

Also by François Gemenne

DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND MIGRATION: Analysis of Linkages and Consequences (*co-author with R. Stojanov, J. Novosak, J. Opiniano and T. Siwek*)

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Nations and their Histories

Constructions and Representations

Edited by

Susana Carvalho

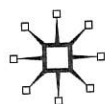
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*Dedicated to Amélia, my beloved and adoring mother, and
to Sandra, her younger sister and my guarding angel.*

(Susana Carvalho)

*To Christine,
who knows all too well why this book matters.*

(François Gemenne)

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Sinocentrism and the National Question in China

Eric Hyer

Introduction

Ethnonationalist forces held in check during the Cold War re-emerged with raucous consequences that have altered the political map of the world. Ongoing conflicts are predominantly ethnonationalist wars waged by 'nations' against 'states' in a struggle to reconcile state and national identity (see, Nietschmann, 1987). Such movements claim 'nationhood' based on historical, cultural and linguistic characteristics. The re-emergence of such ethnonationalist movements has made relevant again a discussion of the national question in the People's Republic of China (PRC). This chapter analyses China's discourse on the national question within a broad historical context and shows how an underlying sinocentrism (*Huaxia zhongxin zhuyi*) has informed Chinese views of the national question and China's national identity despite different ideological and political affinities.

Before taking up the debate over the national question in modern China it is necessary to give historical context to the following discussion by outlining the origins and evolution of the Chinese nation and state. The Chinese national myth that is invoked to legitimise the government's rule over a vast country is especially problematical because the conceptualisation of the Chinese 'nation' and 'state' as developed over the past century seeks to incorporate an ethnically diverse group of nations into the modern state of China and assumes a national harmony within a unified Chinese state. Rather, it is important to keep in mind that historical 'China' was not a well-defined and clearly delimited Chinese nation-state, constituting a single nation and a single state, but rather a more fluid concept that implied more than just a single nationality unified by culture and language living within a single uncontested state.

The classic Chinese historical novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* opens with 'states wax and wane, coalesce and cleave.' China's own history reflects these truisms. Ancient China was first unified under the Qin dynasty (221–6 BCE) after a period of warfare among various city states that only

constituted a small portion of contemporary China. Over time, however, Chinese expanded from the Chinese central plan in all directions incorporating territory and assimilating minority nationalities. The greatest periods of expansion were during the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911), both nomadic nations that conquered and ruled China for over 300 years further expanding the boundaries of the 'Middle Kingdom' as they assimilated Chinese customs and practices to a great degree, especially the Manchu who were thoroughly sinified. During the Qing dynasty, the territory directly administered by Beijing was pushed to the furthest extent as the Manchu incorporated China's periphery into their empire. However, with the advent of Western and Japanese imperialism, China was reduced in size as the Qing dynasty was forced to cede control over lands that Chinese now consider 'lost territory,' including Mongolia, parts of Manchuria, lands along the border in Central Asia, such as the Pamir Mountains, and areas in South Asia 'lost' as the British pushed the borders of India northward.

Thus, 'China' has evolved in its meaning and geographical identity. '*Zhongguo*' could refer to the central geographical location of a particular city state of ancient China, or indicate the 'Middle Kingdom' of China as it evolved over the centuries. Contemporary 'China' is the result of centuries of Chinese dynasties waxing and waning, but modern Chinese nationalists harbour viscerally held irredentist visions of a Middle Kingdom that once controlled lands now incorporated by other countries or recognised as independent nation-states.

To comprehend the rationality of the People's Republic of China's conceptualisation of the Chinese nation and state, it is first necessary to understand these historical roots. Chinese today hold on to the 'distilled essence' – a clear notion of the geographical realm, as well as the material and cultural primacy – of what was historical China, a greatness achieved during the Qing dynasty (Mancall, 1984). This historical, cultural and psychological mindset provides the substance of the contemporary Chinese conceptualisation of China's national identity (Cranmer-Byng, 1973, pp. 67–79). These factors inherited from the Qing dynasty that established the modern nation, and that the contemporary regime feels obligated to defend, have a significant impact on China's sensitivity towards nationality and territorial issues (Perdue 1998a, p. 285).

Understanding contemporary Chinese conceptualisations of the nation and state entails historical, geopolitical and cultural dimensions. Tu Wei-ming, the renowned Chinese historian, points out that Chinese 'know reflexively what China proper refers to' and the 'impression that geopolitical China evolved through a long process centering around a definable core remains deeply rooted' (Tu, 1991, p. 3). Chinese perceptions – 'expressions of a historical existence' – do not vary with political ideology, but are the result of a common historical and cultural legacy of all Chinese. The strong sense of

Chinese nationalism that developed early in the 20th century was buttressed by an image of the past glory of a 'united' empire during the Qing Dynasty.

Chinese views of the Chinese nation and state are not monolithic but share many common threads. More traditional views assume that Chinese expansion was based on cultural assimilation because of China's superior culture and was not colonial in nature. One Chinese scholar, adopting this argument concludes that China's 'unity of humanity and peaceful penetration' resulted as China 'spread her civilization over all the people of the Far East, but she did not impose any claim of government through conquest. All these inherent tendencies in spirit, together with the ways of living, customs and laws, developed along their natural lines, made of the Asiatic peoples a unity' (Djang, 1935, pp. 4–5). Others argue that the various ethnic groups that inhabited the periphery of China were not forcefully conquered, but 'unified' within the Chinese 'cultural-state.' Thus, the Chinese state emerged over millennia, not by military conquest but rather developed as an all-embracing cultural entity ruled over by the emperor. Thus, an 'essentialist view that all the basic features of the contemporary nation-state are found in the distant past without fundamental alteration' is a common thread in Chinese historiography. And it assumes that 'the maximal borders attained by the Qing empire in the mid-eighteenth century' constitutes the 'ideal boundaries defining a timeless national culture' (Perdue, 1998b, p. 255). This idealised conceptualisation of the Chinese nation and state has persisted even to the present as a nationalist myth and wields great influence over the contemporary understanding of the 'national question' in China and the government's specific policies towards minority nationalities and self-determination.

Historically Chinese, including the present regime, assume China is a unified multinational state, the territorial boundaries of which correspond roughly to the Manchu Qing dynasty. This policy denies the national identity of non-Chinese minorities and subsumes them as 'Chinese minorities' within the Chinese state that came into existence through a historical process based on a growing sense of cultural unity as 'Chinese.' This characterisation is an attempt to render the national question moot, as far as the right to self-determination or secession is concerned, by assuming that the minority nationalities are an integral part of the Chinese nation-state. The only relevant national question in the eyes of the Chinese government is the relationship between the different 'Chinese nationalities.'

The People's Republic of China has employed a rather subtle means to subvert ethnic nationalist movements by denying minority nationalities in China the fundamental elements of 'nationhood.' For example, the PRC does not recognise the minority nationalities within the present borders of China as 'nations.' The term 'Chinese' (*Zhongguo ren*) includes the numerous ethnic groups in China – all of which are included within the 'Chinese nation' (*Zhonghua minzu*). The term *Minzu* has a 'cultural' connotation that

includes non-Han (non-Chinese) ethnic groups (Jagchid, 1979, pp. 234–6).¹ Unlike the Soviet Union, which granted ‘union republic’ status to larger nationalities, the PRC only recognises the ‘cultural independence’ of the various minority nationalities within autonomous regions directly under the control of the central government. Also unlike the Soviet Union following the Bolshevik Revolution which, at least in principle, recognised the right of self-determination, the PRC has never, since it was established, recognised the aspirations for national independence by the non-Chinese nationalities currently under Beijing’s control. China has shown no patience with secessionist movements, as was clearly demonstrated in Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang in recent years.

The following discussion focuses on the evolution of elite leaders’ views regarding the territorial limits of China and the right of the non-Chinese inhabitants of China’s periphery to national self-determination. The views of Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong on these issues are examined. These two issues are salient because national identity based in part on territoriality is deeply imbedded in the conception of the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*) and homeland (*zuguo*) that are such central components in Chinese national identity (Duara, 1995, pp. 70–71). Using a historical narrative of China’s territoriality and ethnic identity, Sun, Chiang and Mao constructed images of China that served their sinocentric nationalist ends.

Marxism and the national question in China

Communists adopted various approaches to the analysis of the national question. ‘Classical Marxism’ equates the ‘national question’ with the ‘class question.’ This analysis concludes that class consciousness will outweigh national identity and therefore, as the class question is solved, national antagonism and nationalist aspirations will consequently disappear. Lenin faced a daunting task as a revolutionary practitioner taking power in a disintegrating multinational Czarist empire. His ‘strategy’ was to offer the right of national self-determination in order to co-opt other nationalities during the struggle to gain power. However, after gaining power, the regime denied the right of self-determination but adopted less coercive policies towards minority nationalities in order to dampen secessionist movements; the regime hoped that in the long-term this would facilitate assimilation and thus bring an effective end to the national question (Connor, 1984, ch. 2).

Many assume that the Chinese Communists represent a radical departure from China’s past and that Mao adopted Leninist views on the national question in China. In fact Mao’s views are strikingly similar to views held earlier by Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek, Sun’s successor as leader of the Nationalist Party (KMT). While the vocabulary Mao used may reflect the language of the Comintern, closer analysis reveals the underlying sinocentrism that is deeply rooted in China’s cultural and historical traditions. Mao, like many

younger Chinese of his generation, was obsessed with ‘national salvation’ in the face of Western imperialism. Young Mao greatly admired the first Qin emperor who unified China under one government. Mao’s idealisation of this classic period in China’s national development motivated his modern nationalism and obsession with the survival of ‘China’. Thus, an analysis of the national question in the People’s Republic of China, cast in the terminology of Marxism-Leninism, obscures the underlying sinocentrism that is common to Chinese Nationalists and Chinese Communists alike.

Chinese identity runs deep and the development of the notion of ‘China’ developed over millennia. The issue is further complicated by the unifying ideology of Confucianism and its impact on the very essence of what it means to be Chinese; Confucianism stresses cultural identification over racial and ethnic categories and a Confucian culturist ideology is deeply embedded in China’s nationalist discourse (Duara, 1995, p. 74). With this in mind, I adopt the rather straightforward definition of national identity as the ‘self-image that is tied to [the] nation, together with the value and emotional significance [Chinese] attach to membership in the national community’ (Gries, 2004, p. 9).

Evolution of Sun Yat-sen’s views

Sun claimed China was a united nation inhabited by one people. He asserted that ‘China, since the Ch’in [Qin] and Han dynasties, has been developing a single state out of a single race’, and that eventually ‘all names of individual people inhabiting China’ would die out, thus uniting all minority nationalities with the Han in a ‘single cultural and political whole’ (Sun, 1929, p. 6; Sun, 1970, pp. 181–2). He marvelled that China was a nation ‘with such a prestige that small nations came to her and of their own free will demand to be annexed’. He felt that minority nationalities considered it an honour to be part of China (Chang and Gordon, 1991, p. 44). Following the revolution in 1911, the Nationalists adopted policies that reflected Sun Yat-sen’s assimilationist views and independence movements were strongly opposed.

After Mongolia asserted its independence in 1911 with the fall of the Qing dynasty, Sun could not resign himself to the permanent separation of Mongolia from China and in 1923, while negotiating for Soviet assistance, he extracted a statement from the Soviet representative that ‘it is not, and never has been, the intention or the objective of the present Russian government to carry out imperialistic policies in Outer Mongolia, or to work for Outer Mongolian independence from China’ (Brandt, 1966, p. 70). However, political realities forced Sun Yat-sen to modify his all-encompassing, sinocentric view and ‘culturalist’ vision of China. Under the influence of Wilsonian idealism and more directly Comintern advisors, Sun accepted the principle of national self-determination as defined by Stalin – self-determination as the right of a nation to ‘arrange its life according to its own will. It has the

right to arrange its life on the basis of autonomy. It has the right to enter into federal relations with other nations. It has the right to complete secession. Nations are sovereign and all nations are equal' (Stalin, 1942, p. 23). Accordingly, at the First National Convention of the Nationalist Party held in January 1924, a declaration was issued which stated: 'We hereby repeat solemnly that we recognize the right of self-determination for all peoples in China, and that a free united Republic of China based upon the principles of free alliance of the different peoples will be established after the downfall of imperialism and militarism' (Hsu, 1933, pp. 128–9).

The sinocentric views of Sun Yat-sen are common among most all Chinese who hearken to the unification of the Qin dynasty or the territorial greatness of the Qing when they conceptualised 'China'. Published in 1925, *Zhongguo sangdi shi* (history of China's lost territory) continues to be cited as an example of the grandiose territorial claims Chinese make. A chapter entitled 'Territory During the Halcyon Days of the Qing Dynasty' asserts that 'areas inhabited by Han, Manchu, Mongols and Muslims were already united' during the Qing dynasty, and argues that modern China should claim territories included in the Manchu empire as Chinese. The author offers two reasons for this:

First, the territory inherited by the Republic [of China] comes directly from all that was controlled by the Qing during its final days, and has undergone no change at present; and secondly, all areas inhabited by the Han, Manchu, Mongols, Moslems and Tibetans are in fact unified, which was completed during the Qing. (Xie, 1925, p. 6)

Chiang Kai-shek and the national question

Following the death of Sun and with the dominance of the KMT by Chiang Kai-shek, a hypernationalist, Nationalist Party policy on the national question took on a more strident and sinocentric tone. Though Chiang Kai-shek had fundamental ideological differences with the Chinese Communists, he was equally gripped by the concern over China's 'salvation' and the unification of China as it was before the fall of the Manchu Qing dynasty. The 'Provisional Constitution of the Political Tutelage Period,' written in 1931, defined China in the broadest possible terms: 'The territory of the Republic of China consists of the various provinces and Mongolia and Tibet' – Mongolia had become independent with the fall of the Qing dynasty and Tibet was independent *de facto*, but not recognised as such by the KMT (*China Yearbook*, 1934, 1934, p. 466). To Chiang, the Japanese invasion represented the climax of a century of imperialism in China and the defeat of Japan would symbolise the end of an era of humiliation and the rebirth of a united China with the restoration of all lost territory.

Chiang Kai-shek outlined his views in *China's Destiny* published in the early 1940s. He rejected the notion that China was ever an imperialist or

colonial power and he defined China, territorially and culturally, in the broadest, most inclusive terms:

The territory of the Chinese state is determined by the ... limits of Chinese cultural bonds. Thus, in the territory of China a hundred years ago ... there was not a single district ... that was not permeated by our culture. The breaking up of this territory meant ... the decline of the nation's culture. Thus, the people as a whole must regard this as a national humiliation, and not until all lost territories have been recovered can we relax our effort to wipe out this humiliation and save ourselves from destruction. (Chiang, 1947, p. 34)

He also rejected the right of national self-determination: 'The Chinese nation has lived and developed within these river basins, and there is no area that can be split up or separated from the rest, and therefore, no area that can become an independent unit' (Chiang, 1947, p. 35; see also, pp. 39–40). To this end, a public education policy was initiated to assimilate the non-Chinese population. The curriculum was designed to 'reconstruct their cultures' as well as teach a 'clear understanding of the Chinese race and nation' (*China Handbook*, 1937–43, 1943, pp. 403–4; *China Handbook*, 1937–45 [revised and enlarged], 1975, p. 341).

Following the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, however, the realities of *realpolitik* forced Chiang Kai-shek to suppress his sinocentric views on the national question; the change was necessary in order for the KMT to facilitate an alliance with the Soviet Union. Mongolia independence was a reality grudgingly accepted by Chiang Kai-shek because Stalin demanded it at the Yalta conference in 1945 with the acquiescence of the United States and Great Britain. This change in KMT policy was set forth in a statement made by Chiang on 24 August 1945, just ten days after the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with the USSR:

if frontier racial groups situated in regions outside the provinces have the capacity for self-government and a strong determination to attain independence, ... our government should, in a friendly spirit, voluntarily help them to realize their freedom; ... and as equals of China we should entertain no ill will or prejudices against them because of their choice to leave the mother country. (Chiang, 1969, vol. 2, p. 857)

The statement would also appear to include Tibet as an area that qualified for independence, but unlike Mongolia, Tibet had no patron. At the time, Xinjiang too was independent of Chinese control but subject to significant Soviet influence.

This recognition of an independent Mongolia was later characterised as a benevolent act by China: a 'momentous decision ... on the assumption that

by consenting to these infringements upon her territorial sovereign rights to a wartime ally, China might contribute to the cause of peace' (*China Presents*, 1949, p. 11). One Chinese scholar characterised the treaty in the same light as previous treaties China was compelled to conclude:

China was of course free to resist such arbitrary measures. But the brutal fact was that she had been at war with Japan for eight long years. She could not fight three more enemies. The only path open to this war-torn country was the signing of a new *unequal treaty* with the Soviet Union! (Kao, 1980, p. 175)

The KMT, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, rejected the right of self-determination, but as its power base declined, it resentfully recognised the Mongolian People's Republic as an independent state, a recognition that was subsequently withdrawn after 1949 on the grounds that the Soviet Union had broken the treaty of friendship with the ROC and therefore the KMT government, now isolated in Taiwan, was not bound by its recognition of Mongolian independence. This Nationalist claim to Mongolia was only relinquished after Taiwan's democratisation and the election of an opposition party to power in 2000.

The national question and the Chinese Communist Party

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) looked to the Soviet Union as a model to follow on the national question. However, when the CCP came to power it did not establish a federated state, as it had called for previously, but for historical and nationalistic reasons declared that China was a 'united nation of multiple nationalities'. This policy, it was argued, was the 'outgrowth of the historical development of the past several thousand years' and rooted in the glorification of the Qin dynasty's unification and the Qing dynasty's expansion of the empire (Weng, 1950, p. 6; see also, Hudson, 1960, pp. 53–54). CCP policy initially supported the right to self-determination but after gaining power, claimed that in countries that had experienced a socialist revolution, the assertion of self-determination by minority nationalities was 'reactionary' (*Renmin Ribao*, 2 October 1951 cited in Dreyer, 1976; Moseley, 1966, pp. 5–8).

The CCP initially accepted Stalin's argument that 'Leninism broadened the conception of self-determination and interpreted it as the right... to complete secession, as the right of nations to independent existence as states. This precluded the possibility of... interpreting the right of self-determination to mean [merely] the right to autonomy' (Stalin, 1942, p. 183). The CCP's view of nationality conflict accepted the Marxist view that it was fundamentally the result of class conflict. In theory, nations were artificial constructs used by capitalists to suppress the proletariat. But when the proletariat seized power, nations and nationalism would vanish. Reality did not unfold as

theory predicted. In fact, in the PRC, the opposite was the case. The threat to the unity of China, caused by secessionist movements, did not diminish after the Communist revolution. The CCP reluctantly accepted the 'loss' of Outer Mongolia as a *fait accompli*, but in Tibet the new Communist regime forcibly annexed Tibet, while for a number of years, Xinjiang, with the acquiescence of Moscow, resisted control by the central government in Beijing. Secessionist movements in Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia have persisted to the present.

Before gaining power, the CCP naively supported the right of self-determination and held out the possibility that various regions would become independent national entities. This reflected the influence of Chinese sinocentric idealism regarding the willingness of non-Chinese groups to be included in the Chinese nation, as well as Leninist strategy – an attempt to placate the various non-Chinese inhabitants of the border areas in order to establish a united front to oppose the Japanese and then the Nationalists. But Mao believed that the inhabitants of these areas were just one factor to be considered, one that could be transformed, envisioning the eventual inclusion of the vast territories inhabited by non-Chinese nationalities as part of a unified China (Moseley, 1966, p. 19).

Self-determination, federation and secession

The Manifesto of the Second National Congress of the CCP held in July 1922 spelled out the Party's vision of China:

The establishment of a Chinese Federated Republic by the unification of China proper, Mongolia, Tibet, and Sinkiang into a free federation. (Brandt, 1966, p. 64; see also, Zhu, 1930, pp. 272–4, 278)

This statement left many issues unclear. Did 'China proper' include Manchuria? Xinjiang had become a province of China several decades earlier and if it needed to be liberated it was from Soviet domination. Did Mongolia include both Inner Mongolia and Outer Mongolia? The Mongolian People's Republic had become independent the previous year.

During the Jiangxi Soviet period (1927–35), the CCP's position on the national question became more precise. At the First All-China Congress of Soviets held in November 1931, a resolution on the 'Question of National Minorities', declared that:

the Chinese Soviet Republic categorically and unconditionally recognizes the right of national minorities to self-determination. This means that in districts like Mongolia, Tibet, Sinkiang, Yunnan, Kweichow, and others, where the majority of the population belongs to non-Chinese nationalities, the toiling masses of these nationalities shall have the right to

determine for themselves whether they wish to leave the Chinese Soviet Republic and create their own independent state, or whether they wish to join the Union of Soviet Republics, or form an autonomous area inside the Chinese Soviet Republic....The Chinese Soviet Republic shall also support...national minorities that have already won their independence. (Kun, 1934, pp. 78–83)

Article 14 of the Fundamental Law (constitution) of the Chinese Soviet Republic spelled out the right of self-determination:

The Soviet government of China recognizes the right of self-determination of the national minorities in China, and to the formation of an independent state for each national minority. All Mongolians, Tibetans, Miao, Yao, Koreans, and others living on the territory of China shall enjoy the full right of self-determination, i.e., they may either join the Union of Chinese Soviets or secede from it and form their own state as they may prefer. (Brandt, 1966, p. 223)

Although the CCP rhetorically supported self-determination and the right of secession, it was not the ideal it wished to achieve – a unified multi-national state as symbolised by the Qing dynasty. A call was issued to unite behind the CCP in order to establish ‘a single state...without national barriers, and to uproot all national enmity and national prejudices’ (Kun, 1934, pp. 78–83).

The Long March from Jiangxi to Yan’an marked a watershed in the CCP’s policy, but the CCP continued to publicly support the right of self-determination in order to maintain the anti-Japanese united front. In ‘Nationalities Policy in Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Warfare’, Liu Shaoqi argued that the ‘right of minority nationalities to independence and autonomy must be recognised before they would sincerely form an alliance with China and rise to resist Japan. Without recognising the right of nationalities to self-determination, there can be no national alliance on an equal footing’ (Liu, 1969, p. 17).

In December 1935, the Communists issued a statement calling on the Inner Mongolians to ally with the CCP in order to oppose Japan and appealed to the Mongols’ sense of nationalism by urging them to ‘preserve the glory of the Genghis Khan era.’ The statement maintained that Japan was attempting to occupy the ‘entire nation of Inner Mongolia’ but also condemned the ‘Chinese warlords headed by the shameless Chiang Kai-shek, who not only consider themselves the suzerain, but have even designated the entire region of Inner Mongolia a province...in order to destroy gradually the Mongolian nation.’ The CCP declared that ‘no other nation may occupy or seize under any excuse the territory of the nation of Inner Mongolia’.

Aware of Mongolian sensitivities about China’s historical encroachment into Mongolia, the declaration stated:

We feel that the people of Inner Mongolia have the right to solve all their internal problems, and no one has the authority to interfere by force in their living, habits, religion, ethics, and all other rights....[Inner Mongolia] may, according to the principle of self-determination, organize its own life and form its own government....It also has the right to establish its separate entity....[T]he nation is supreme, and all nations are equal.... (Mao, 1978, vols. 5–6, pp. 6–8)²

The following year, a call was directed to the Muslims (Hui) of Northwest China, but reference to a ‘nation,’ as in the statement on Inner Mongolia, was absent:

According to the principle of national self-determination, we advocate that the affairs of the Moslems must be completely handled by the Moslems themselves, that, in all Moslem areas, the Moslems must establish their independent and autonomous political power and handle all the political, economic, religious, custom, ethical, education, and other matters. (Mao, 1978, vols. 5–6, pp. 35–7)³

While upholding the right of national self-determination in order to facilitate the organisation of a united front, Mao nevertheless revealed his desire for a united China, which included much of the former Qing Empire. An interview conducted by Edgar Snow with Mao in July 1936 was revealing:

It is the immediate task of China to regain all our lost territories, not merely to defend our sovereignty below the great wall. This means that Manchuria must be regained. We do not, however, include Korea, formerly a Chinese colony, but when we have re-established the independence of the lost territories of China, and if the Koreans wish to break away from the chains of Japanese imperialism, we will extend them our enthusiastic help in their struggle for independence. The same thing applies to Formosa. As for Inner Mongolia, we will struggle to drive Japan from there and help Inner Mongolia to establish an autonomous state.

With regard to the Mongolian People’s Republic (MPR), Xinjiang and Tibet, Mao observed:

When the people’s revolution has been victorious in China, the Outer Mongolian republic will automatically become a part of the Chinese federation, at its own will. The Mohammedan and Tibetan peoples, likewise,

will form autonomous republics attached to the Chinese federation. (Mao, 1937, pp. 40–41; also in Snow, 1961, p. 96)

The shift away from support for the right of self-determination and secession to the policy of establishing 'autonomous regions' became clearer at the Sixth Party Congress held in November 1938. Addressing the issue, Mao remarked:

[O]ur present task is to unite all nationalities and fight together with them against the Japanese. ... In the common struggle against Japan, they will have the right to handle their own affairs and at the same time to unite with the Hans in building a unified country. (Weng, 1950, p. 9; see also, *Renmin Ribao*, 6 Sept. 1953, p. 1)

And although it was already independent, later it became clear that this was merely a position adopted out of tactical necessity because future statements confirm that the Chinese Communists were not reconciled to the fact that Outer Mongolia had asserted its independence at the end of the Qing dynasty and that it was unlikely that it would ever again become part of China.

Nevertheless, at times, statements were made which still supported the earlier, more liberal position on the national question. For example, in 'On Coalition Government,' written in 1945, Mao supported the 'right of self-determination and of forming a union with the Han people on a voluntary basis'; he also criticised Chiang Kai-shek for his chauvinistic views expressed in *China's Destiny* (Mao, 1965, vol. 3, pp. 305–6).⁴ But the CCP's move towards a more sinocentric concept of the national question is clear in the textbook *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party*, used in training Party cadre. Originally published in 1939 it describes the territorial boundaries of China:

The present boundaries of China are: Bordering on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the northeast, northwest and a portion of the west. In a portion of the west and the southwest bordering on India, Bhutan and Nepal. In the south bordering on Siam, Burma, Annam and close to Taiwan. In the east close to Japan and bordering Korea.

A revised edition, published in 1952, demonstrates how CCP views were also circumscribed in light of political considerations:

The present boundaries of China are as follows: Bordering on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the northeast, northwest and a portion of the west. Bordering on the Mongolian People's Republic in the north. In a portion of the west and the southwest bordering on Afghanistan, India, Bhutan and Nepal. In the south bordering on Burma and Vietnam. In the east bordering on Korea and close to Japan and the Philippines.

In the earlier edition several neighbouring states are classified as 'vassal states' (*fan*):

After defeating China in war, the imperialist states then stole several of China's vassal states and a portion of her territory. Japan occupied Korea, Taiwan, the Ryukyus, Penghu islands and Port Arthur; England occupied Burma, Bhutan, Nepal and Hongkong; France occupied Annam; and a tiny state like Portugal even occupied Macao. (Mao, 1945, p. 1)

In the later edition this was revised to read:

After defeating China in war, the imperialist states not only occupied several surrounding states which originally received the protection of China, but also stole or 'leased' a portion of China. For example, Japan occupied Taiwan and the Penghu islands and 'leased' Port Arthur; England occupied Hongkong; and France 'leased' Guangzhouwan. (Mao, 1952, p. 1)

That the Communists had adopted a narrower interpretation of self-determination and now considered it to mean self-government within a federated Chinese state became clear in a July 1944 interview with Gunther Stein in which Mao stated:

Outer Mongolia is part of China. ... China must first recognize Outer Mongolia as a national entity. Then organize a sort of United States of China to meet their aspirations. We believe they will come to join.

The same is true concerning Tibet. ... The Mohammedans should also be given a chance to form their state. Manchurians are no longer a separate nationality. Nor are Formosans. (United States Senate, [1969] p. 982; see also, Stein, 1945, pp. 244–5, 442–3)

Conclusion

From the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921 until it came to power in 1949, the Party's nationalities policy evolved from one which supported the right of self-determination and secession to one that resembled the assimilationist and sinocentric policy advocated earlier by Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek. Although this position was at times moderated, it is clear that Mao and other leaders of the CCP believed in a unified China that incorporated all the nationalities that had been controlled by earlier dynasties. The idea of a voluntary federation such as that advocated during the Jiangxi Soviet was abandoned. The concept of self-determination had evolved to mean autonomy within a united China. The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, convened on 29 September 1949, drafted the Common Program which established the policies of the PRC. There was no mention of the right of national self-determination. China was characterised as a 'big fraternal and

co-operative family composed of all nationalities' and 'splitting the unity of the various nationalities' was prohibited (Hinton, 1980, p. 55). Later, in the constitution drafted at the First National People's Congress, secession was no longer considered a legitimate right, and regions inhabited by minority nationalities were regarded 'inalienable parts of the People's Republic of China' (*Documents of the First Session*, 1955, art. 3, ch. 1). The 'Program for Enforcement of National Regional Autonomy' provided for the establishment of autonomous regions, but stated that 'all national autonomous districts shall be an inseparable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China' (*Survey of China Mainland Press* 394, August 1952, p. 9). With the establishment of the Communist government in 1949, it was claimed that the past practice of exploitation and antagonism between nationalities would disappear. It was argued that 'any nationality, if it succeeds in secession, will not only lose for certain the great achievements of liberation and equality which have already been effected, but will also fall for certain under the yoke of imperialism once more' (Wang, 1958, p. 11).

The establishment of a multinational unified state was the culmination of the dual forces of modern Chinese nationalism and traditional sinocentrism harking back to the great dynasties in Chinese history. Some form of federation, although initially advocated because of the Soviet model, was rejected due to the historical legacy and the nationalistic desire for a strong, unified China. However, this change in policy was not, it was argued, the result of 'armchair theorising', but a decision 'closely linked with the objective conditions in China' that 'evolved from a long period of experience and struggle' (Weng, 1950, pp. 6-7). The transition from the policy adopted in the early days of the Party and the Jiangxi Soviet period to the policy espoused in 1949 was determined by what were said to be national developments:

[T]he Communist Party...consistently advocated self-determination and federalism from the day the party was founded until the period of the Anti-Japanese War. It was only with the period of China's third revolutionary war that these slogans ceased to be emphasized....Led and instructed by the Chinese Communist Party, the people of each nationality had already greatly heightened their...patriotic consciousness, greatly changed and transcended their original situation of mutual antagonism, and gradually formed bonds of equality, unity, mutual help, and cooperation as a basis for realizing common political aims and interests. Therefore, the establishment of a united, multinational state was the desire of the great bulk of the people of all nationalities in our country. (Chang, 1966, pp. 67-8)

The question of Outer Mongolia was not raised at the time, but other minority nationalities were not considered suitable for 'nation-statehood,' because:

in political, social, economic, cultural, and other respects, these people, like other national minorities, were ill prepared for separation; all the national minorities (including those of Sinkiang and Tibet), because of

cultural and historical conditions, and especially because of close economic relations, formed with the Han a single, unbreakable unit. (Chang, 1966, pp. 71-4)

Published in 1950, 'Sino-Soviet Friendship: A Study Guide' argued that 'the unity or separation of each nationality is based upon certain historical conditions and what is most advantageous to that particular nationality'. Regarding the right to exercise self-determination in the future it said:

Some people inquire: 'Since we recognized Mongolia's independence, in the future shouldn't we recognize the independence of Inner Mongolia, Tibet, etc.?' We respond by saying...Mongolia gained independence under these historical conditions....Therefore, our position is to continue to recognize and guarantee their independence, and do not need them to be reunified with China as one country....What of Inner Mongolia, Tibet and other nationalities presently within China? Well, we were liberated at about the same time. The present problem is to join forces to build a strong new China together, not to be divided and independent....Only in this way will the best interests of all nationalities presently within China be served. We must not forget that specific historical conditions derive from the basic interests of the people. This should be the basis upon which we view issues. (*Zhong-Su youhao*, 57-8)

Thus it was appropriate for these areas to 'overcome the remnants of local nationalism as well as any feelings of solitariness, exclusiveness, and aimless xenophobia, all of which are harmful' (Chang, 1966, p. 74).

Officially stated rationale aside, other factors account for this change in CCP policy. The significant shift in policy began after the rise of Mao Zedong. Mao, much like Chiang Kai-shek, betrayed a deep concern for 'national salvation' through the eventual inclusion of the vast territories inhabited by non-Chinese nationalities and considered as part of a unified China during the Qing dynasty. Mao was a more chauvinistic and sinocentric Chinese nationalist and did not support the policy of federalism, as other Party leaders had (Moseley, 1966, pp. 68, fn. 18). On several occasions, Mao evidenced his obsession with the disintegration of the Chinese empire during interviews with Edgar Snow and Gunther Stein, cited earlier. Mao's initial support for national self-determination was due to his idealistic view of the historical unity of China and as a tactic he believed that denouncing the chauvinistic policy of the Nationalists would win non-Chinese groups' support for the CCP, but it is doubtful that Mao's support of the right of self-determination and secession was heartfelt.

Mao's and others' flirtation with idealism regarding the national question ended with the Long March, during which the CCP experienced devastating confrontations with the non-Chinese they encountered. This convinced the Communists that these minorities would not willingly be integrated as part of a Chinese nation and therefore had to be denied the option of

self-determination (Dreyer, 1976, pp. 67–70). Mao and other leaders of the CCP were also clearly aware of the possibility of foreign powers taking advantage of these minority nationalities' animosity towards the Chinese. Soviet assistance had been crucial to the Mongols in their struggle for independence and the situation in Xinjiang and Tibet was yet undecided. This was cause for real concern, since these:

minority nationality areas are mostly located in border areas of the motherland, [and] imperialism, reactionaries and modern revisionists will use every means possible to unite with these reactionaries in minority nationality areas in order to subvert the motherland. Among the nationalities they encourage nationalist sentiments, sow seeds of dissension among various nationalities, and plot to carry out their evil plan to split the unity of the nation. (*Minzu Tuanjie*, 1963, p. 3)

The new government dismissed such nationalist-separatist movements as reactionary because circumstances had changed. Chinese argued that the need for secession no longer existed, because:

Today, the liberation of all China has been basically completed. ... The position of the national minorities within the country is entirely different from that of the past. The problem that for so many years was unsolvable has been fundamentally solved. (Weng 1950, p. 6)

Since 1949, despite the lip service to the ideal of a unified multinational state, Beijing has pursued a policy of integrating and assimilating (sinifying) the minority nationalities. During the 1950s, autonomous regions, counties and townships were established and the 'economic and cultural development' of the 'fraternal nationalities' was encouraged. But the underlying policy of solving the national question by slowly assimilating minority nationalities was fairly transparent. In 'On the Rectification Campaign and Socialist Education Among the Minority Nationalities', written in the latter 1950s, the case for a united China of multiple nationalities was made in terms not unlike those used earlier by Chiang Kai-shek in *China's Destiny*:

In remote days, China was already a country... practicing the system of centralism. ... [T]he historical development of our country led to the formation of an irresistible and inevitable trend, namely, the trend toward a united people's China. ... On such a historical foundation, the various nationalities of China set up in 1949 the united People's Republic of China. Any nationality attempting secession is acting contrary to the trend of the long historical development and its basic requirement. (Wang, 1958, p. 9)

In a 1957 speech, Zhou Enlai, after condemning the 'two types of Chauvinism' – Han chauvinism and local-nationality chauvinism – argued

that assimilation is a 'progressive act if it means natural merger of nations advancing towards prosperity. Assimilation as such has the significance of promoting progress' (Zhou, 1980, p. 19).

From the late 1950s until the 1970s, the Marxist belief that 'the national question is essentially a class question' and Mao's dictum that 'national struggle is a matter of class struggle' were invoked, and a hard line on the national question was adopted. The policy was still an assimilationist one, but became a heavy-handed policy of sinification under the guise of class struggle. Since the 1980s, this 'leftist' policy has been condemned because it mistakenly 'synchronized the rise and disappearance of nationalities with the rise and disappearance of classes, lumping the national problem and the class problem together'. But the policy remains one of 'progressive assimilation' over the long term. The current view is that the national question 'came into being after a history of several hundred or several thousand years, and will continue to exist for a long time to come' ('Is the National Question', p. 18). This view is based on the assumption that non-Han peoples are economically and culturally drawn to China and willingly accept sinification as was the case throughout history, and with the eventual end of 'national differences', the national question will cease to exist.

Despite the return to a more conciliatory policy towards minority nationalities by the Chinese after the Cultural Revolution, it is clear that the world has embarked on a renewed period of national independence movements. The independence movements following the break-up of the Soviet Empire have had a demonstration effect that has invigorated ethnonationalist movements around the world; the impact on the national question in China is already evident in the well publicised situation in Tibet, but also the lesser known Muslim revolts in Xinjiang that attempt to establish an Islamic republic and the stirring of a renewed nationalist movement in Inner Mongolia. The national question and China's national identity remain in flux and nationalism remains one of the strongest forces in China today.

Notes

1. Use of the term *minzu* causes confusion. Often translated as 'nation' in English, it is more accurately translated as 'ethnic group.' Although the term *guojia* can be translated as 'nation' it is more accurately translated as 'nation-state.' Thus, using the term *minzu wenti* to mean 'national question' is misleading because in Chinese the term has the connotation of ethnic relations among minority groups all considered to be 'Chinese', and includes no notion of the right to 'nationhood.'
2. For a substantially altered version which also offers the possibility to 'unite in a federation with other peoples', see Chang (1966, pp. 51–2).
3. For a variation see Chang (1966, pp. 52–3).
4. Later editions of 'On Coalition Government' changed the right of self-determination to the right of self-government. For comparison of versions see Brandt, et al. (1966, p. 308).

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