

Introduction

STEVAN HARRELL

The essays in this book speak to anyone who would like to question the idea that the existence of China has been inevitable for a very long time, or is puzzled about why there is no immediate solution to the issue of Tibetan independence, or would like to know why the study of minority peoples—only 8 percent of the People's Republic and only 1.5 percent of Taiwan—can tell us important things about the history and the present of China as a whole. They also speak to anyone who revels intellectually in the complexity and potentiality of social relations in the real world. The essays, by nine anthropologists and a social historian, all address related facets of the shifting and fluid process of negotiation that is the real nature of ethnic relations in China, past and present, and by extension in the rest of the world also.

The Negotiated Nature of Ethnic Identity

In the last few years of the twentieth century, the world seems consumed with the politics of identity. Contention among groups for economic and political resources captures an enormous amount of attention in the world press, as more and more boundaries are drawn and solidified. The Balkans are once again Balkanized, with Bosnia splitting into three (or is it two?) republics, Macedonia standing by itself but provoking Greek resentment because of its name, and Albanians nursing grievances in Kosovo, the reputed cradle of Serbianity. Armenians fight to the death over Karabakh where, they tell us, there were no Turks (Azeris) at all until the eighteenth century. Kurds struggle unsuccessfully for independence from Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, but at least attain the consolation prize of recognition in the world press as a "nationality." Quebec may or may not secede from Canada, but it is at least recognized as a "unique society" with a separate culture, and

actually outlaws non-French-language signs. In the United States, ethnic consciousness is variously promoted and derided as a source of pride and a source of conflict, while self-appointed representatives of ethnic and racial groups contend over the results of the last census and the categories to be employed in the next one. In Europe, on the other hand, boundaries are softening. German troops are cheered as they take part in a Bastille Day parade on the Champs Élysées; Catalonia, with no opposition from Madrid, advertises itself in the world press as "a country in Spain with its own language, history, and traditions"; and even in England, now joined to the Continent by the Chunnel, people begin to think of themselves as Europeans.

We see the actors in this drama-cycle of Mahabharatian complexity as members of collectivities—nations and ethnic groups. An ethnic group can be defined as a group of people that shares a putative common origin through descent and a putative commonality of cultural features such as language, food, clothing, and customs that distinguish it from other ethnic groups (Keyes 1981; Nagata 1981; Harrell 1990). Some ethnic groups are also nations, possessing in addition to a common origin and culture the claim to state sovereignty. The relationship of a nation to its own ethnic parts can take various forms: it can be mono-ethnic (such as Korea or Denmark); it can have a single, dominant ethnic group but preserve a varying number of rights for minorities (as in Turkey, Japan, or Malaysia); or it can be ideologically poly-ethnic, with equal rights theoretically granted to members of all ethnic groups, as in the cases of the United States, China, Singapore, Tanzania, or Belgium. Similarly, an ethnic group can be nearly coterminous with a nation (though it always allows for the possibility of emigration) as in Japan or Poland; it can be one of several groups making up a nation, as Bretons in France or Navajos in the United States; or it can spread across several countries, as do Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, or Basques in France and Spain.

In the Western press, and in the ideologies of most states in the contemporary world, including the People's Republic of China, this complex patchwork of relations among nations and ethnic groups is seen as a struggle over resources among groups already in existence. For example, the current Bosnian war is often portrayed as a situation in which members of disparate ethnic groups—Serbian, Croatian, and Muslim—lived side by side in peace, interacting and intermarrying, as long as the retrospectively benevolent hand of Tito's dictatorship cradled them firmly, but

revived old slights and ancient hatreds as soon as land, local power, and relationships with powerful outsiders went up for grabs with the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Similarly, the Levant (to revive an old and hopefully neutral term) is seen as the battlefield and—just maybe—the site of peace between Israelis and Palestinians, each of whom were there from time nearly immemorial. The ideology of the People's Republic of China starts from a similar assumption—that the fifty-six official *minzu* (nationalities) who make up China's population all have their own "long and glorious histories" leading up to their participation in socialist China today.

What this commonsense view of ethnic relations leaves out is the fact, readily apparent when one looks closely and without prejudice, that these groups, whether they be ethnic groups, nations, or something in between, are not rigid in their membership, not fixed in their identity, not unbroken in their history. It is not just their respective positions and rights to resources that are the subject of conflict and negotiation, alliance and opposition, but also their constitution and their very existence. There were no Israelis or Palestinians in 1900, for example, only Jews and Muslims, identities that are much wider and less territorially based than the current national ones. People who were once Serbs began to identify themselves in a national sense as Yugoslavs in the 1960s and 1970s; now their descendants may well be calling themselves Serbs again. "Asian/Pacific Islander," a spectacularly broad identity that includes Pakistanis and Samoans, Indonesians and Koreans, is emerging as a basis for coalitions in U.S. politics because it has become a census category.

The fluidity and changeability of ethnic categories are due to a characteristic of identity pointed out most cogently by Bentley (1987): the fact that identity is ultimately a subjective state and that subjective states are characteristic of the habitus of individuals. One acts as a Serb or a Kurd or a Korean only if one feels that one is indeed a member of that group. And the habitus of individuals is generated by their growing up in a complex world of multivalent social relationships. For some people, there is never a reason to question, during their entire lifetimes, their status as Japanese or Poles or Basques; but for others, the possibilities are multiple. One might in one situation be a Spaniard, in another a European, in a third a Basque. One might grow up thinking of oneself as not much more than a citizen of the United States, an American, and then a personal or political incident can

arise to make one aware of a different identity, as a Jew who is the victim of anti-Semitism, for example, or as a Native American eligible for affirmative action. The reason, then, why groups change their membership or their claim on the loyalties of their members is that individuals have social ties to a variety of groups, some of which may appear, change, or vanish during the individuals' own lifetimes.

The multivalency and fluidity of individual identities is what makes people susceptible to manipulation by leaders attempting to build loyalty and accumulate followers according to the characteristics of ethnicity—purported common descent and purported cultural commonality. Many people must have been content to be Yugoslavs until Milosević came along and pointed out that they were persecuted as Serbs; Chinese, Japanese, Thai, and Korean Americans were just that until Asian identity became a force for political and social change in the 1960s. Manipulation by political leaders is, of course, only sometimes successful; success depends partly on the degree of preexisting emotional attachment people feel toward the identity being promoted and partly on the resources promised as rightfully theirs by the manipulative leaders. Asian American identity has only partly caught on, and Italian American identity, though a force in the ethnic politics of certain eastern U.S. cities, fell flat as a basis for civil-rights mobilization in the late 1960s.

This fluidity and manipulability of identity leads to the primary lesson to be drawn from the essays in this volume: any government that wishes to gain the loyalty of its citizens must convince them that they are citizens by virtue of their historical and cultural attachment to the nation and that this attachment is a long, glorious, and immutable one. A government must not simply ignore, it must also actively attempt to hide, the fluid, multivalent nature of ethnic identity. It does this, ordinarily, by constructing narratives of national unfolding, what Homi Bhabha (1990, 1) calls "the attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress" or what Benedict Anderson (1991, 195) characterizes as "the process of reading nationalism genealogically—as the expression of an historical tradition of serial continuity." These narratives of unfolding are stories of the processes by which an ancient people has come down through the ages as agent, as victim, as subject and object, but most importantly as a unity. Any narrative of unfolding must replace the factual history of fusion

and fission, alliance and conflict, and above all of negotiation, that is the real process of the origin, development, and demise of ethnic groups and nations. In replacing a history of negotiation with a narrative of unfolding, a government must make it look as if there is no choice but to be a loyal subject.

At the same time, it is not only governments that need to create this kind of narrative and make it seem natural in order to succeed. Leaders of ethnic collectivities that claim to be nations but have no state (such as Kurds or, until recently, Palestinians) or even of collectivities that have made no claim to statehood (such as Yokut or Navajos or Asian Americans) must also create a narrative that makes being a member of that ethnic group seem inevitable, important, and satisfying to potential members so that they can mobilize people behind their political agendas. In doing so, these leaders must, like governments, actively hide the fluidity and changeability of identity and group membership. The successes of such governmental and other ethnic leadership efforts are, however, bound to be partial in the long term. As Bhabha (1994, 149) points out, "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb these ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities. For the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of the anxieties of its irredeemably plural modern space."

The same can be said of ethnic groups as of nations: new identities, based on individuals' perceived commonalities with certain people and on their differences from others, arise as the structure of local communities, kin groups, and languages and their patterns of usage changes with demographic, economic, and cultural change. A government or an ethnic leadership may be successful in the short or medium run (England, so far, has a much longer record of success at this than France, for example, and France than Germany; "Yugoslav" identity lasted only a couple of decades), but even identities that last a long time change their bases of unity and their content. Dynasties have come and gone in Morocco, but they did not previously speak French; the discouragement in France and outright banning in Quebec of English in public places suggests that the leaders of France and Quebec are conspicuously afraid of losing their claim to being leaders of historically inevitable collectivities, that they realize the messy and sometimes unpredictable nature of the real process.¹

The essays in this volume are about how this process of hiding the history of negotiation behind the narrative of unfolding—even as negotiations continue to take place that may or may not eventually undermine the narrative—has taken place in China. As such, it concerns itself both with the overarching identity, first cultural and then national, that we now call “Chinese” and with its constituent ethnic identities, including both the majority, which we now call “Han,” and various minority or peripheral identities that have at various times been included in the larger Chinese collectivity. In each case, the authors of the essays stress both the fluidity of the process that creates “Chinese” and its constituent identities and the partially successful narratives of central and ethnic leaders who try to hide that fluidity and to prevent people from questioning the assumptions behind the narrative of unfolding.

Negotiating “Chinese” Identity

There has never been a rigid boundary around the category “Chinese.” Since earliest times, the people who have called themselves Hua or Xia or Zhongguo ren (people of the countries in the middle) or, of late, Han, have held an ideology of both cultural superiority and inclusivist expansionism, conducting what I have elsewhere called a “civilizing project” (Harrell 1994), an attempt to bring the benefits and responsibilities of their own purportedly superior civilization to the presently inferior people around their periphery. They have met, at different times, with various degrees of resistance or accommodation, but the general trend has been one of expansion of both population and geography, particularly toward the southern frontiers. And the boundary has always been a gradual rather than an abrupt one. The core has consisted of those culturally closest to the literati ideal of civilization or, in more recent times, to the “advanced culture” of the Han. Those around the periphery, if they approached closely enough to the center’s cultural ideals, might be included in the category of *shu-fan*, or “cooked barbarians,” those whose foreign ancestry was not

narrative versions of it. Not all events that transpired are recoverable to write or speak about, but it is important, I think, to expose ideology for what it is—a conscious falsification, a conscious selection of some of the available evidence over some of the rest of it to induce people to believe a single version of the past, a version often farther from what really happened than other versions that have a less overt political purpose.

in doubt, but who had come far enough in the civilizing process to participate in the civilized order.

As Brown shows in her reconstruction (chapter 2) of how this process worked among the plains Aborigines of southwestern Taiwan during the Zheng (1661–83) and Qing (1683–1895) periods, the actual course of identity transformation has been a complex one. Intermarriage, migration, and changes in habits and customs from one generation to the next have led individuals, families, and sometimes whole communities to change their identity from something else to Chinese. In some cases the identity change has come before the cultural change is complete (what Brown calls the “short route” to becoming Chinese); in other cases cultural change, though it happened slowly, has been almost complete before people began to identify themselves as Chinese (what Brown calls the “long route”). But as Ebrey (chapter 1) demonstrates for a long sweep of Chinese history, from the Northern and Southern dynasties (311–589) to the end of the imperial era and beyond, once a group of people was accepted as “Chinese,” the complexity, indeed the very existence, of this process has been disguised by the construction of a Chinese ancestry in the form of a surname and a genealogy tracing that surname to remote historical or proto-historical periods. If Ebrey’s assertion that possession of a Chinese single-character surname is what includes a person or a lineage in the category of “Chinese” is true, it is a perfect example of the superimposition of a narrative of unfolding (in this case, the unfolding of a patriline) upon a messy history that included flight, fight, intermarriage, and a host of other nongenealogical processes. The Taiwan ex-Aborigines, as Brown points out, may reveal when asked that their ancestors were *huan-a* (barbarians), but they all have Chinese surnames now, and their official record, embodied in genealogical books in the style recommended by Zhu Xi of the Song dynasty, usually trace their origins to some province on the mainland of China.

The current Chinese People’s Government also takes part in this genealogical construction of the Chinese nation, in this case explicitly including both Han and *shaoshu minzu*, or “national minorities” (who might best be defined as barbarians within the political borders of the People’s Republic who have become “cooked by burning” [*shao shu le*] either before or after the imposition of the Communist government), when it appeals for unity among all of *Yan Huang zisun*, or “descendants of [the mythical] emperor Yan, or Shen Nong.” As Ebrey points out, at whatever

level this patrilineal narrative of unfolding is imposed, it selects one (the patrilineal one) among 2^n actual biological ancestral lines, conveniently leaving out the 2^{n-1} lines that involve mothers and intermarriage, just as it selects one cultural line (the Chinese one) among the many cultural inheritances and interactions that have occurred among the generations of ancestors of any currently Chinese person.

This kind of narrative also ignores the contribution of what were originally non-Chinese cultural, even linguistic, strains to that identity that has become accepted as Chinese. Brown, again, provides a good example, showing that most of the "former Aborigine" women of southwestern Taiwan did not bind their feet and yet were counted in the Japanese colonial censuses of the early twentieth century as Chinese. Hakka women in late imperial China, of course, did not bind their feet either, and it may well be that this difference from standard practice was a "matrilineal" or "affinal" vestige of some part of their identity, since Hakka were almost certainly the descendants of intermarriages between Chinese immigrants and local people, even though by the Qing dynasty they were full participants in the examination system, in commercial guilds, and in other aspects of the core Chinese civilization.

The fact that Cantonese speakers in Guangdong often considered the Hakka to be less than fully Chinese and that, even in the examination system, they had a separate, ethnic-based quota, illustrates another point about the boundary between Chinese and non-Chinese: it was a frontier zone rather than a sharp border. The Hakka may have been more "inside" than various kinds of "cooked barbarians," but they were more "outside" than other kinds of Han. And the "cooked barbarians" were more "inside" than the *sheng fan* or "raw barbarians," savages who were as yet beyond the reach of much civilizing influence and, as Ebrey points out, did not have surnames and thus lacked a patrilineal connection to Chinese society, at least until the Communists ideologically "cooked" them, even giving them surnames as well if they went to school.

For many people, this patrilineal narrative of unfolding is definitive at any given time; certainly the great majority of people in the heartland of China give no thought to the possibility of being anything but Chinese. Still, like all hegemonic narratives, it is tentative at the edges. For example, an increasing number of people in Taiwan, while acknowledging the Chinese origin of the

cultures and languages of that island, are beginning to identify themselves with a Taiwanese nation, rejecting not the content but the hegemonic value of the patrilineal narrative of unfolding, even as they visit their own relatives in Fujian and Guangdong provinces. (In recent polls, close to 50 percent are now in favor of political independence for Taiwan.)

As Ren shows (chapter 3), these people are trying to replace the genealogical narrative of unfolding with a geographical narrative of the unfolding of an island through its experiences as a place of invasion and resettlement, a victim of five countries' colonialism, and a pioneer first of economic development and now of experimentation with free speech and democracy in East Asia.

As Ren also points out, however, identity politics in Taiwan today is in the middle of a period of intense and complex negotiations, whose short-term outcome is still very much in doubt. Opposed to the localistic narrative as embodied in the epic poem *Island Nostalgia* and the planned memorial for the victims of the Nationalist Army's February 28 Massacre of 1947 is the older, still-powerful government discourse of Chinese culture, which has been modified in recent years to embrace, rather than exclude, localisms such as the Minnan language and certain folk religious practices. And visits to the mainland, which have become the norm for Taiwanese people since 1988, have sent an ambivalent message: kinship ties exist, but political and economic history, especially that of the last forty-nine years, may have a stronger pull and render irrelevant any genealogical connection between the Taiwanese and the Emperor Yan.

Negotiating Ethnicities in the People's Republic

In present-day Taiwan, the relative weakness of the government's position since Jiang Jingguo (Chiang Ching-kuo), not known as a democrat, decided to democratize his country in the final months of his life in 1987 has meant that the government has increasingly had to try to co-opt, rather than reject, the sentiments of local identity. In the People's Republic, the government's position, at least until now, has been somewhat stronger, since there is no democracy, little opportunity for free expression, and central or provincial control of most economic and bureaucratic resources. But even in the most centralized and repressive period, from 1957 to 1979, there was some room for local ethnic discourses to develop; and since the institution of the relatively liberal reform

policies in 1979, the complexity of the negotiating process has once again become clearly apparent in several kinds of cases described by the authors in the remaining essays in this volume. In one type of case, which includes those of the Mongols and Tibetans, the parties negotiating on behalf of local identities have some claim to historical nationhood, and the negotiations thus involve both the question of the boundary between Chinese and non-Chinese and the question of relationships between different parts of the Chinese nation. In a second type of case, represented here by the Utsat, the locals have no claim on nationality, but they do have a strong case for attachment to groups outside China. In the third type—the cases of the Naxi, Ge, and Prmi—locals are purely ethnic groups, with no claim of nationhood, and the negotiations thus center on the composition and interrelationships of groups internal to the larger category of Chinese. Even in these cases, however, the very fact that scholars such as Chao, Cheung, and Harrell are writing about the Naxi, Ge, and Prmi in an international forum such as this book means that the negotiations have a global aspect.

The first kind of case, represented here by the Tibetans and the Mongolians, is perhaps the most surprising, if for no other reason than that separatism or independence is not the crucial issue in the communities examined. Whatever may be their private opinions, the Tibetan educators portrayed by Upton (chapter 4) are clearly working to develop a locally and/or culturally based Tibetan culture and identity within China, certainly a goal that is approved and has been in various ways actively promoted by the central government, which attempts to build modern China as a *tongyi de duominzu guojia*, or “unified country of diverse nationalities.” Even the ethnic lyric of longing, “Snow Mountain Tears,” was originally written in Chinese and only translated (badly, by some reports) into Tibetan. But the educators and entrepreneurs who camp on the grasslands with their VCR and discuss plans for local education are simply one faction within the local Tibetan community, illustrating the important point that negotiations over identity take place not only between the center and representatives of local groups but also among factions within the local groups themselves (a point even more graphically demonstrated by Chao’s discussion of Naxi intellectuals and dongba culture). At the same time, particular interest groups attempt to speak for a wider community: the educators and businessmen of Aba Prefecture, for example, did not represent themselves as mere leaders of

a particular part of northeast Tibet or northwest Sichuan, but continually emphasized their Tibetanness to Upton and constantly urged her to travel around so that she could see the whole of the Tibetan culture that they were claiming metonymically.

The process of negotiation of part-whole relationships, and particularly of who speaks for what group, is also illustrated graphically in Khan’s essay (chapter 5) on who are the Mongols. The image of Mongols that has seemingly existed for centuries and is now popularized in textbooks, television programs, local fairs, and foreign-language publications portrays them as the herders of the boundless steppes: dressed in silk robes, always mounted or in the vicinity of a horse, living in yurts, drinking milk-tea, and eating mutton. Chinggis Khan (also, incidentally, portrayed as a great Chinese hero, emphasizing that the Mongols are part of the larger category), who reportedly never wanted to live in a city at all, is the forerunner of these brave nomadic herders. There are even radio programs designed to help herders with animal husbandry, but none for farmers or agriculture. As Khan points out, however, there have been sedentary, agricultural Mongols for hundreds of years, and in present-day Inner Mongolia well over half the Mongols are farmers, though this fact is rarely mentioned.

The paradox of this romantic image is that it has been negotiated between the central government and a group of Mongolian intellectuals and cadres, most of them urban born and bred, often literate only in Chinese, and quite frequently at a total loss on horseback. The herders themselves probably have little objection to being portrayed as the archetypal Mongols, but they are in a sense the “ground” (Mani 1987) of ethnic discourse, not speaking for themselves but simply acting as a chip in the negotiations of identity. The Mongolian farmers, of course, are even less well represented, having had neither their own nor others’ voices to represent their interests or portray the nature of their identity, until Khan came along in this volume.

Borchigud’s essay (chapter 6) illustrates the effect of this static narrative of essential “Mongolity” on those who are subsumed by it. She and Khan both report that most Chinese, even long-distance train travelers and college students, who must be counted among the most educated of the general populace, assume that Inner Mongolia is a far-away place where people even in the towns go to work on horseback, where no one speaks Chinese, and where there would probably be no such thing as a university. Some Han have even confused Inner Mongolia, which is politically

part of China, with the Mongolian Republic, which has been an independent country since 1923. At the same time, however, this discourse is not fully hegemonic either, especially not within the population of Inner Mongolia. In the cities, Borchigud reports, two local identities are emerging, and perhaps converging. One of these overrides ethnic distinctions: Han residents of Hôhhot are beginning to consider both themselves and Mongolian residents of Hôhhot primarily as Neimeng ren (people from Inner Mongolia), and many of them are showing little ethnic consciousness, since, they say, they all speak the same language (Chinese) and follow most of the same customs, and there is increasing intermarriage between the two groups. The children of these marriages, however, will almost invariably be designated as Mongols, since this may give them the opportunity to be admitted to certain colleges with lower examination scores and eventually to have more children of their own. People here are not so much rejecting the state-imposed narrative of separate ethnic histories within a greater Chinese nation as co-opting it for their own purposes.

Some of the urban Inner Mongolians, then, are experiencing a situation like that of the people of Taiwan (Ren, chapter 3), where the shared experience of a place is more important in determining their identity than membership in a patriline. The difference is that the Inner Mongolian counternarrative, while flirting briefly in the 1980s with a separatism similar to that of Taiwan, a separation that would bring them together with the Mongolian Republic in a Greater Mongolia, floundered in the late 1980s on the recognition that people from the Mongolian Republic did not consider the Sinophone Hôhhotians to be true Mongols. Inner Mongolians thus had no choice but to throw in their lot with China, but in a context of wishing for much greater regional autonomy than the center would probably grant willingly. It is this retreat from an imagined transnational community that has led to the emergence of a local identity for Mongolians. Mongolian residents of Inner Mongolia use "Obor Mongolcuud" to refer only to ethnic Mongols. As Borchigud points out, however, by consciously distinguishing themselves from ethnic Mongols in the Mongolian Republic, they are, consciously or not, emphasizing their Chinese citizenship. It may be that these two emerging "Inner Mongolian" identities will eventually converge, at least in urban areas, if the importance of a shared experience of place (and language) overcomes the importance of patrilineal ties.

This situational multiplicity of identities (Mongol or Inner Mongolian or Chinese citizen, applying to the same person at different times or in different contexts) is illustrated even more clearly by the case of the Utsat, described by Pang (chapter 7). This small Muslim group, living in a few villages on the south shore of Hainan Island, presents a different kind of case from that of the Tibetans and Mongols described above, since the Utsat, while having a clear connection in at least some narratives with people outside China, still have no claim whatsoever to separatism or statehood. They are Utsat only in their own private historical narrative of arrival from the Southeast Asian empire of Champa in the twelfth or thirteenth century. To most Hainanese, the Utsat are simply *huan-nang*, or "barbarian people," but in the official state narrative of China, which divided the population of the country into fifty-odd recognized *minzu* in the 1950s and 1960s, they are a local subgroup of the Hui. Linguists have even proposed that their Austronesian language be designated "Huihui Hua," the same name given to the Arabic and Persian vocabulary borrowed into regional Chinese dialects by Muslims in the Northwest (Gladney 1991, 393-421). It is important to point out in this context, however, that this triple identity, negotiated up to the 1950s and stable since then, is seemingly not a problem to most of the Utsat people. It has generated not a counteridentity but a fourth contextual one in the 1980s, when meetings with Southeast Asian Chams linked the Utsat with a kin-based narrative of descent from the Champa empire. This case illustrates clearly, I think, that negotiations need not take place in a zero-sum context, where the state has one idea about identity and the locals have another. In this case, all the identities, including the state-imposed one of Hui, are acceptable and in some situations useful to Utsat people.

Unlike the Utsat, the Naxi intellectuals of Lijiang, discussed in chapter 8 by Chao, have no significant contact with foreign "relatives," and unlike the Mongolians or Tibetans, they have no significant claim to nationhood. Their project is thus to promote their identity in a purely ethnic, rather than nationalist, context, and their problem becomes one of compiling a narrative that is at once compatible with the ideology put forth by the dominant powers in the central government and still able to create and channel cultural and ethnic pride in some sort of Naxi heritage. What the negotiations produce is a compromise. On the one hand, they have established the Dongba Research Institute to

promote dongba culture—to narrate the unfolding, over the centuries, of native science, literature, and arts through the practice of rituals and the development of knowledge embodied in the Naxi pictographic script, traditionally known only to the dongbas, or ritual specialists, of whom there are very few left. To select what has become known as dongba culture from the eclectic mix of Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese folk religion, Daoism, and indigenous folk beliefs that existed in Naxi society before communism is once again to conceal a complex reality behind a straightforward narrative of the unfolding of a particular native essence.

On the other hand, it is agreed by the promoters of the Dongba Institute that the “real Naxi” are not those who live in Lijiang town, which is overly Hanified, but rather the poor villagers living in the remote mountainous regions, who have little to do with the effort of ethnic narration that is carried out on their behalf (as with the Mongolians and Tibetans) by a small coterie of urban intellectuals who are much more part of the general Chinese culture than are the people they are representing. And to strengthen the case for their particular paradoxical version of what it means to be Naxi, these intellectuals engage the help of foreign scholars such as Chao and others, many of whom have conducted research in Naxi areas over the past few years. Even though there are essentially no Naxi in other countries, it is still possible to use foreign connections as a weapon in the negotiations over the true nature of Naxi identity.

Foreign connections serve as a negotiating chip in a quite different way for the Ge, a small group in southeastern Guizhou described in chapter 9 by Cheung. The Ge were identified officially in the 1950s ethnic identification project (*minzu shibie*) as a branch of the Miao, a designation that almost all Ge dispute and resent. Since the 1980s, when discourse on identity became possible once again, local leaders have engaged in a constant effort to have their official identity changed to Ge. They have petitioned government agencies at several levels, compiled scholarly materials on their history, even threatened to refuse to participate in cultural performances, all to no avail so far, because the State Nationalities Commission has refused since 1979 to grant *minzu* status to any previously unrecognized groups. They have a new weapon, however, in foreign (and to an extent also domestic) tourism. The prefectural government of Southeast Guizhou has recently made great efforts to develop ethnic tourism in the area, and at least one of the communities visited for cultural

performances is a Ge village not far from the city of Kaili. Leaders and others in this village are now taking their case for a separate Ge identity to the international arena through the tourists who visit them; whether this is a successful negotiating strategy remains to be seen, since they are often identified as Miao to tourists who cannot speak Chinese.

In the Ge case, then, we have two competing narratives of unfolding, one that identifies the Ge as an independent group with its own history, and the other that tells their story as a branch of the Miao. In the final case considered in this volume (chapter 10), Harrell takes up the case of the Prmi, a group of about fifty thousand people in Sichuan and Yunnan who also have two competing narratives. In Sichuan, the Prmi are Zangzu, or “Tibetans”; they identify themselves as such to outsiders when speaking Chinese, they learn written Tibetan in school in some areas, and their most educated young people often go to Lhasa to study. In Yunnan, on the other hand, the Prmi are the Pumi, a separate *minzu* whose history is testified to by references in orthodox Chinese historiography from the *History of the Later Han* to the present. Historical contingency alone makes the Prmi Zang in one province and Pumi in another; in both cases the identities were negotiated between local and central political leaders in the 1950s. The remarkable thing about this case is that, in contrast to the Ge situation described by Cheung, no Prmi to whom either Harrell or European anthropologist Koen Wellens (n.d.) has spoken has any problem with this dual identity. Neither scholar has discovered much contention or argument, and in fact Prmi who are Zangzu and Prmi who are Pumi have begun to collaborate on several projects both of scholarship and of economic development.

Once again, the process of negotiating identities is not necessarily an adversarial one; instead, in the Prmi case as in so many others, the process covers up a complex history with a simple narrative of unfolding. Even though there are two separate narratives, they are both conscious oversimplifications of the facts of the case. Prmi, as far as we can tell historically, originally came from the north, but they have been settled in the Yunnan-Sichuan border area for a long time. Because they were politically and religiously situated on the frontiers of Tibet, they could become Zang in Sichuan; because they were separate linguistically and culturally from all their neighbors, they could become a separate *minzu*. Once this happened, the two narratives of unfolding began to diverge.

Implications

There has been much recent scholarship on the question of what it means to be Chinese, who is Chinese and who is not, and what distinguishes Chinese from other people. During the heyday of the Maoist orthodoxy, the questions were muted, at least for the territories ruled or claimed by the People's Republic: everybody inside was Chinese. This led to a situation described by Tu Wei-ming (1991), who maintained that, in defining Chineseness, the periphery, by which he meant the areas outside the People's Republic—Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the emigrants of the Chinese diaspora—had been central. Nowhere but on the periphery could the question be raised openly or productively. But the decline of Maoist orthodoxy in recent years has, if anything, increased the importance of the periphery as the questions raised there can now be asked about the entire Chinese world. Culture, language, territory, genealogy—all can be claimed as basic or discarded as irrelevant by actors who have a particular interest in defining Chinese one way or another. The peoples discussed in this volume—those of the ethnic periphery and of Taiwan, which is part of the geographic and ethnic periphery, are now part of the same dialog that Tu saw centered in the far geographic periphery and in the diasporic communities. Mongols and Han who together consider themselves Neimeng ren, or Tibetan educators and Naxi intellectuals who are striving to carve out distinct ethnic identities within China, force the issue of whether Chineseness can any longer be defined entirely by degree of closeness to the core.

Edward Friedman (1994) has raised a more radical possibility—that there is no longer one specific core. He asserts that the image of China is shifting from a "Northern," centralized, culturally and politically uniform one to a more "Southern," polycentric, culturally diverse one. If this is true—and Friedman presents diverse and suggestive evidence that it is—then the essays in this volume take on a double significance. They ask both whether certain groups can be included in the newly emerging unity in diversity and also what differentiates one part of the diverse nation from another. The peripherality of these groups is perhaps less salient in this context—since there is no core—but the questions of whether or not they can be included and of how they can forge local identities within the larger whole make them even more crucial to the study of how and with what pieces this new jigsaw puzzle of China is being constructed. In this sense, the present

book is not just about peripheries (although all of us find the peripheries fascinating in themselves), but about the nature of the whole and the relationship to its parts. We thus hope that the cases we discuss here will contribute to the general understanding of what constitutes China.

References

- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London and New York: Verso.
- Bentley, G. Carter. 1987. "Ethnicity and Practice." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1): 24–55.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1990. "Introduction." In *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha, pp. 1–7. London: Routledge.
- . 1994. "Dissemi-nation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." In *The Location of Culture*, ed. Homi Bhabha, pp. 139–70. London: Routledge.
- Friedman, Edward. 1994. "Reconstructing China's National Identity: A Southern Alternative to Mao-Era Anti-Imperialist Nationalism." *Journal of Asian Studies* 53 (1): 67–91.
- Gladney, Dru C. 1991. *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Harrell, Stevan. 1990. "Ethnicity, Local Interests, and the State: Yi Communities in Southwest China." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (3): 515–47.
- . 1995. "Introduction: Civilizing Projects and the Reactions to Them." In *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Stevan Harrell, pp. 3–36. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.
- Keyes, Charles F. 1981. "The Dialectics of Ethnic Change." In *Ethnic Change*, ed. Charles F. Keyes, pp. 4–30. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.
- Mani, Lata. 1987. "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India." *Cultural Critique* 7:119–56.
- Nagata, Judith. 1981. "In Defense of Ethnic Boundaries: The Changing Myths and Charters of Malay Identity." In *Ethnic Change*, ed. Charles F. Keyes, pp. 87–116. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.
- Tu Wei-ming. 1991. "Cultural China: The Periphery as Center." *Daedalus* 20 (2): 1–32.