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HISTORY

Chinese Culture from a Long-Term Perspective

Why Discuss the Plurality of Chinese Culture?

A few years ago, when I was taking part in a scholarly forum, I argued that Chinese cultural tradition is plural, not singular. At the time, I merely wanted to show a sense of caution about the fact that, as China expanded, trends would rise that would push people toward returning to tradition, promoting national learning (*guoxue*), and singing the praises of patriotism. The doubt that I had at that time was that the national learning that people were discussing might narrow into the study of the Han nation, or that tradition would serve to narrow Han Chinese culture into one form of Confucian learning or another. Might this trend in reviving Chinese culture result in a dangerous and extreme new direction? If this were to happen, it could very easily combine with social fashions that have emerged in China, such as wearing traditional Han clothing, sacrificing to the Flame Emperor and Nüwa, venerating Confucius, and reading the classics in a way that would operate under the discourse of cultural self-awareness to turn respect for traditional culture and an emphasis on identity into a way to promote cultural nationalism and even statism. For these reasons, on many different occasions I have argued

that the plural nature of Chinese culture is also the complexity, tolerance, and openness of Chinese culture.

As time passed, I continued to hold this view. In this chapter, however, I am more interested in discussing why the Chinese cultural tradition is plural, and will do so from the historical perspective that takes into account the processes of how, over thousands of years, Chinese culture grew layer by layer and gradually solidified. By reviewing the roughly hundred years that have elapsed since the late Qing and early Republican periods, during which time China faced many moments of continuity and discontinuity with the past, I demonstrate the plurality of the Chinese cultural tradition and show why today it is necessary to maintain an open attitude and accept various aspects of foreign cultures as new layers of Chinese culture.

Exactly What Is "China's" Culture?

Let us begin with this question: What counts as China's culture?

Over the past few years I have criticized on many occasions some of the methods that are used for describing and narrating Chinese culture, because books and articles that study Chinese culture often use an overview (or macro) model, looking from the top down to provide a vague introduction to so-called Chinese culture. In my view, it is important to be clear about what is meant by "Chinese culture." Even the word "Chinese" is important, because "culture" is something that all nations have. If you could explain clearly that this culture is something that China has (or is prominent there), and other countries do not have this (or it is not prominent there), or you can describe what the Chinese world has (or is prominent there), and what other nations do not have (or it is not prominent there), only then have you arrived at the relatively "typical" version of Chinese culture; you cannot include those atypical things in your definition of Chinese culture.[1]

What, then, are those aspects of culture that quintessentially belong to "China"? Here I focus my discussion on Han Chinese culture, because it must be conceded that since ancient times Han culture has served as the mainstream and core of Chinese culture. I see five key facets of Han Chinese culture.

First: the use of Chinese characters (*Han zi*) to read and write, as well as the ways of thinking that are derived from Chinese characters. Ancient legends tell of the creation of Chinese characters by Cang Jie, whose invention was said to be so remarkable that it caused grain to fall from the sky and the ghosts to howl in the night. Although this story comes from myth, it also shows the significance of Chinese characters in the formation of Chinese culture. Chinese characters, which are originally based on ideographs, have indeed had a massive influence on Han Chinese people's modes of thought and expression, and continue to be used down to the present day (while, for the most part, other cultures no longer use forms of writing that could be traced back to ideographs).[2] This influence has not been limited to Chinese culture but has also made its presence felt among neighboring areas that are known as the cultural sphere of the Chinese script (*Hanzi wenhuaquan*).

Second: the structure of family, clan, and state in ancient China. This traditional rural order, beliefs about family morality, and state order all served as the basis for Confucian teachings, including the entire set of political arrangements related to the state, society, and the individual (which were different from the culture that developed out of the Greek and Roman system of city-states),[3] as well as ideas derived from these political arrangements that were related to self-cultivation and governance of the state.[4] All of the preceding ideas and structures shaped the traditions of daily life and political life in ancient China.[5]

Third: the belief system of "three teachings in one." In traditional China, "Buddhism was used to cultivate the mind, Taoism was used to extend life, and Confucianism was used to govern the world."[6] Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism existed side by side, supplementing one another, and no single religion could lay claim to status as the absolute or sole religion. For these reasons, too, no religion could supersede the secular power and authority of the emperor, and thus religions accommodated one another while remaining under a dominant political power. Because of the absolute authority of the emperor, China did not have religions that attempted to claim a sphere of their own that was separate from imperial power.[7] As a result, Buddhism and Taoism, and later on Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam, all had to submit at some point to mainstream ideology and morality and allow for changes in the essence

of their religious beliefs and their positions in society,[8] assisting society within the limits proscribed by imperial power. Of course, these arrangements led many believers to take a perspective on religion that was not particularly clear or fixed in one place, resulting in practical admixtures of different religious beliefs. Although religion did not have the absolute power that could be granted by faith, there were very few wars between religions in China—a phenomenon that was quite rare in other regions and countries around the world.[9]

Fourth: understandings of and interpretations of ideas about "the unity of Heaven and man" (*Tian ren he yi*) in the universe, the study of Yin and Yang and the Five Elements, as well as the knowledge, ideas, and technologies that were developed on the basis of these scholarly practices.[10] The origins of this type of scholarship is found early in history,[11] and its influence on later eras reached Chinese medicine, feng shui, building and construction,[12] and even politics and aesthetics.[13]

And, finally: the unique idea that formed in ancient China of All-under-Heaven, which was influenced by the cosmology of "round Heaven and square Earth," as well as the way of looking at the world that developed out of this idea of All-under-Heaven. From this imagination of All-under-Heaven, ancient China saw the development of an international order based on the tribute system.

If we take these five aspects of Chinese culture and hold them up in comparison to Christian civilization, or with the Islamic world, or even with the regions of East Asia and South Asia (which also follow Buddhism and use Confucian principles), then we see that these five characteristics can only be considered "China's" "culture." I continue to hope, therefore, that people will not use sprawling concepts cast in empty, universal language to arrive at abstract and overly broad definitions of Chinese culture. (Some examples of this tendency include emphasizing the Doctrine of the Mean, placing stress on ethics, or a strong emphasis on the family, and so on.) It is more important to point out that these cultural origins are complex and simply cannot be contained under the rubrics of Confucianism, neo-Confucianism, the Five Classics, or classical learning, just as they cannot be covered thoroughly by current practices of so-called national learning.

What, Then, Is "China"? The Long History of China's Formation

The question not been resolved, however, because "China" is a concept that still must be defined. Although the cultural phenomena that I sketched out above can be found throughout several thousand years of Chinese history and always occupied the position of the mainstream, they still are only part of Han national culture. If we recognize that "China" is not just Han national culture, then the "Chinese" cultural traditions described above still cannot be equated simply with Chinese culture.

More and more historical evidence shows that, since ancient times, each dynasty (or China) had either close or distant relationships of exchange with cultures outside the dynasty (or foreign cultures). Even in the period of early antiquity, which previously had been considered to be relatively closed off from outside influences, there was a substantial overlap between the land of what is now China and surrounding cultures, peoples, religions, and material goods. It is not necessarily the case that the bloodlines of each of the Three Dynasties of Antiquity were as pure as they were described in ancient histories and stories, which spoke of "the progeny of the Yellow Emperor."[14] For example, can we really say that the Shang dynasty was made up of Han people (*Hanzu*) or Huaxia people (*Huaxia zu*)? Fu Sinian did not believe it to be the case. He argued instead that the people of the Yin dynasty were "foreigners," and that the dynasty established by the Yin and Shang was an amalgamation resulting from a conflict between Eastern Barbarians (*Dong Yi*) and the Xixia, and even was the product of "barbarians defeating the Xia."[15] Fu Sinian also reminded us that the regions of Qi and Lu, which had been thought to be the historical headwaters of Chinese culture, were in fact a center of foreign territory.[16] Other scholars have argued that the sources of Yin and Shang culture "had relatively strong connections to what later became known as Tungusic culture."[17]

Even if these arguments are just conjecture, the overlap between cultures at that time was quite common. Important evidence comes from the Yin-dynasty ruins at Anyang in Henan Province, a site that has been the subject of extensive research. Li Chi argued in 1932 in an essay

on the Yin ruins that although it had previously been believed that a direct line of succession linked the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, and that the Yin ruins were purely a part of ancient Chinese culture, it was actually quite diverse. Scapulimancy, plastromancy, sericulture, tattooing, black pottery, and jade *cong* came from the east, while bronze making, hollow-head adzes, and spears came from Central Asia and West Asia. Rice, elephants, buffalo, and tin came from South Asia.[18] Even if the rites and music of Hua-Xia (that is, Chinese) had reached a point of relative maturity by the Zhou dynasty, foreigners from all areas continued to come to China; peoples such as the Yue people, who were said to cut their hair and tattoo their bodies, and the people of Chu, who were said to believe in witches and ghosts and partake in strange rites, gradually came within the cultural sphere of the Zhou dynasty.[19] Although "rites and music" (*li yue*) became an important symbol of the cultural community of the Zhou dynasty, the peoples of regions under control of the Zhou dynasty—in Zhao, Wei, and Han in the north, the Qi and Lu in the east, the Jing and Chu in the south, the Rong and Qin in the west, and Zheng and Wei in the central plains—all developed their own individual cultures.[20] It was under the restraints provided by the system of enfeoffment and feudal lords that they developed together into a complex, diverse, and loosely bounded Zhou civilization. In my opinion, those versions of "Zhou-dynasty culture" that are completely unified, with clear political order, and clear borders are more often than not the product of later people's reminiscences and imaginations, much like those who argue that the rites of the Zhou dynasty were created by the Duke of Zhou himself. In fact, what we can generally call the core of Zhou-dynasty culture was largely the product of two overlapping traditions: the tradition of rites and music and the shamanic tradition.

From today's perspective, before the Warring States period (and Confucius), people's ideas about so-called culture and tradition were not self-conscious, but, rather, unrestrained. It seems that the harmonious relations of these earliest times had room for many differences in physical features among people. It is for precisely this reason that the era in which some lamented that "the rites had fallen into disorder and music had been ruined" also became an era of cultural enlightenment, one whose arrival resulted in the rise of distinctions between various schools

of thinkers, leading to a situation where "the various schools held to several ways, and could not come back to the same point, nor agree together."[21] Thinkers such as Confucius, Mozi, and Laozi, and the Confucian, Mohist, and Taoist orientations that emerged from them, along with the knowledge, faiths, and customs that were in conflict, were all the product of this era of diversity and division. As Ying-shih Yü has argued, it was this time when "the system of the Tao was about to be torn apart all under the sky"[22] that proved to be the "central era" of Chinese thought, one that provided endless resources for the intellectual thought and cultures of subsequent eras.[23]

For these reasons, the "Middle Kingdom" (*Zhongguo*) that was inherited and expanded by the unified dynasties of the Qin and Han was originally a mixed space that intermingled a wide variety of races, ideas, cultures, and regions.[24] The national identity, state ideology, and cultural orientation of Han "China," however, first took shape out of these mixed elements during the period of unification under the Qin and Han. The intellectual openness of the *Lü Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Huainanzi,* which were credited with including aspects of "Hundred Schools" thought and ideas, and the intellectual ordering that was undertaken by the *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu fan lu*) and the *Virtuous Discussions Held in the White Tiger Hall* (*Bai hu tong*), which were credited with dismissing the "ways of kings and hegemons" advocated by the Hundred Schools, all contributed to the formation of a "Chinese" cultural world. In them, we see "Chinese" cultural identity begin to emerge. This emergence was also spurred by pressure from the "Xiongnu," the "western regions" (*Xi yu*), and the "southern and eastern barbarians."[25]

We should recognize that because under the Qin dynasty "all weights and measures were standardized, the gauge of wheeled vehicles was made uniform, and the writing system was standardized,"[26] and the Han dynasty "dismissed the hundred schools and embraced only Confucian ways"[27] that the "China" that was centered around the core regions of the Nine Provinces began to appear, and a Han nationality that took the "Hua-Xia" as its core began to form. At the same time, a "Hua-Xia" (Chinese) culture began to take shape, one that took the idea of All-under-Heaven as its central ideology, that subscribed to ideas about Yin and Yang and

the Five Elements, that engaged in politics based on a mixture of political ideas (especially Confucian and Legalist), that was accustomed to writing in Chinese characters, and that possessed its own religious and ethical order. As Sima Qian described it in the "Basic Annals of the First Emperor of Qin" of the *Records of the Grand Historian*, the "Middle Kingdom" of that time "extended east to the sea and to Chaoxian [Korea], west to Lintao and Qiangzhong, and south to Beihu. In the north fortresses were established along the Yellow River and then over the Yin Mountains to Liaodong."[28] It is also as Sima Qian remarked in the "Biographies of the Money Makers" (*Huo zhi lie zhuan*): "the Han rose to power and prominence." This self-description of China provides evidence of how Chinese people in ancient times defined the Middle Kingdom. By the time of Sima Qian, China extended west to Guanzhong, Bashu, and Tianshui; to the south, Panyu (in Guangdong) and Dan'er; to the north, the Longmen and Jieshi, the Liaodong Peninsula, the Yan region, and Zhuozhou; to the east, Mount Tai, the Bohai Sea, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang. These places already made up the "domains" of the "Middle Kingdom" and showed its initial formation.[29]

The Former and Latter Han dynasties, which stretched across over four centuries, seem to have established the cultural world of "China." Despite this, however, contacts between China and the cultures on this periphery did not come to an end. In fact, from the time of the Qin and Han dynasties to the Wei-Jin period, and then again down to the Sui and Tang dynasties, convergence and contact became even more prominent. This was especially true especially during the Sui and Tang period, an important time when foreign cultures recast Chinese culture. Allow me to provide a very rough outline of this history.

First, in terms of nationalities, during the Qin and Han periods, China had a great number of contacts and interactions with the thirty-six states of the western frontiers, with the Xiongnu in the north, and with the Baiyue in the south. The period of the Northern and Southern dynasties saw extensive contacts with the Xianbei and the Xiang. Intermixing between these racial groups was a common occurrence.[30] It was so common that, by the Western Jin dynasty, Jiang Tong, a Han man of letters, wrote "Discourse on Moving the Rong" to warn people against such intermingling.[31] In fact, this intermixing happened not only among the Hu and

Han peoples to the north but also in the south. Tan Qixiang once pointed out that, in both the north and the south, the peoples of the middle ages were the result of a mixture of many bloodlines of different nationalities. Han people in modern-day Hunan, for example, descend in part from the "Southern barbarians" (*Nan man*) of the middle ages.[32] The Sui and Tang dynasties witnessed the rise of the Jurchens, the Turfans, and the Huihe, as well as migrations by people from Persia and India, and the common presence of the Sogdians and Shatuo people. China, then, had already become a cultural community where Han and non-Han were mingled together. Foreigners did not necessarily see themselves as foreign, while the Han people did not necessarily see themselves as being absolutely superior to others.[33] Even the eldest son of the Emperor Taizong of Tang (r. 626–649) was particularly fond of "foreign styles" (*Hu feng*), with a passion for the Jurchens' language and customs.[34] In the core regions of China, many foreigners also rose to the highest ranks. Two examples can briefly illustrate this phenomenon. First, the members of the Gautama family from India served for several generations as high-level officials in the Tang dynasty who were engaged in technological questions.[35] Second, the rulers of the Sassanian dynasty in Persia, as well as their elites and religious figures, we able to become subjects of the Tang and even residents of the capital, Chang'an.[36] Many people of foreign nationalities or from other countries were blended into China, not only becoming Chinese people (*Zhongguo ren*) but also becoming people of the metropolitan capital.[37] It is because the bloodlines of people from distant places were blended with the Han nation that scholars such as Chen Yinke would argue that the prosperity of the height of the Tang dynasty came from "bringing in wild and vigorous blood from north of the into the decadent body of the central plains. The old diseases were driven out and new possibilities arose and unfolded, resulting in an unprecedented era."[38]

Second, in terms of the flow goods and objects, we learn from works such as Edward H. Schafer's *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand* (which is translated in Chinese under the title *Foreign Civilizations of the Tang Dynasty*) and Berthold Laufer's renowned *Sino-Iranica*[39] that, in the middle ages, all variety of goods made their way to China, including not just curios, medicines, perfumes, grapes, Amboyna wood, lotuses, and

the like, but also *baixi* (the "hundred entertainments," which included music, dancing, acrobatics, and so on), foreign dances, clothing, peppers and spices, and so on. All told, these good created an atmosphere in which, according to Yuan Zhen (779–831), "Foreign music, foreign soldiers, and foreign clothes have been everywhere for fifty years."[40] This point requires no further elaboration.

Third, in terms of religion, we have Buddhism from India and the western frontier, local religions that arose within China, and Zoroastrianism, Nestorianism, and Manichaeism, which came from lands even further away; all of these were incorporated into China. Whether on the western frontier, in Dunhuang, or in Chang'an, various religions came into conflict with one another and also blended with one another. To what extent did various cultures blend in with one another or come into conflict with one another? Here we might look to one example, *The Record of the Dharma-Jewel through the Generations* (*Lidai fabao ji*), a historical document on Chan Buddhism that was completed somewhere around Chengdu in the middle of the eighth century. The book records stories about the conflicts between Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Nestorianism, and shows that in Jibin (modern-day Xinjiang) conflicts arose between religions originating from South Asia, West Asia, and even Europe, and that these stories of conflict had not only made their way to the interior regions of China but had also stimulated the development of religious beliefs there.[41] What is more important, however, is that the many religions that made their way to China caused a crisis in traditional Confucian thought, and new ideas and culture gradually emerged from this sense of crisis and from attempts to resist foreign religions.[42]

In recent years, then, more and more scholars have spoken out against earlier historical accounts that described China as closed, inward-looking, and conservative. They have also weighed in against the idea that early modern China was forced to "respond" to Western "stimulus," arguing instead for an account that emphasizes China's long-standing openness across history. The year 2000 saw the publication of two notable books: first, the American scholar Valerie Hansen's *The Open Empire,* which argued through an examination of China in the Middle Ages that premodern China was a vibrant, vital, outward-oriented empire.[43] Second, in *The Sextants of Being,* a book on early modern China, the American

scholar Joanna Waley-Cohen also discussed the early global orientation in China, refuting arguments about a closed, inward-looking China with historical evidence from politics, religion, and trade.[44]

The Mixed, Multilayered State of Chinese Culture: The Song-Dynasty Transition

I have previously written about the emergence of a "China sensibility" in the Song dynasty and argued that the open attitudes toward race, culture, and religion that originally were found in ancient China (all of which overlapped with one another) underwent an important transformation during the Song dynasty. Han Chinese culture, which had been overlaid with many aspects of foreign cultures in the Middle Ages, was reconstructed, reordered, and stabilized once again, forming the Chinese cultural tradition that carries influence down to the present day. This tradition, of course, is both old and new.[45]

I noted earlier that, in the middle of the eighth century, non-Han national groups such as Turkic peoples, Persians, Sogdians, Huihe, Turfan, and Shatuo peoples arrived in great numbers because of wars in other places. Down through the middle of the tenth century (the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period), many different foreign groups made their way into central China. These migrations resulted in both ethnic and religious problems and presented a substantial threat to the Han civilization of central China. Although the Song began as a unified state, the non-Han political powers to the north, which included the Liao (Khitan), the Xia (Tangut), the Jin (Jurchen), and, later on, Mongolia, all posed a serious threat to Han political power. As the Japanese scholar Nishijima Sadao said:

> Although a unified state appeared during the Song dynasty, the Sixteen Prefectures of Yan and Yun (which includes modern-day Beijing) were occupied by the Khitans, the Xixia established a state in the northwest and fought with the Song, and both the Khitans and Xixia had parity with the Song in referring to their respective "emperors" (*Huangdi*). Moreover, the Song court made annual payments

> to the Liao (Khitan) and was constantly at a state of war with the Xixia. This state of international relations in East Asia, then, was quite different from the situation of the Tang dynasty, which ruled All-under-Heaven and bestowed the status tributary states on the countries that surrounded it. From this [that is, the Song] period onward, then, East Asia began to reject the idea that Chinese dynasties were at the center of the international order.[46]

When the self-centered ideology of All-under-Heaven suffered a setback, a self-centered nationalism arose. This development revealed a sharp contrast between the real world and the world of ideas: as the status and power of the nation and state were diminished, the self-consciousness of the nation and state grew ever stronger.[47]

This situation led to one of the great transformations in the history of Chinese culture: the rise of all-out efforts to protect and, eventually, to promote forcibly the spread of Han culture. During this era, the high level of suspicion toward the cultures of other national groups played a role in the formation of ideas about the "proper way of handling state affairs" (*guo shi*), or the overall intellectual and cultural consensus. As "China" was surrounded by "foreign" countries, it asserted its possession of its own space and delineated finite borders, thereby gradually forming, in cultural terms, a "country" or "state" (*guojia*). Han culture, coming under pressure from foreign cultures, no longer resembled the Tang dynasty or the dynasties that came before it, and no longer could freely open its territories and absorb great numbers of foreign peoples. Instead, China worked to establish its own unique traditions and clear territorial boundaries.[48]

These intellectual trends, which were focused on restoring the power of Han-ethnic dynasties and defending Han Chinese cultural traditions, arose during the middle of the Tang dynasty. Beginning with Han Yu (768–824), a trend that we might call "glorifying the throne and casting out barbarians" in the fields of politics and culture appeared among groups of educated elites who were beset by a deep sense of emergency. Chen Yinke has discussed five major areas of significance in Han Yu's work: the establishment of a Confucian orthodoxy (*daotong*); the sweeping aside of ornate and trivial writing styles; the rejection of Buddhist and Taoist

practices in politics and social customs; the improvement of writing styles to aid the dissemination of ideas; and the promotion of new men of talent who would disseminate his ideas. In terms of cultural history, Han Yu worked to reestablish the authority of Han-ethnic culture and to reject the infiltration of the cultures of other national groups.[49] This cultural orientation spread until, during the Song dynasty, we see the court of the early Song reestablishing court rituals, scholars of classical learning using the *Spring and Autumn Annals* to call for glorifying the throne and casting out barbarians, and historians reflecting on the rise and fall of the Tang dynasty and the social problems that arose in the Five Dynasties period. We then see a discussion about Confucian orthodoxy (*daotong*) that begins with the essay "On the Central Kingdom" (*Zhongguo lun*) by Shi Jie (1005–1045) and includes the work of Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), Zhang Heng (1025–1099), and Sima Guang (1019–1086). At the same time, we also see how, in addition to facing a new international order, Song-dynasty gentry elites also faced a domestic crisis of legitimacy. The cause of this crisis was simple: because this new dynasty was not an aristocratic authority with a natural hold on power, new justifications had to be provided to show why the Zhao family of the Song dynasty was a legitimate power and why the emperor was a sacred and authoritative figure. The presence of these issues explains why, from the very founding of the Song dynasty, it was important to conduct the sacrifices to Heaven, make sacrifices to the Earth Lord at Fenyin, ensure the appearance of messages from Heaven (*Tian shu*), go back to the Three Dynasties of Antiquity to establish appropriate rites and music, establish new policies, and guarantee that the court ruled All-under-Heaven together with the gentry elites.

People in ancient China always saw the Three Dynasties of Antiquity as the highest ideal that could be achieved. As a result, it was not only Song emperors such as Huizong and Zhenzong who were enthusiastic about the revival of ancient cultural traditions but also officials and gentry elites (whether conservative or radical, such as Wang Anshi and Zhu Xi) who also strongly advocated "unifying morality and customs" (*yi daode tong fengsu*). These ideals also influenced ordinary elite groups and exercised a deep influence over efforts to reestablish the cultural boundaries and intellectual guideposts of this empire.

Establishing a New Tradition for Han Chinese Culture: The Song-Dynasty Transformation and Beyond

Against this backdrop, the Song dynasty worked at both the level of the state (that is, the court) and (local) gentry to reestablish gradually a new cultural unity based on Han traditions and Confucian ethics. As I discussed in detail in the second volume of *An Intellectual History of China,* the state employed institutions, while the gentry employed moral education. These actions worked together to establish certain Confucian principles as the bedrock of ethics and morality. A system for ordering life that was based on these principles won support and was gradually spread out to all different regions. Filiality (*xiao,* also "filial piety"), which served as the basis for the family and clan system, and loyalty (*zhong*), which served as a fundamental concept for ordering the state, became overriding ethical values. Even religions that had foreign origins (including Buddhism and certain local practices) had to recognize at all times the presence of imperial power. The system of rites that originated in ancient Confucian ritual ceremonies was extended into the lives of the common people in all parts of the realm, becoming a new part of social customs. Some ways of living and habits that had been rejected by authoritative "culture" came to be recognized as wrong. For example, excessive drinking, love of beauty and sex, aggressive accumulation of wealth, and other excessive expressions of personality—"wine, women, avarice, and ill temper" (*jiu se cai qi*)—came to be seem more and more and shameful behavior. To explain this process in modern terms, we would say that in Han-ethnic China, the unity of ethics and morality was gradually established, and a universally recognized cultural world began to form, establishing the foundations of daily life for people in China.[50]

The remaking and cementing of "Chinese" culture as the culture of Han China during the Song dynasty in fact meant the re-creation, reestablishment, and normalization of those "Chinese" cultural characteristics that I described above. As proponents in the international scholarly arena of the idea of the "Tang-Song transformation" have pointed out, enormous changes took place between the Tang and Song periods, with Song-dynasty China becoming quite different from the Han and

Tang periods that had preceded it. Once there was a so-called Other (*tazhe*), China began to have a sense of what was "non-Other," which came to be seen as "Chinese" culture and "Han" traditions. There is no question that this culture would later become the mainstream of Han Chinese culture. Even so, this was not a complete or unchanging Chinese culture. For "China," however, this history was quite strange, as the Song dynasty re-created a culture based on the Han nation and reestablished an ethical system based on Confucian thought, thereby forming a consciousness of a Han "China."

It is especially worth pointing out that even though the Song dynasty re-created Han Chinese culture and formed new traditions, two other major transformations also occurred in the history of China. In Chinese history, the entry of Mongolians and the Manchu Qing into the core regions of Han Chinese culture and the subsequent rule of China by non-Han peoples again brought new foreign bloodlines and brought more of foreign cultures to China. These two dynasties also expanded China's territory beyond its original boundaries. As a result, in all three of these periods, it became much more difficult to define the limits of so-called Chinese culture.

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, following the years of Khitan and Jurchen rule in the northern areas of China proper, Mongolian culture made its way (along with the change in political power) throughout Han China. The cultures of these non-Han peoples had a deep influence on the cultural world of China, but even today we have not completed sufficient research on this century or more of "foreignization" and "Mongolization."[51] The founding emperor of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang, would later say that "When the Yuan occupied Hua-Xia [that is, China], they did not follow the rituals of Hua-Xia. Therefore, in the ninety-three years that they ruled, the customs of Hua [that is, China] died out, and human affairs fell into decadence."[52] Although Zhu was exaggerating, it is true that China foreign customs—dismissed as "rituals without hierarchy" and strange fashions in clothing and hair—were deeply influential.[53] It is said that the Han Chinese from the northern areas of China proper—even the gentry elites—were not particularly attuned to distinctions between Han and non-Han.[54] As a result, later scholars would lament that "the corruption of All-under-Heaven increased by the day,

and neither men of learning nor senior officials recognized what was happening."[55] Some bemoaned the way "the traditions remaining from the Song had been wiped out."[56]

Foreign cultures, then, layered onto and accumulated within Han culture. Mongolian hairstyles and fashions, "the dances and music of the Hu," and "Hu surnames and Hu personal names" all enjoyed popularity in Han China for nearly a century, so much so that "people's customs had changed for so long that they thought nothing strange of them."[57] When the peoples of the plains, who rode horses and carried swords, performed rituals that made no distinctions of hierarchy and enjoyed a lavish lifestyle when they took up residence in cities, they also posed a threat to Han cultural traditions. Likewise, with the intermarriage of Mongolians, Hui, and Han, both marriage and funerary traditions came to influence family life among the Han. After a century of Mongol rule, the Song dynasty's efforts to establish a unified morality and set of customs seemed to have been set back a great deal, because a deep intermingling of foreign culture and Han culture had already taken place. What had been come to be seen by Han cultural traditions as the most important markers of culture (clothing, customs, and language) and the most important aspects of cultural order (the divisions between the scholarly elite, the peasantry, craftspeople, and merchants, as well as the rural clan system) all developed serious problems. For these reasons, when the Han regained power at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, a movement for "de-Mongolization" took place under the new political regime. This movement discouraged wearing foreign clothing and using foreign surnames, and promoted the remaking of Confucian ritual, the restoration of Confucian social order, and a return of the cultural center to the original fifteen provinces of China proper. It seems that the early Ming worked to reestablish a Han version of All-under-Heaven, and the people of Ming believed that the cultural shifts of the early Ming were "the making of a new era, washing away a century of degraded customs. . . . They were able to return to the grandeur of the Three Dynasties of Antiquity and achieve what the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties could not."[58] Here it appears that the cultural world of the Middle Kingdom was once again stabilized and reestablished; once again, the boundaries of tradition Han culture were reaffirmed.[59]

It is important, however, to note another turn in this history, which once again broke the movement toward the reestablishment of a Han Chinese cultural tradition. As I noted in the Introduction, from the Manchu conquest of 1644 onward, China gradually became a multiethnic empire that included the Manchu, Han, Mongolian, Uighur, Tibetan, Miao, and other groups, and a variety of foreign cultural elements, including religious faith, modes of living, and intellectual outlooks were all gathered into the cultural system of the Great Qing. All the way down until the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, and to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there was no way to change this situation, and people accepted the call made by the last Qing emperor's edict of abdication to "combine all of the territories of the Manchus, Han, Mongolian, Hui, and Tibetans to form a great Republic of China." The state inherited the lands and territories of the Great Qing empire. This culture of "China," then, clearly had broken through what I previously discussed as the Han Chinese culture and its five characteristics.

Does the "plural" nature of Chinese culture, then, allow for the inclusion of Manchu, Mongolian, Hui / Uighur, Tibetan, and Miao culture? Currently, the fevered interest in China for national learning and traditional culture is running up against precisely this problem: in the face of a plural culture, national learning opts for a singular one.

On "China" as a Unique (Multi-)Nation-State

Right now many people in China advocate this national learning. Some say that national learning is the Five Classics of Confucian learning; others say that national learning is what Hu Shi called the "study of the national past" (*guo gu zhi xue*); and still others say that because modern China includes a variety of national groups and has inherited the massive territories of the Qing dynasty and the Republic of China, then we should have a "greater national learning" (*da guoxue*). To discuss this issue, I need to turn once again to what "China" means, because we have to ask: As a special kind of (multi-)nation-state, can China also exist as a complete historical world or cultural world?

My view is as follows. I oppose narrow nationalism and statism, and, in my historical research, I work to go beyond ossified borders of the nation and state. I must also point out, however, that the state (*guojia*) (or dynasty [*wangchao*]) still has considerable power to shape culture. This relationship between the state and culture is a notable characteristic of all countries in northeast Asia: in China, Japan, and Korea, political forces are much more powerful than they are in Europe, and the territorial boundaries of the state are much more stable than what is found in Europe. The national states of Europe only took shape in the early modern period, while the area of the central regions of China has been clearly known since the Qin and Han dynasties, even if the exact borders have been changing constantly. The same is true for the cultural spaces of the Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and the Ryukyus. As I noted before, in East Asia no single religion extended beyond the borders of individual states and superseded the power of the emperor, conditions were lacking for free travel and exchange between different states, and there was no transnational community of intellectuals in East Asia. In East Asia the boundaries between greater and lesser, inner and outer, and us and them were quite clear, and the role of the state (or dynasty) was huge, to the point that it functioned to set boundaries between cultures and create identities. This situation was quite different from what was found in Europe, where people came and went between different countries, ruling families intermarried, and knowledge circulated back and forth. Europeans not only shared the Greek and Roman cultural traditions but also shared a world of faith, unified by the great power of religion, under which the pope enjoyed greater power than the secular power of the king. For these reasons, although I laud efforts to view China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and the region of the East China Sea and South China Sea as a "mutually linked and entangled history,"[60] and to study the area as a single region, I am also concerned that scholars who are interested in "rescuing history from the nation" have overlooked the role of the state, the dynasty, and the emperor in the periodization of history and molding of culture. Likewise, we cannot blindly apply new theories while ignoring the fact that China is a nation-state (or multinational empire) with deep origins, one that is not only a stable historical space but also a stable cultural world.

As I noted earlier, as a cultural world, "China" or the Middle Kingdom did not become static once it had formed, but gradually spread outward in all directions from its center in the regions of the Yellow River and the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River. "Chinese culture" is not a single culture but is a community that formed as its core, Han culture, melded with many other cultures. We need to look at the problem in two ways, however. First, during the formation of the cultural worlds of the Qin and Han dynasties, the Song dynasty, and the Ming dynasty, these areas gradually formed the center and boundaries of Han Chinese culture. This was particularly the case during the Song and Ming dynasties, which gave rise to a very clear sense of (Han) "China" and an awareness of "foreign lands" (*waiguo,* that is, regions on the periphery), as well as the clear distinction of differences between Chinese (*Hua*) and foreign or "Barbarian" (*Yi*). Through the combined efforts of the Song and Ming courts and the gentry elites, these areas became relatively stable and solid, making the central regions of China (the so-called traditional eighteen provinces of China) protect this culture and gradually spread outward toward its periphery, forming a relatively distinct cultural world. Here we see that Han Chinese culture is the most important core of this culture. The Xiongnu, Xianbei, Turkic peoples, Mongolians, and Manchus, as well as the Japanese, Koreans, and Annamese were all influenced by this Han culture, and all Chinese dynasties, including the Liao, Jin, Yuan, and Qing treated Han culture as a legitimate and rational civilization through which to promote themselves and to establish their own political power.

I want to emphasize, however, that we need not insist on understanding everything within the frame of "Han assimilation" or "Sinicization." Chen Yuan, for example, argued in *The Sinicization of Peoples from the Western Frontier in the Yuan Dynasty* (*Yuan xiyu ren Huahua kao*) that after the Mongols took control of China, many different foreign national groups from the west and the north were assimilated into Han culture. Likewise, the Chinese American scholar Ping-ti Ho maintained that the Manchus would not have been able to rule China were it not for their eventual Sinicization. It is important to understand the backstory and the sentiments behind these ideas. Chen Yuan, a hard-core Han Chinese nationalist, wrote works during the during the national emergency of the Second

Sino-Japanese War that were filled with nationalist pride, such as *The Subtleties of Hu Sanxing's Commentary on the Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* (*Tongjian Hu zhu biao wei*) and *Investigations in New Folk Religions in Hebei during the Early Southern Song* (*Nan Song chu Hebei xin daojiao kao*). As for Ping-ti Ho, as a Chinese person in America he always emphasized the power of his culture, and his debate with Evelyn Rawski about Sinicization clearly shows his feelings as a Han Chinese person.[61]

Why is it so important today to emphasize this aspect of the question? It is important because different aspects of culture are constantly overlapping. When we look at history, although you can say that there were strong tendencies toward Sinicization during the Yuan among the peoples who came from the western frontiers, and that the Manchus also were strongly assimilated into the Han during the Qing, it also the case that Han traditions underwent changes during Mongol rule, just as the Manchu Qing wrought tremendous changes on Han China. Put in terms of fashionable theories of modernity, I suspect that the development of urban enterprises, entertainments, and lifestyles may have developed most quickly during these periods of so-called foreign rule: that is, during the Mongol Yuan dynasty and the Manchu Qing. Why is this the case? Because Han Confucian culture is founded on the order of rural society. Han Confucianism criticizes and resists the city's modes of living, order of daily life, and value orientations. The rapid development of cities during the Yuan may be the result of the fact that, for a period of time, Confucian ethics lost some of their power as a controlling force. The Mongol rulers did not fully apply Confucian values to govern life under their rule. For example, the flowering of drama and theater in the Yuan was closely related to urban growth and changes in the gentry elites' values. Those members of the elite who could not be officials went to live in the city and set aside their aspirations to "govern the state and bring peace to All-under-Heaven," and some became "idle people wandering about" (*youmin*), people of the market, protégés of the powerful, and libertines.[62] These people spurred an interest in writing for, performing for, and appreciating the theater. Likewise, to a certain degree the Qing also temporarily reduced the role of Confucian ethics as a controlling force in the *Lebenswelt* (even if, on the surface, the Qing emperors upheld Confucian

thinking). In the debate between Ping-ti Ho and Evelyn Rawski about Sinicization, both sides have made important points, but we should avoid going too far in either direction.

My view is shaped in part by the many accounts I have read of Koreans' tribute embassies to Beijing and other travels to China. Many accounts written by Koreans confirm that, because the Manchus ruled the state, it was the case that, although the upper levels of society and the Han gentry elites held on to their traditional values, during the Qing period great leaps of development took place in what we now call capitalism and modernity. For example, the process of urban commercialization was so strong that even high officials such as Grand Secretaries could go to the Temple of Abundant Blessings (Longfu si) to do business. Korean emissaries noticed that Han customs had gradually lost their pride of place, as they saw many things that were out of character with northern China, such as the intermingling of men and women, no separation of masters and servants, decadent lifestyles, a panoply of urban entertainments, clanging funeral music, and people flocking to worship Guan Yu and the Buddha while paying little heed to Confucian temples. All of these experiences led Korean embassies to believe that Han cultural traditions were on the wane after the Manchu Qing had gained power.

It seems to be the case, then, that the assimilation of foreign groups by the Han can also be seen as the dilution of the power of Confucian morality and ethics as a result of foreign rule. Should we call these events the foreignization of the Han? Or the assimilation of foreigners? Does the Chinese culture that we see today come only from traditional, Confucian Han culture, or do we include other new and "foreign" cultural elements?

Continuity and Discontinuity: Chinese Culture and the Western Challenge since the Late Qing

Tradition continuously stretches on and influences life today. The classics also continue to be reinterpreted and to this day serve as a source of our spirit. China is different from Europe in that, because of the spread of theology in the Middle Ages, there was a clear moment of discontinuity

in European history; it was only because of this discontinuity that a renaissance could take place through a rediscovery and reordering of the classics. Early modern Europe was originally established on the cultural traditions of ancient Greece and Rome and on the Christian faith, and, when each nation-state was established, it broke away, solidified, and took shape.

In the same period, however, China expanded outward from a central state to its peripheries; in terms of culture, it developed from one system into a combination of many. Within this culture, the traditions and classical texts of Han China from ancient times persisted across thousands of years. They were not truncated or broken for several reasons. First, the authority of the sages and the classical texts were established very early on and were always integrated with politics, which guaranteed the transmission of this culture and its ideas. Second, these texts and traditions borrowed the power of the political authorities and the examination system to ensure that they were preserved by educated people. Mainstream educated people took part in examinations on knowledge about these texts and traditions in order to reach the upper levels of society and to ensure their role and their position once they were there. Third, both official and private education, in places such as private academies and village schools, were always important, and this support combined with the support of political authorities. For these reasons, we were still on the thread of our traditions, history, and culture that extended for thousands of years—at least until the end of the Qing and the beginning of the Republic of China.

However, aside from the ongoing encounters with the cultures of other national groups, it was the movement of Western learning toward the East that began in the fifteenth century and, more important, the gunboats of the nineteenth century that changed traditional China's political and cultural orientation. Especially after the end of the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895, China began to speed up its turn to the West, and the worry and anxiety surrounding the pursuit of "wealth and power" became a continuous source of radicalism. The 1911 revolution, the May Fourth Movement, the Second Sino-Japanese War, the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the Cultural Revolution gradually changed cultural traditions handed down across the millennia, so much so that we often now understand the Western saying "the past is a foreign country,"

and it seems that traditional culture is far away from us. Nowadays most people would agree with the assessment offered by Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909), who argued that the entry of early modern Western culture into China resulted in "tremendous changes never before seen" and a "rupture" between China and tradition.

Here I will point out five important aspects of this rupture, with an example for each.

1. Although China continues to use the Chinese writing system, the characters, vocabulary, and grammar of modern Chinese have all undergone major changes. Modern Mandarin Chinese shows considerable influence of the spoken language used during the Mongol Yuan and Manchu Qing dynasties, but more important, the advocacy of written vernacular (*baihua wen*) during the May Fourth Movement caused traditional oral language to become part of the written language, which then was jumbled up with many, many new words from modern terminology or terms from Western languages. Whether in newspapers, documents, or spoken language, we often see old terms that took on new meanings, such as *jingji* (economics), *ziyou* (liberty or freedom), and *minzhu* (democracy), just as we see words that previously had never been part of the written language, such as "ideology" (*yishi xingtai*), "computer network" (*diannao wangluo*), various "-isms" (*moumou zhuyi*), and "layoff" (*xia gang*). If language is a means of understanding and transmitting meaning, then the world that is understood and expressed through modern Chinese is already quite different from that of tradition.[63]

2. Although some traditional family and clan organizations continue to be maintained in modern China—especially in the countryside—and Chinese people to this day place importance on the home, family, and following elders' wishes, the relationship between the family, society, and the state have changed. With many modern cities, modern transportation, modern information, and modern lifestyles, the social basis of traditional culture has already been broken apart in China. In the past, the spaces people lived in were courtyard houses, gardens, and farmhouses, and relations between people were determined by family, clan, and intermarried family groups. The relationships within and between families that were formed by these bloodlines were important and reliable: as it is said, "blood is thicker than water." The ethical order that was founded on

"separation between men and women, and clear authority between elder and younger" allowed the family, the clan, and the larger state to coexist peacefully. In *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society,* Fei Xiaotong argued that the fundamental social unit in China was different from the West: our pattern is not like "distinct bundles of straw" in the West, but rather "like the circles that appear on the surface of a lake when a rock is thrown into it."[64] Modern cities, transportation, and media have changed everything, however, and modern law requires equality between men and women and free marriage and divorce between one man and one woman. The close relationships and interdependency found in neighborhoods, villages, and clans disappeared in the face of calls for greater democracy and the process of urbanization. As a result, Confucian ethics and state ideology that had been established in this traditional society also lost much of their basis.

3. Since the late Qing period, Confucian thinkers have been challenged by Western democratic ideas and have gradually lost their hold on politics and political ideology. Likewise, Buddhism and Taoism have been challenged by Western scientific thought and have been the targets of campaigns to wipe out so-called superstition. As a result, they have retreated from the true world of faith, just as many other religions no longer retain their essential meaning and significance. Even though Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and other legal religions such as Islam and Christianity can coexist peacefully under the control of other political powers, this kind of ostensible unity of religions is not at all like ideas held during the Tang dynasty that advocated the mutual exchange of ideas, knowledge, and faith. Instead, it is the isolation of religion as a result of a high degree of political control.

4. Ideas, knowledge, and technologies concerning the relationship between humans and nature, Yin and Yang, and the Five Elements have been weakened in the face of challenges from modern Western science. As a result, they have separated gradually into different fields and relinquished their role in understanding both politics and the natural world. They have only retained their importance in areas where science remains inadequate, such as in medicine (Chinese medicine), geography (feng shui), and food and drink. Modern Chinese people no longer uphold ideas about the Yin and Yang and the Five Elements, and they even

do not follow traditional ideas about time such as the four seasons and the twenty-four divisions (*jie qi*) of the traditional calendar. China also no longer marks years on the calendar according to the dynasty or the emperor's reign, opting instead for the Western calendar. According to traditional beliefs, "If heaven does not change, the Tao does not change." In this view, adopting a different calendar system would change everything, much like changing the calendar to mark the beginning of a new emperor's reign.

5. Ever since the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the international order and the set of treaty relationships established in modern Europe has worked as part of the larger movement of the West into the East both to wipe out Chinese ideas of All-under-Heaven and the tribute system and to redefine the relationship between China and all the various countries of the world.[65] Even if China still holds on to some sense of itself as a kingdom at the center of All-under-Heaven, as Xu Zhuoyun (1930–) has argued, "It is because of this idea of China as the center of the world that, for thousands of years, China could not adjust to the idea of equal co-existence with other states. Right down to the early modern period, Chinese people seemed to be unable to get past this idea."[66] The world will change, however, and in this globalized era, the ancient Chinese worldview that was based on the cosmology of "round Heaven and square Earth" and the international order based on the tribute system lost its validity some time ago.

Conclusion: Rediscovering the Plurality of Chinese Culture across History

We can certainly understand the feelings that lie behind the recent surge of interest in traditional culture and national learning. I believe that three aspects of these developments are quite important: First among these is the desire to return to a different starting point, to escape the grip that Western culture has had on our ideas, our institutions, and our faiths since the early modern period and to return to the resources of traditional culture to seek a foundation for rebuilding modern Chinese values. The second is the search for identity. This means working, in an era when faith

is all but absent, to reestablish cohesion among "Chinese" citizens in their views on history, culture, values, and, especially, the state. The third is a new scholarly direction: an effort to extract China from a century of influence by Western scholarly institutions and find a new direction, whether in terms of the division of fields of knowledge, jargon used to express ideas, or in institutions that support research. On the surface, these ideas and feelings that lie behind the interest in traditional culture and national learning seem perfectly fine, but the problem lies in the fact that tradition is not fixed in place, and "China" is not singular.

First, culture forms across history, and history is always adding and subtracting from culture. By "addition," I refer to the borrowing of traditional resources to undertake creative interpretations of elements of foreign culture that are continuously encountered. This addition took place, for example, in the way educated people in China in the middle ages "matched meanings" (*ge yi*) of Indian Buddhism with local ideas, transforming foreign ideas into a part of Chinese thought. By "subtraction," I refer to the selective forgetting of aspects of native culture. Examples of this subtraction include the ways that, in ancient China, some customs that did not adhere to the moral order were remade, or, in modern China, the way that science was used to conduct campaigns against so-called superstition. For these reasons, we cannot say that a fixed, unchanging tradition exists.

Second, I also want to remind people that the history of ancient China demonstrates the plurality of Chinese culture; ancient China contained many different national groups and many different cultural elements. Even if the Qin and Han Empires gave rise to a core of Han culture, the repeated addition of foreign people and foreign cultural elements created new complexity and richness. By the time of the Song dynasty, the state and the gentry elites, facing the international environment and external pressures, took actions that gave rise to a cohesion of Han Chinse culture, which, in turn, began to give prominence to the divisions of inner and outer and self and other in the Chinese cultural world. During the Mongol Yuan dynasty, however, China once again mingled with foreign peoples, and the layering of cultures resulted in a new and hybrid culture. After a period of "de-Mongolization" in the early Ming dynasty, Han Chinese culture may have solidified again, but the establishment of the

Great Qing Empire brought another expansion of territories and peoples and new layers of culture. Because ancient China was a cultural community in which all streams flowed into one, and China now is also a (multi) national state, we must therefore recognize the plurality of Chinese culture.

Finally, in the late Qing and early Republican period, China underwent tremendous changes never before seen in two thousand years, events that marked a moment of discontinuity in Chinese culture. Of course, in the present we do need to reacquaint ourselves and discover new aspects of tradition, but we also need to understand that, since tradition is continuously changing, the ways that modern values can reassemble traditional culture is a major problem. As others have said in the past, "Tradition is the living resources of the dead; traditionalism is the shackles of the living." An inflexible, "fundamentalist" approach to preserving an imagined tradition is simply a way to refuse any and all progress.

I can sense at a very deep level that the growing anxiety in China, which makes extremely strong demands to "develop and spread" (*hongyang*) Chinese tradition, Chinese perspectives, and Chinese values, can be traced back to the way that, from the late Qing and early Republic onward, people have had stronger and stronger feelings about the need to pursue "wealth and power," to highlight memories of the glorious dynasties of the past. All of these sentiments are the reason why, for more than a hundred years, China has traded one article of fashionable clothing for another. Mao Zedong said, "Ten thousand years is too long; we must seize the day." This is an important image, because it carries a deep sense that "backwardness must be combated" and poverty and weakness must "have its hold on the world broken." As China "rises," then, it becomes essential in the eyes of many to show the world that our vast country has not only taken its place among the so-called great nations of the world but also should have a commanding position, specifically in terms of culture. What concerns me is exactly this "tradition fever" (*chuantong re*) and "national learning fever" (*guoxue re*) in China. I believe we absolutely cannot allow these strong sentiments to turn tradition fever and national learning fever into scholarly practices or forces that mobilize nationalism or statism.