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COMMUNIST MULTICULTURALISM

ETHNIC REVIVAL IN SOUTHWEST CHINA

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Because of historical and racial considerations [the Chinese] have no problem identifying those who belong to the collective "we" and those who are the "they."

—LUCIEN PYE, "How China's Nationalism Was Shanghaied"

INTRODUCTION

This book is the result of a faux pas. It grew out of a gaffe committed several years before I embarked on my academic career. In the late 1980s, I spent a year teaching English at Yunnan University in the city of Kunming. Yunnan is China's most ethnically diverse province and is home to more than two dozen minority ethnic groups, called shaoshu minzu. In Yunnan I met many people who were members of minorities, some of them students in my classes or professors at the university. On one occasion I asked an acquaintance, in English, about her ethnic background. I knew she was a member of the Yi minority, but I didn't know if both of her parents were as well. "My mother is Yi," she said, "and my father is Han."

"Oh," I replied, without thinking, "so you are half-Yi, half-Chinese."

I sensed at once I had committed an offense. "No!" she snapped, "I am half-Yi, half-Han. I am all Chinese!"

Fortunately, my friend forgave my error; she knew English well enough to know that in the West, the term "Chinese" is frequently used as a synonym for Han. I was, for instance, learning to speak standard Chinese (Mandarin), which in Chinese is often called Hanyu, the spoken language of the Han. Yet as I reflected on my mistake, I wondered if it was purely a linguistic one. Was I just confusing terms, or did I harbor some unexamined assumptions about Chinese culture and national identity?

China is often assumed by outsiders to be a homogenous entity. Yet the Chinese are remarkably diverse in terms of language, customs, and religion. True, the Han comprise the vast majority of China's population, but they are themselves a varied lot and include subgroups that speak dozens of dialects and practice an array of social customs.[1] Moreover, the Han majority are just one of fifty-six officially recognized "nationalities," or *minzu*. The Chinese population also includes a number of so-called "peoples" (*ren*), or unofficial ethnic groups.

According to the Chinese government, this diversity is something to be celebrated. Official documents describe China as a multinational, multiethnic nation-state, one in which the so-called "nationality question" has been resolved. China is roughly 92 percent Han; together with the minorities, the Han constitute the great, multinational Chinese nation, the *Zhonghua minzu*. Pre-communist conceptions of China and Chinese identity may have been tainted by Han-centric bias, but officially these have been discarded in favor of a broad participatory notion of Chinese national membership. Because Chinese identity is supposedly not tied to any one racial or ethnic heritage, no group need feel excluded if its roots lie in some peripheral ethno-cultural stock.

In reality, of course, the matter is not so simple. Unrest among Uyghurs, Kirgiz, and Tibetans and interethnic violence among Han, Hui, Mongols, and others indicate that the nationality question has yet to be resolved. Complicating matters is the fact that Chinese national identity is a contested concept. The twentieth century was marked by repeated efforts on the part of intellectuals, reformers, and revolutionaries to rethink the meaning of what it is to be Chinese and to possess a Chinese identity—national, cultural, ethnic, or otherwise. Some of these thinkers eschewed ethno-cultural essentialism in favor of ostensibly neutral notions of Chinese identity, the most obvious being Maoist socialism. Others invoked a racial, quasi-kinship-based, Han-centric ideal in an effort to rescue a Chinese essence from the decrepitude of cultural tradition. Still others sought to meld Confucianism with ideals of social and political modernization.[2] The contradictions of these formulations and the conflicts they pose for minorities show that the nationality question is alive and kicking.

The viability of the nationality question is evident also in the minority cultural revival that began at the start of the post-Mao reform era. For the purpose of this discussion, cultural revival is the reviving for new generations and transmitting to them the beliefs, social forms, and material traits that had once characterized specific groups. Throughout China, temples, mosques, and churches have been rebuilt and restored. Bilingual education classes are expanding, arts and culture associations are surging in membership, and Chinese minorities are discovering their religious and ethnocultural roots. Among the groups participating in this revival are the Dai, Bai, and Hui of Yunnan—the subjects of this book.

This minority culture fever (*wenhua re*) raises important questions regarding identity, culture, and the nation—in China and elsewhere. First, how should we understand these efforts to promote minority culture and identity? What significance does the revival have for prevailing theories of the nation-state and national identity? Does minority revival compromise Chinese national cohesion, given that some aspects of it tap into cross-national memberships and identities? What does it tell us about Chinese national identity and the Chinese nation-state? What role has the state played in cultural resurgence, and how have state actions shaped it?

Several hypotheses can be advanced to explain and interpret this revival. First, it may be a form of separatist or proto-separatist behavior. If cultural revival is an indicator that minorities increasingly identify with non-Chinese collectivities and are organizing on the basis of these other identities, the revival may engender challenges to the Chinese state and its territorial integrity. There is evidence to support this hypothesis: during the 1990s, members of some *minzu* engaged in violent anti-state activities, and cultural and religious institutions at times served as bases of organization. Another hypothesis is that minority revival represents a kind of nonterritorial exit strategy.[3] By rebuilding and expanding cultural institutions, minorities are fostering a collective identity and existence outside the Han-centric mainstream, without engaging in actual secessionist politics. Scholars of contemporary China have noted that nonminority organizations and cultural practices enable participants to circumvent constraints on private and social behavior dictated by party-state norms. The Chinese healing art of *qigong* is one example. Anthropologist Nancy Chen argues that qigong has "reframed the very boundaries of public and private spheres, opening up different possibilities for the organization of daily life in time and space."[4] With regard to minorities, examples of cultural revival as a kind of quasi-separatist but nonterritorial exit strategy can be quite concrete. For instance, in many parts of the country the re-opening of religious schools affiliated with temples and mosques has sparked an exodus of minority students from the state school system. While the state tries to curtail institutions and activities that contravene its goals and interests, it generally regards these phenomena quite differently from overt challenges to its authority and territorial integrity.

A related hypothesis is that minority cultural revival is one element of an emerging Chinese civil society. In the wake of the Tiananmen pro-democracy movement of 1989, some scholars began using the concept of civil society to analyze popular protest and social movements in China.[5] They argued that post-Mao reforms, by decentralizing political and economic power, had facilitated the emergence of social organizations relatively free from state control. This sphere of association and organization, some argued, engendered critical discourse and the emergence of alternative identities that made anti-state resistance feasible, in both thought and action. The florescence of cultural, religious, and other organizations among minorities might be part of this more general civil society formation. Yet minority cultural activism has an added significance, insofar as it stems from ethno-cultural notions of collective selfhood that may be at odds with those propagated by the party-state. Dru Gladney has suggested that increased political protest by and organization among Hui Muslims is evidence of an emergent civil society and a Chinese public sphere. At the same time, he characterizes these actions in almost separatist terms, as part of a "new tide in ethnic nationalism and 'primordial politics' sweeping China."[6]

Minority cultural revival can also be seen as a critique of Chinese economic, social, and minority policies and of dominant notions of what it means to be Chinese. This argument is advanced in a number of contemporary analyses of Chinese minority identity and culture. In *Other Chinas*, Ralph Litzinger argues that Yao cultural and religious revival entails a repudiation of Maoist politics of class struggle and a search for new forms of what (borrowing from Foucault) he calls "'governmentality'—ways of governing at the local level that are legitimated through resuscitated cultural practice."[7] Revival as criticism and resistance is also a key theme of Erik Mueggler's *The Age of Wild Ghosts*, which examines life in an impoverished Yi community in northern Yunnan. Mueggler demonstrates that the return of traditional practices such as exorcism is bound up with a rejection of the state's efforts to control land, bodies, and behavior. Maris Gillette's *Between Mecca and Beijing* focuses on a different kind of challenge to the powers that be; her analysis of urban Hui Muslims in Xi'an shows how Hui aesthetic and religious expression opposes mainstream Chinese understandings of modernity by asserting alternative Islamic ones.

Still another hypothesis is that cultural resurgence ultimately serves state interests, sometimes at the expense of minorities' own goals. In other words, cultural revival may be not so much an assertion of minority identity and interest as it is a Han-centric tool for the advancement of the state's agenda. There are precedents that support this argument. Katherine Palmer Kaup shows how the creation of the Zhuang *minzu* in the 1950s helped the CCP consolidate its control over the province of Guangxi.[8] Louisa Schein and Dru Gladney demonstrate the ways in which the promotion of minority identities feeds an ongoing, Han-centric project of national identity construction.[9] Stevan Harrell, meanwhile, argues that the Chinese state's post-Mao concern for minority development echoes the "civilizing discourses" of earlier regimes, discourses that ultimately sought to bring diverse peoples under state control.[10] Although Ralph Litzinger highlights the ways in which Yao revival critiques modes of governance, he also shows how state approval of Yao ritual practice has generated new channels of surveillance and control.[11]

The research in this book supports a number of these hypotheses. Cultural and religious revival among the Dai, Bai, and Hui has made it possible for some members of these groups to establish modes of existence detached or separate from the larger social milieu in which they live. For instance, the version of Islam embraced by some Hui Muslims promotes identification with a global Sunni Islamic community and a concomitant turning away from non-Muslim culture and society. Other Yunnan Hui Muslims, however, view Islamic faith and practice in ways that celebrate their distinctly Chinese Islamic history. They counter what they see as self-defeating isolationism with an integrationist Islam they believe is more authentic, more traditional, and more in keeping with the precepts of their faith.

Dai, Bai, and Hui articulations of identity also express criticism of official policy. One manifestation of the Bai cultural revival is the valorization, in books, articles, exhibitions, and media productions, of Dali-area capitalists from a century ago—precisely the kinds of figures long vilified as bourgeois enemies of the people. This celebration of Bai (or proto-Bai) economic achievement reflects the national emphasis placed on the market, and on the idea that getting rich is glorious. Yet it also hints at dissatisfaction with socialist policies that some Bai believe rendered them poorer and more isolated than their forebears. The rediscovery of Bai capitalists' contributions to local and provincial development also challenges the stereotype of minorities as backward. The embrace of capitalist heroes is of a piece with other aspects of the Bai revival, such as the promotion of bilingual education and the celebration of their ancestors' contributions to the arts and music of the Tang dynasty. However, continuities between the Maoist socialist period and the policies of the present persist. Elements of the

contemporary cultural revival entail rejections of Maoist policies, but others build on the policies, projects, and accomplishments of the Maoist era.

One noteworthy feature of the revival is the role of the state in nurturing and supporting it. This support takes the form of legal guarantees of minority autonomy and specific minority rights. China's Constitution of 1982 and the Law of Regional Ethnic Autonomy of 1984 guarantee, among other things, freedom of "normal" religion, so long as religious activities do not undermine stability and the social order. These laws also promise the right to self-government in minority regions, to the development of minority languages, and to autonomy in administering the finances of minority regions. The maintenance of these rights, however, is uneven. The state determines what "normal" religion is and whether religious activities are disruptive or threatening. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons local and national officials often acknowledge these rights.

Yet Chinese officials do more than tolerate cultural resurgence. Han and minority officials at the central, provincial, and local levels are actively involved in promoting it, and they participate in it in unexpected ways. To a great extent the state's promotional efforts can be chalked up to its interest in expanding trade, tourism, and tax revenues. The commoditizing of minority culture, religion, and history is, in short, a development strategy. This does not mean that officials are necessarily concerned with historical accuracy, authenticity, or even reality. As Beth Notar shows in *Displacing Desire*, the packaging and marketing of minority culture are at times shaped by ideas that are fantastical, if not "preposterous."[12] State promotion of minority culture and history is also a legitimation strategy. National, provincial, and local governments use—and manipulate—cultural institutions to enhance their authority over and relationships with a diverse minority population. The state at times also involves itself in cultural and religious affairs in an effort to define tradition and identity in ways that support its own agenda. Its support for minority culture thus reflects the government's interest in maintaining power and control. Yet not all of the government's actions are control-driven or instrumental in promoting government agendas. This is apparent when the state is disaggregated and the interests and motivations of local minority officials are taken into account. Local officials who are themselves minorities can and do mobilize state resources to achieve minority-defined goals.[13]

The role played by officials in the revival underscores the evolving nature of state-society relations in contemporary China. These relations are often adversarial, as seen in government efforts to crack down on activities by Falun Gong and Tibetan Buddhists, among others. However, interactions between the state and social groups can also be cooperative and mutually beneficial. Scholars such as Jonathan Unger, Anita Chan, Ken Foster, and others have shown how state-created business associations help entrepreneurs and business groups pursue their interests while facilitating the flow of information to officials, thereby enhancing government control.[14] These scholars have proposed concepts such as "socialist corporatism" and "incorporated associations" to capture the cooperative and reciprocal aspects of this relationship. While revealing instances of conflict between and within state and society, scholars draw attention to the interworking of these categories and the positive-sum quality of their interaction.

Another hypothesis drawn from observation has been overlooked or downplayed in much of the scholarship on Chinese minorities. For members of the three groups that are the focus of this study, cultural revival can be as much about being Chinese as it is about being minority. Many participants in this revival view their endeavors in terms of several discourses that relate directly to concepts of citizenship and Chinese national identity more generally, including the discourses on minority autonomy and on China's post-1949 modernization. Certain instances of minority cultural promotion are efforts to put teeth into the party-state's promises of autonomy, to modernize minority religion and culture, and to reject the stereotype of minorities as backwards and uncivilized. For many Chinese minorities, the modernization of minority culture is a means of asserting citizenship and membership in the national body politic.

The findings of this book dovetail somewhat with Gillette's study of urban Hui in the city of Xi'an. Gillette argues that consumption patterns and Islamic practice among the Xi'an Hui demonstrate that Hui Muslims have internalized state-sanctioned norms of modernization. At the same time, the Hui counter these Han-centric, state-led definitions of modernity with Islamic (or Islamicized) versions, a strategy Gillette interprets as counter-hegemonic. For these Hui—and for the rural Yunnan Hui of this study—Islam serves as an alternative "index of civilization" that allows Muslims to assert their distinctive religious identity while demonstrating their success in light of norms broadly accepted throughout China.[15] While this book reiterates many of Gillette's findings, for the Dai and Bai as well as for rural Yunnan Hui, it takes the argument further. Efforts to modernize minority culture while preserving distinctiveness are more than counter-hegemonic challenges to Han-centric national ideals. They are—or rather, can be—forms of citizenship practice.

This discussion of the relationship between minorities and the party-state or of the cultural revival does not imply that everything is rosy. For one thing, the Chinese government's commitment to cultural pluralism is limited and ambiguous. Official tolerance is trumped by the state's concern for stability and its commitment to a Han-centric vision of Chinese modernization. Furthermore, although the goals of those who champion minority culture frequently cohere with the ideals embedded in Chinese nationalism, the identity-based ferment analyzed in this book can and does hold counter-state or counter-hegemonic potential.

Minorities may link their cultural and religious endeavors to the norms of Chinese national discourse, but they are not uncritical of those norms, or of the policies in which they are enshrined. Rather, in positioning their activities in relation to economic development, minority autonomy, and even socialist modernization, minorities "wave the red flag to oppose the red flag": they deploy these methods to criticize the shortcomings of CCP policy and practice. Nevertheless, evidence that minority citizens accept these ideals suggests that, to paraphrase Tip O'Neill, all nationalisms are local. For the Dai, Bai, and Hui, being minority is, or can be, one way of being national.

CHINA'S MINORITIES

What often perplexes outside observers about Chinese minorities is the variation among minorities. Some minorities appear quite ethno-culturally distinct from the majority Han, while others are relatively indistinguishable from the Han or other groups among whom they live. Some groups are geographically concentrated, or stand out in terms of dress, religion, speech, and custom, and yet still lack any strong sense of themselves as a distinct ethnic group. Other minorities are widely dispersed and appear assimilated to dominant regional customs, but possess a cohesive ethno-cultural identity.

This complexity stems in part from the official Chinese understanding of the term "minzu" and the broad way it has been applied to ethno-cultural groups. In the 1950s, China's new communist regime embarked on a project of classifying the country's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity and establishing which groups should be granted minority status. Teams of ethnographers, linguists, and historians were dispatched throughout the country to collect data on the language, customs, arts, folklore, religion, economic practices, and social structure of hundreds of self-identifying groups. As has been well documented elsewhere, the state's effort to sort through this material and identify particular minorities was informed, at least in theory, by Joseph Stalin's definition of a nation. Stalin delineated four criteria that had to be met for a group to achieve status as a nation (*narod*). A nation, he claimed, was "an historically evolved, stable community of people, based upon the common possession of four principal attributes, namely: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make-up manifesting itself in common special features of national culture."[16]

To be recognized as a *minzu*, a group had to demonstrate that it possessed these four attributes. Official Chinese understanding of who constituted a minority was also influenced by Marxist stage theory and the social evolutionary theory of Lewis Henry Morgan, which had also influenced Stalin.[17] Thus, while Chinese ethnographers tried to figure out which groups deserved minority status, they also sought to determine the stage of economic development to which these groups had progressed. A group's level of development depended on the possession or lack of a written language, kinship and political structures, religious organization, and the nature of the local economy. Thus the Akha and Wa, who practiced shifting cultivation (so-called "slash and burn" agriculture) and lacked a written script, were considered more backward than the Bai, who were sedentary wet-rice cultivators well integrated into the regional market economy of early twentieth-century Yunnan.[18] In actual practice, however, political expediency and matters of convenience generally won out over theoretical purity in the categorizing process.[19] The party-state's desire to avoid a bureaucratic nightmare also informed its decision to amalgamate over four hundred groups seeking recognition into fifty-five officially recognized minorities.

The Dai, Bai, and Hui exemplify this complexity of identity and practice. There is significant linguistic, religious, and cultural variation among them, and analysis of their post-Mao experiences provides a broad, comparative view of the minority cultural revival. These three groups also vary in their similarity to or difference from the majority Han, in their geographic cohesion or dispersion throughout Yunnan and China, in the degree to which they were socially and culturally integrated into Chinese society prior to 1949, and in subjective matters of self-identity. In both official and popular perception, the Dai, Bai, and Hui are also characterized according to their level of docility and quiescence or restiveness and rebelliousness, perceptions that seem to have become an index for government in determining how receptive they are to state-led, Han-centric civilizing projects. In other

words, these three groups represent the variation that characterizes Chinese minorities as a whole.

Historically, Chinese thinking about ethno-cultural differences distinguished peoples by the degree to which they had adopted and adapted to traditional Chinese cultural practices. Those who measured up to Chinese standards of behavior, etiquette, and learning were considered civilized, or "cooked," while those whose folkways, customs, language, and actions were irredeemably foreign were viewed as barbarian, or "raw."[20] This raw versus cooked, barbarian versus civilized dichotomy established a continuum of difference and assimilation. A group's place on this continuum was determined not by blood or kinship-based notions of ethnicity but by its members' adherence to behavioral standards.

A continuum of assimilation and difference informs Chinese thinking about minorities, although the meanings of "integration" and "difference" have changed over time. The three cases examined in this study could be positioned along this continuum, with the rather "exotic" Dai at one end, the relatively integrated Hui at the other, and the Bai somewhere in between. Such a continuum, however, fails to capture the ambiguities of how minorities perceive themselves and are perceived by others in the wider society. It also fails to capture the fact that ethno-cultural distinctiveness can vary through time and circumstance; such distinctiveness can be a reaction to the experience of political and social alienation rather than its cause.

This continuum also overlooks other criteria by which minorities are judged in popular opinion, if not in policy. As mentioned above, minorities are distinguished according to how docile or rebellious they are or are perceived to be. The ideal of a "model minority"—an ideal type that is exotic, docile, and, as many scholars have shown, typically feminine—informs official, academic, and popular Chinese discourse.[21] As a corollary to the model minority ideal, there is also a type of pecking order or scale of authenticity in popular and even official discourse. The more culturally distinct (from the Han) a group is, the higher its place on that scale. Minorities whose customs differ little from the Han and who are well integrated into modern Chinese life thus deviate from the minority ideal. Groups that are highly acculturated to Han society and are also restive or rebellious are even more suspect. During my fieldwork, all sorts of people—academics, officials, taxi drivers, urbanites, peasants—expressed doubts about my case selection, usually to suggest that I drop the contentious, highly integrated Hui and examine instead the more exotic, impoverished, matrilineal Mosuo or the

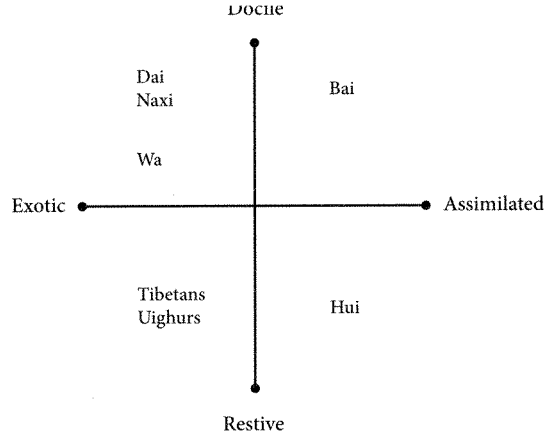

FIG. 1.1 Perceptions of variation among Chinese minorities

equally exotic and isolated Wa. My decision to study the Dai was met with universal approval.

This picture is complicated by the understandings of modernization that infuse much Chinese thinking about minorities and economic development. Exoticism is valorized, but so too is the embrace of a modernizing project that has assimilative consequences. Minorities are expected to be exotic, even quaint, but they are also expected to accept the assistance of the "elder brother" Han nationality along the path to modernity.

Rather than viewing minorities in terms of a continuum of assimilation and difference, it makes sense to situate them within a schema that includes two dimensions. Such a schema, as presented in Figure 1.1, indicates where the Dai, Bai, and Hui fit. The horizontal axis indicates the degree of cultural distinctiveness, ranging from "exotic" to "assimilated," they are perceived to demonstrate. The vertical axis indicates the nature of their responsiveness to state-led control, ranging from "docile" to "restive" (or rebellious). This way of characterizing minorities is not exact, and certainly is open to interpretation. For one thing, groups may vary over time in terms of how assimilated or quiescent they are or are perceived to be. The cultural revival itself has engendered assertions of minority uniqueness and a rejection of Han-centric conformity. It should be noted that characterizing a group as restive or docile in no way means that all members of that group are rebellious, troublemakers, separatists, passive, etc. These characterizations are generalizations of views—what Susan Blum refers to as cognitive prototypes of ethnic others—expressed in official and academic classificatory schemes as well as in statements by ordinary people.[22]

Of the three cases analyzed here, the Dai most closely approximate the minority ideal. Prior to their incorporation into the Chinese nation-state, the Dai of what is today called Xishuangbanna Prefecture constituted a fairly distinct political entity, whose linguistic, religious, and other cultural practices set them apart from mainstream Han society.[23] The Dai polity persisted several years after 1949, albeit in diminished form, due to CCP efforts to incorporate the region by co-opting the existing political and religious elite. The Dai, who number 1.3 million in Yunnan, are related to Tai peoples in Myanmar, Laos, and Northern Thailand, and their cultural revival has augmented their connections to some of these Tai groups.

The Bai are an intermediate case, and somewhat difficult to categorize. Although there are small communities of Bai in other provinces, the Bai reside almost entirely in Yunnan, mainly in the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture. With 1.6 million people, they are the second-largest minority in the province. The Bai speak a Tibeto-Burman language from which a written form was recently derived, and they are the descendants of various tribal and ethnic groups that held sway over Yunnan for over five centuries until the thirteenth-century Mongol conquest. They possess a number of cultural and religious practices that appear to be specific to them as an ethno-cultural entity.[24] In other words, the Bai evince many external markers of ethnic difference that justify their minority status. In terms of subjective matters of self-identity, however, the Bai are a bit of a paradox. Prior to and even after Liberation many Bai rejected the idea that they were a minority nationality. They called themselves not Bai but *minjia*, a term meaning "civilian households" that possesses no ethno-cultural connotation. They also emphasized their ancestral ties to eastern Han China and their cultural and economic accomplishments in a Confucian Chinese world. Even the "Bainess" of Bai cultural practices is somewhat murky. Past studies of *minjia* life portrayed them not as ethnics but as paragons of mainstream Chinese rural society.[25] For centuries the Bai have been well integrated in terms of culture, education, politics, and economics. Their contributions to Chinese culture and their cultural revival reflect this adaptation; they are proud of this history.

The Hui appear to be the most integrated of the three cases I examine. As the descendents of the historic latecomers to Yunnan who arrived with conquering Yuan, Ming, and Qing armies, many Hui appear indistinguishable from the Han or minority groups among whom they live. They share a language, an economy, and general cultural practices, although the degree of integration varies by region and even by settlement. Yet even where they appear mostly integrated or completely assimilated, the Hui possess a strong self-identity as a distinct ethno-religious collectivity. To an outsider acquainted with non-Muslim Chinese society there may be much that is familiar about the Hui, but they are, in Jonathan Lipman's formulation, "familiar strangers."[26] While many Hui live in communities that have undergone a significant religious revival, others neither practice Islam nor even adhere to prohibitions on the consumption of pork and alcohol. The Hui are both the smallest and the largest of the three groups examined here. Within Yunnan, they number over six hundred thousand, but nationwide the Hui number nearly 10 million. Yet many Hui scoff at the idea of the Hui as a separate *minzu*, seeing themselves instead as part of a more than 20-million strong Chinese Islamic entity some call the "Islamic nationality" (*Yisilan minzu*), a category not recognized by the Chinese government. The Hui are also the most "restive" of the three cases. Rightly or wrongly, they are viewed as the most prone of the three to be involved in ethnic conflict and criminal behavior and are regarded by many non-Muslims as troublemakers. Restive Hui are not, however, separatist rebels; interethnic and Hui-state conflicts usually arise out of local, specific grievances.

The characterization of the Hui as restive must be regarded critically. Thinking about minorities in terms of their responsiveness to the rules of Chinese society at large tends to obscure the historical and contemporary mistreatment of certain groups by successive Chinese regimes. The Hui are perceived as prone to rebellion because during the Qing and Communist regimes they were the targets of pogroms and persecutions.[27] Efforts to combat oppression have enhanced Hui cohesion and collective self-identity, and they are quick to defend themselves and their religion. There is a dynamic quality to Hui-state and Hui-Han interaction and conflict not captured in the diagram above, and both this dynamism and the history of anti-Hui persecution must be acknowledged.

The Dai, Bai, and Hui also differ from each other and the Han in terms of the contacts they possess with political and cultural collectivities beyond China's borders. Cultural resurgence among the Dai, for instance, has been facilitated by exchanges with Tai communities in neighboring Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand and has led to broader identification by Dai people with a greater Tai ethno-cultural milieu. Among the Hui, Muslim religious and educational activism is inspired and assisted by international Islamic organizations and the governments of Muslim nations. Since the Bai are found almost exclusively in Yunnan, their cultural activism has a more localized character. Yet this has not prevented Bai cultural and educational activists

from looking beyond their locale—for instance, to international agencies like the United Nations—to promote their cause.

YUNNAN PROVINCE

Located in the far southwest of China, on the borders of Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam, Yunnan is the most ethnically and culturally diverse of China's provinces (fig. 1.2). The majority of China's fifty-five minorities are represented in the provincial population; the populations of twenty-four of these groups exceed four thousand. About one-third of Yunnan's 45 million residents are members of minority ethnic groups.[28] The diversity of the minority population and the province's historical isolation make it a fruitful test case for examining the relationship between national and minority identity.

Yunnan has long enjoyed, or endured, isolation from the heartland of Han China. Despite the spread of the silk trade into Yunnan as early as the second century B.C.E., the region was for centuries dominated by disparate tribal groups. From the eighth through the middle of the thirteenth centuries, successive Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms ruled much of Yunnan. These kingdoms participated in tributary relationships with the imperial courts of the Tang and Song dynasties. Cultural and technological contacts with the Chinese heartland increased, facilitating the adoption of Chinese writing and agricultural techniques. Yunnan's administrative and political independence ended with the Mongol conquest. In 1253, Kubilai Khan defeated the Dali kingdom and reorganized Yunnan as a province under the governorship of Sayyid 'Ajalls Shams al-Din, a Muslim from Bukhara in Central Asia. Under Mongol rule, that is, the Yuan dynasty, tens of thousands of Mongol, Chinese, and Muslim soldiers and civilian support personnel migrated to Yunnan and established settlements throughout the province. These settlement policies continued under the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties (1644–1911), accelerating the political and cultural integration of the province. The incorporation of Yunnan into imperial China, however, was not a one-way process. Chinese practices, norms, and institutions increasingly permeated Yunnan culture and society, but as C. Pat Giersch demonstrates, newcomers and their customs were often indigenized.[29] The province was and is today a cultural and political mélange.

Yunnan's character as peripheral to China's political, economic, and cultural core is a function of its topography and geographic location. The

FIG. 1.2 Yunnan and its neighbors

province is extremely mountainous, severely constraining the amount of land available for high-yield agriculture.[30] Until recent decades, the terrain made travel between Yunnan and the rest of China treacherous and time-consuming. Before 1966 no rail line linked Yunnan with the rest of China, although in the early 1900s, the French built a railroad connecting Kunming to Hanoi, in what was then French Indochina. Yunnan is also a border province and shares a boundary with Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam. The province's peripheral status was mitigated somewhat during World War II, when thousands of American and Chinese troops were stationed in the province. During this period the Burma Road was constructed, the Flying Tigers flew supplies into the capital of Kunming, and major inland universities relocated from Japanese-occupied regions to the Yunnan countryside. Yet Yunnan was also one of the last areas of the country to be "liberated." The founding of the People's Republic was declared on October 1, 1949; Yunnan's liberation was accomplished half a year later in 1950.

Although Yunnan is increasingly tied into the global economy, a fact signified by the opening in 1999 of a Wal-Mart in Kunming, social

problems continue to affect minorities and the province as a whole. The province copes with poverty, underdevelopment, illiteracy, and a growing AIDS problem. Yunnan is one of China's poorest provinces (table 1.1). In 2006, the per capita net rural income in Yunnan was ¥2,251 (approximately $281), just 70 percent of the already low average rural income in China of ¥3,255 ($408). Residents of cities and towns in Yunnan are considerably better off than those in rural areas; in 2006, net urban incomes averaged ¥10,070 ($1,259).[31] There are no figures on the number of minority poor, but the State Ethnic Affairs Commission estimates that minorities account for 40 percent of China's poor, despite comprising just 9 percent of the total population.[32] In Yunnan, as in other provinces, underdevelopment and poverty are aggravated by illiteracy and low levels of education.

Yunnan officials have been trying to expand the rural enterprise sector so as to increase incomes and the revenue base. The provincial government is seeking to refashion Yunnan as a gateway to Southeast Asia and to utilize its border location to economic advantage. Provincial officials have focused particular attention on the tobacco and cigarette, mining, tourism, and horticulture industries. Contraband markets and industries have mushroomed in tandem with officially sanctioned economic endeavors. Yunnan has also long been a major conduit for heroin trafficked from the Golden Triangle to the West. The province's border character is a decided advantage, or disadvantage, depending on one's perspective.

The peripheral character of the province and its peoples shapes cultural activism among the Dai, Bai, and Hui. Although concerns and interests specific to them motivate their endeavors, they are also responding to the disadvantages of residing in the geographic and cultural periphery. Minority entrepreneurs and officials are exploring how cultural institutions, artifacts, and practices can contribute to economic development. While economic development is important, minorities think about development in more than just economic terms. For many, cultural revival means modernizing their cultures while preserving their identities.

Until recently, analyses of ethnicity and nationalism in the field of comparative politics mostly ignored questions regarding Chinese minorities. This neglect has stemmed in part from beliefs about Chinese homogeneity and exceptionalism. For good reason the Chinese were viewed as homogenous, despite significant regional diversity. Political science scholarship on contemporary China focused primarily on the big events of the twentieth century, such as imperial collapse, civil war, revolution, communism, and reform after Mao. Research on Chinese ethnic and religious groups was hampered for decades by restrictions on access and information. In the decades since 1978, however, scholarship on Chinese minorities has blossomed but few comparative political studies of Chinese minorities have been produced.[33] Moreover, Chinese minorities typically have been studied as minorities; their status as citizens and members of a Chinese national entity has been neglected, though recently that has begun to change.[34] While this book focuses on the experiences of the Dai, Bai, and Hui, it is about much more than that. It poses broader questions about culture, the nation, and the politics of national identity in China and elsewhere.

TABLE 1.1 Per Capita Rural and Urban Disposable Incomes (in yuans) in Yunnan and China, 1980 and 2005

	1980	*2000*
Rural, Yunnan	148	2,042
Rural, all China	191	3,255
Urban, Yunnan	420	9,266
Urban, all China	478	10,493

SOURCES: *2006 Yunnan tongji nianjian*, 687, 754; National Bureau of Statistics of China, *2006 Zhongguo tongji nianjian*, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2006/indexch.htm (accessed May 27, 2007).

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CULTURE, THE NATION, AND CHINESE MINORITY IDENTITY

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

Themes of narrative and the individual have figured prominently in nationalist thought and scholarship. This congruence between notions of personhood and models of the nation is not surprising, given that concepts such as autonomy, sovereignty, and will, not to mention the body politic, have their origins in Western thinking about the individual, the sovereign self. The very concept of national identity owes its existence in part to an Eriksonian notion of psychosocial identity drawn from psychoanalysis.[2] Theorists and nationalist leaders alike speak of nations following a course of development and maturation that often entails identity "crises." These crises, such as war, civil conflict, famine, invasion, and economic depression, challenge national integrity and require for their resolution a revised self-concept and stance toward other political actors.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These post-modern approaches inform and enrich much contemporary scholarship on the post-Mao resurgence of localized cultural identities. Yet in valorizing particularity and viewing attempts at cultural or ideational integration as hegemonic effects of power, they run the risk of essentializing the difference and distinctiveness of minority identities and culture. Implicitly or explicitly, post-modern approaches rely on the same exclusionary model of culture and identity as does modernization theory, one that places the national in opposition to the minority. In doing so, the possibilities for syncretism and interpretation are underestimated. Certainly the political motives underlying these approaches tend to support the protection of distinct minority cultures and identities, and so are commendable. Yet post-modern approaches imply that particularistic, localized identities are sacrosanct, hermetically sealed constructs, incapable of being melded with national identities and values without being silenced or erased. Theoretical assumptions render post-modern scholars of cultural identity unable to account for how minorities may interpret the "national" in ways that expand its meaning and application.

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

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

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

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

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

Neither Taylor's nor Kymlicka's framework really help us think about some of the most vexing cases of cultural politics, including state-led efforts to suppress minorities and minority culture. Part of the problem lies in these theorists' mostly uncritical use of the models of nation and culture outlined above—models that turn cultural minorities into what Homi Bhabha calls "'foreign bodies', in the midst of the nation."[20] Kymlicka states outright that he accepts the Gellnerian approach to the nation and national identity.[21] Even while trying to carve out a space for minority cultures justified in terms of liberal utility, the model he employs rests on assimilationist underpinnings.

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

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

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

ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF CULTURE AND THE NATION

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

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

The weaknesses of hybridity indicate the need for a closer look at the role of power, domination, and resistance in matters of cultural belief and practice. These issues animate the work of several scholars who take aim at the model of culture as societal glue. For example, Sherry Ortner's studies of Sherpa religion and Himalayan mountaineering highlight the asymmetries of power in cultural practice and their implications for shared meaning. Ortner emphasizes the variability of culture, by showing how cultural practices like ritual change over time, as practitioners negotiate shifts in the distribution of political and economic power. She also questions the extent to which shared meanings are either preconditions or the product of cultural practice. What Ortner finds is that the absence of shared meanings, the lack of agreement over the significance of symbols, can facilitate cooperation and cohesion. For instance, Ortner demonstrates how Sherpas have managed to get Western climbers to comply with the staging of certain religious rituals despite the Sherpas' subservient position to the mostly Western climbers, and despite the fact that these rituals criticize climber behavior. Furthermore, despite their joint participation, Sherpas and climbers view these rituals in quite different ways. For Sherpas, they are aimed at appeasing mountain gods for the sins the climbers—and their Sherpa assistants—intend to commit. This indictment of mountaineering is not, however, apparent to the climbers. Instead, climbers value ritual participation for other reasons: it seems to appease the Sherpas and please the monks, which makes expeditions run more smoothly; it is politically correct and provides climbers a sense of cultural virtue; and superstitiously, it makes sense to play it safe. Climbers' ritual participation also satisfies an orientalist "yearning for solidarity and even identity with the Other," the exotic object of fascination, in this case Sherpas.[26]

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

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

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

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

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

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

Similar insights emerge in analyses of power, identity, and governance in the Chinese case, including Prasenjit Duara's *Culture, Power and the State*, an analysis of state-building and decline in the late Qing and Republican periods. In this work, Duara argues that the authority of the Qing state was affirmed and enhanced at the local level through what he calls the "cultural nexus of power." This cultural nexus was an interconnected web of lineage organizations, marriage networks, religious associations, irrigation societies, and other linkages comprised of symbolic as well as material resources. In Duara's account, these heterogeneous, overlapping, diverse organizations and practices augmented political cohesion and imperial legitimacy. Yet the cultural nexus was also a site of contest, competition, and the pursuit of local interests among local gentry, Taoist priests, village headmen, and other members of the local elite. In fact, competition helped legitimize authority. "The pursuit of these particular symbols by various groups," notes Duara, "enabled these symbols to provide a common framework of authority. More important, it did so even while very different, and sometimes conflicting, interests continued to be pursued."[30]

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

HETEROGENEITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE CHINESE NATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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

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

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

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

In a sense, the idea of the Chinese nation, and the values, norms, and goals this idea comprises, function in the manner of "master frames," as Snow and Benford call them: cognitive, normative, and interpretive schema that help social movement actors identify political challenges and mobilize support to tackle them.[34] Such master frames allow social actors to identify problems and issues, attribute them to specific causes, and mobilize individuals and groups to meet these challenges and find solutions through collective action. In the case of Chinese minority nationalities, certain ideals and values linked to Chinese national identity and membership—specifically, those of modernization, economic development, and minority autonomy—perform these functions. National ideals and values frame the challenges facing minorities and provide an interpretive schema through which their cultural endeavors are justified and understood.

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

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

IDENTITY AND CULTURE WITH (MINORITY) CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The issue of trauma and responses to it are not the sole province of minority cultural practice. Studies by Patricia Thornton, Nancy Chen, and Xu Jian on post-Mao *qigong* sects also highlight the link between popular Chinese spiritual and religious practices and efforts to overcome the psychic, political, and physical wounds of both past and present. Like the Yi with their exorcism, practitioners of *qigong* and Falun Gong wield these as anti-materialist critiques of Maoist-Marxist discourse and the science-and-economic-development ideology of the reform era.[43] Thus, in demonstrating how revived Yi cultural practices serve to process and resolve trauma, Mueggler's work points to ways in which the socio-political experiences of minorities overlap with those of Han Chinese. Yet the picture of the Yi that emerges is of an intensely marginalized, outsider minority whose cultural endeavors are ultimately ineffectual. Yi cultural revival may even be exacerbating their marginality insofar as resurgent practices inhibit their participation in market-oriented agrarian reforms. It seems accurate to characterize the Yi as marginal, but is their marginality a function of their minority culture and status, or of the crushing poverty and isolation that afflict many other communities, Han and minority alike?

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

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

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

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

The scholarship discussed above has raised important questions regarding the assimilationist underpinnings of an earlier generation of studies about Chinese *minzu*.[45] These approaches have much to say about the genesis and significance of the cultural activity and activism that this study documents. By detailing the reemergence (or emergence) of minority cultural practice, religious networks, and community bonds that are sometimes transnational in scope, this scholarship has also shown the strength and complexity of minority experiences in a socialist state often believed to have stamped out such difference. These studies are also a useful corrective to much of the social scientific literature on China that, because of practical concerns, sheer numbers, and theoretical bias, tends to privilege the experience of the Han. Moreover, minority cultural activism at times does involve the excavation of subaltern practices and collective identities interred by Maoist anti-traditionalism and social reorganization. The identities and institutions analyzed in this book can and do serve as a basis for resistance in thought and action against the state, its representatives, and its policies.

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

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

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

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

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

MEANING AND PRACTICE OF CHINESE NATIONAL IDENTITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> Broad participation in China's development has long been more than a matter of state control or popular protest. One could become Chinese in the modern sense by joining a demonstration or a party, but also by training for a profession, opening a local museum, or marketing a local resource. These latter, more local and pluralistic enterprises should not be equated with democracy or a localism invariably hostile to national authority. But they do comprise sites where social capital can be invested in ways that foster diversity, criticism, and a measure of autonomy.[56]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chinese national identity (or Chineseness, for that matter) is neither uncomplicated nor definitively established. Some efforts to formulate a new Chinese nationalism have appealed outright to exclusionary ethnic and racial ideals and symbols, such as the dragon, the Yellow River, and the ostensible common descent of the Han people.[60] Even Deng Xiaoping's modernization-fixated regime resuscitated Confucianism in the mid-1980s to fill the void left by the demise of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology after Mao.[61] Many of these nostalgic formulations are attempts to destroy tradition in order to save it. Appeals to distilled racial symbols may also be efforts to preserve an identity based on an abstract idea of tradition while dispensing with specific traditions that impede national objectives. Appeals to modernity and to culture are often part of the same package; nostalgia is harnessed while outmoded, archaic practices are abandoned in favor of efficacious, modern ones.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Like other Chinese citizens, minorities are expected to work at modernizing themselves. The problem for minorities, however, is that a competing culturalist notion of what it means to be a minority also exists, a notion organized around authenticity, cultural integrity, and tradition. The minority stereotypes that Schein, Gladney, Harrell, and others dissect encapsulate both images and behavioral standards. As they point out, minorities are portrayed as and are expected to be backward, childlike, feminized primitives, in need of the developmental assistance of the elder brother Han. Some members of minority groups accept these depictions and the dependent relationship to the Han such depictions imply, while others acknowledge them but bemoan those who accept them. One senior Dai cadre I spoke with lamented the lack among the Dai of the "struggle spirit" (*fendou jingsheng*) necessary for economic development. In his view, Buddhist fatalism and the relatively easy life afforded by the fertile climate of Xishuangbanna had made the Dai complacent. For another Dai man working in tourism, this backwardness was not a problem: "We Dai have always relied on . . . the more advanced Han for their technical expertise."[66] Thus, while some members of minorities dislike these stereotypes, the view of the Han as the advanced elder brother *minzu* is a widely accepted notion, at times even a useful one.

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

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

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

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

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