and by official discourse. Situating their activities within a normalized discourse of economic development and nationality modernization is no doubt useful. Yet in interviews and conversations with people involved in linguistic promotion, religious education, and other activities, many demonstrated a genuine concern that their activities not be confused with superstitious and backward practices. Backwardness is the general approbation applied to minorities, and it is one that chafes. Revived, expanded, and updated cultural institutions and identities offer members of the Dai, Bai, and Hui means for combating this stereotype and the second-class citizenship it implies.