CHINESE NATIONALISM

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Nationalism was the 'moving force' of the Chinese revolution, wrote Mary Wright, capturing in a phrase a conviction widely shared among students of modern China.[1] In this perspective, a 'rising tide' of nationalism is a constant factor, perhaps the only one, in China's long revolutionary era. As the metaphor suggests, the waters of nationalism steadily engulf all that stands in their path – imperial, Republican, and Communist institutions, elite and popular classes, coastal and interior regions, reformist and conservative factions, Chinese at home and abroad. Other movements and ideologies wax and wane, but nationalism permeates them all.

The paradigm that governs this perspective is what I call the 'culturalism to nationalism thesis'. It is a loose paradigm at best and has no single source or definitive formulation, but its underlying assumptions pervade the academic literature on modern China. The core proposition is that a set of ideas labelled 'culturalism' dominated traditional China, was incompatible with modern nationalism and yielded only under the assault of imperialism and Western ideas to a new nationalist way of thinking. The history of modern China, then, is one in which nationalism replaces culturalism as the dominant Chinese view of their identity and place in the world. Because this was a transformation of collective cultural and political identity, it was a long and traumatic process that left its mark, and continues to do so, on all periods and divisions within the modern era.

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1 Mary Clabaugh Wright, 'Introduction: The Rising Tide of Change', in Wright (ed.), *China in Revolution: The First Phase. 1900-1913* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1968), p.3, passim.

The culturalism to nationalism thesis is a useful and provocative generalization about the rise of nationalism in modern China. The reality and importance of this phenomenon is not in dispute: all observers see a century or more of vigorous Chinese nationalist rhetoric and activity, a 'rise of nationalism' that distinguishes modern China from its imperial past. However, I believe that Chinese nationalism remains poorly understood and inadequately studied. The thesis has made an important contribution, but it is conceptually imprecise and empirically oversimplified in its version of the historical change in question. The purpose of this essay is to summarize the thesis and its implications, to offer a critique of its conceptual and empirical limitations, and to suggest an alternative approach – which might be called 'bringing the nation back in' – to supplement the thesis and help strengthen the study of Chinese nationalism.

The Culturalism to Nationalism Thesis

Over twenty years, ago, in a concise survey of the scholarly literature on Chinese nationalism, James Harrison observed that 'the traditional Chinese self-image has generally been defined as 'culturalism', based on a common historical heritage and acceptance of shared beliefs, not as nationalism, based on the modern concept of the nation-state'.[2] He emphasized that this self-image, developed over more than two millenia following the Qin-Han imperial unification that began in 221 BC, did not preclude some political or nationalistic loyalties. The long span of imperial history offered some evidence of patriotism, of a sense of racial distinctness and xenophobia, and of commitments to imperial institutions and ruling dynasties. Nonetheless, the primary Chinese identity was cultural, with no perception of a Chinese state or nation apart from the cultural heritage. Supreme loyalty attached to the culture itself, not to the state, and there could be no justification for abandoning or even changing the cultural tradition in order to strengthen the state.[3]

Harrison noted two prime elements in the construction of culturalism. One was the notion that China was the only true civilization, its cultural superiority unchallenged. Non-Chinese peoples might be military threats, but they could never be true rivals because of their backwardness and because they could never rule China unless in a Chinese way. There was no concept of, or need for nationalism, in this

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2 James Harrison, *Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Hunter College of the City of New York, Research Institute on Modern Asia, New York, n.d. 1969?), p.2.

3 ibid, pp.3-14.

world devoid of cultural or interstate competition. The other element was the political prescription that rulers must be educated in and govern according to Confucian principles, which were of universal value. Because the standard rested on education, legitimate rule was not limited to ethnic Chinese; aliens who accepted and exemplified Confucian norms might also rule. The political elite's loyalty was to principles that defined a manner of rule, not to a particular regime or nation.[4]

Culturalism's refusal to acknowledge a world of formally equal states and its insistence that legitimate rule rested on adherence to Confucian norms dampened the nationalistic impulses that occasionally surfaced in the course of fluctuating imperial fortunes and houses. Its essential integrity as a world view, supported by the size, wealth and power of the empire, gave it great lasting power, enabling it to bridge periods of disunity and infuse new governments, whether Chinese or alien, with values supportive of the tradition. Culturalism – so the thesis goes – thus explains not only the empire's capacity to survive for so long but also why it fell when a truly competitive alien culture penetrated China. Foreign imperialism did not have to conquer the empire to destroy it. It 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. With culturally-based confidence and identity in doubt from setbacks administered by these avowed challengers, and lacking a nationalist base to fall back on, imperial China disintegrated. The logical outcome of the crisis was rejection of culturalism and development of a nationalism that would provide a new basis for China's defence and regeneration.

Harrison provides a useful overview of the culturalism to nationalism thesis, but it was Joseph Levenson who produced its most subtle, provocative, and influential elaboration, presenting the core concepts as poles around which the swirling currents of modern Chinese thought might be organized. In his first book, Levenson traced Liang Qichao's (1873-1929) intellectual evolution in search of a formula that would halt the disintegration of both culture and empire that characterized the final decades of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).[5] Passages in this book describe how Liang 'fought his way through from

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4 ibid, pp.4-5.

5 Joseph R. Levenson, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and the Mind of Modern China* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1953).

culturalism to nationalism'.[6] Elsewhere Levenson portrayed 'culturalism and nationalism as competitors for loyalty' among turn-of-the-century intellectuals, seeing the era as one in which 'nationalism invades the Chinese scene as culturalism helplessly gives way'.[7]

Many others have found culturalism a useful term to distinguish a mainstream Confucian image of China as a culturally-defined community from competing images of an ethnically-defined ('racism') or politically-defined community ('modern nationalism').[8] Sometimes a variant term is used, as in Ishwer Ojha's analysis of the evolution of Chinese foreign policy from 'culturism' to nationalism, the former term representing a 'non-territorial concept', a loyalty to and preoccupation with culture that differs fundamentally from nationalism, which 'treats culture only as a means' to aid the nation.[9] Joseph Whitney has analysed China's shift 'from cultural entity to political entity' as the Confucian idea of the state was replaced by an imported nationalism.[10] Not surprisingly given the ubiquity of this theme, several students of comparative nationalism have accepted the thesis as an authoritative interpretation. It appears in Hugh Seton-Watson's history of nations and nationalist movements, where Chinese nationalism is a purely modern product of European ideas and incursions;[11] and in Selig Harrison's

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6 ibid, especially pp.108-22, quotation from p.108.

7 Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* vol.1, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1968) pp.98-104

8 See, for example, John Fincher, 'China as a Race, Culture, and Nation; Notes on Fang Hsiao-ju's Discussion of Dynastic Legitimacy', in David C. Buxbaum and Frederick W. Mote (eds), *Transition and Permanence: Chinese History and Culture: A Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Hsiao Kung-ch'uan* (Cathay Press, Hong Kong, 1972), pp.59-69; and Laurence A. Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971), p.270.

9 Ishwer C. Ojha, *Chinese Foreign Policy in an Age of Transition: The Diplomacy of Cultural Despair*, 2nd ed. (Beacon Press, Boston, 1971), pp.ix-xiv, 1-50.

10 Joseph B. R. Whitney, *China: Area. Administration and Nation-Building* (University of Chicago Department of Geography Research, Chicago, 1969), pp.26-29, 160-62.

11 Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (Westview Press, Boulder, 1977), pp.9, 274-87, 423.

reference to China's historical sense of identity as a self-centred 'culturalism' that was replaced by nationalism in the twentieth century.[12]

The most explicit formulations of the thesis concentrate on the late Qing and early Republican periods, especially the years between 1895 (when defeat by Japan catalysed Chinese nationalism) and 1919 (when the May Fourth Movement marked culturalism's eclipse), as this was the era of competition between culturalism and nationalism and the replacement of the former by the latter. However, the full range of the thesis includes studies of earlier imperial history that emphasize the weakness or absence of nationalism in China's political tradition, as well as studies of the modern period charting the tributaries that feed the swelling nationalist tide. There is no shortage of evidence to support this nationalist triumphalism. Nineteenth-century xenophobia and turn-of-the-century anti-Manchuism blend into the more fully developed ideas and movements of the May Fourth era, with their dedication to anti-imperialism and national salvation and regeneration. From this point on, observers have invoked nationalism in at least partial explanation of a remarkable range of phenomena: aversion to foreign ideas and promotion of foreign ideas; repudiation of traditional culture and celebration of national traditions; Nationalist victory in 1927 and Communist victory in 1949; Sino-Soviet alliance in 1950 and the conflict a decade later; Cultural Revolution Maoism and post-Mao modernization. The implication is that nationalism permeates Chinese affairs, manifesting itself even among ideas and movements differing widely in other respects.

At some point in its intellectual history, the thesis parted company with its favourite metaphor. This is a tide that never ebbs. Once triumphant in Chinese political identity, as dominant now as culturalism was in the past, nationalism places its stamp on each new departure in Chinese politics. The recent post-Mao period links nationalism to the outward orientation of the 1980s, producing what some observers have called an 'assertive' or 'confident' phase of Chinese nationalism.[13] Once mainly internal in orientation, nationalism now has profound implications for unresolved territorial claims and how a modernized China might use its power.

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12 Selig S. Harrison, *The Widening Gulf: Asian Nationalism and American Policy* (The Free Press, New York, 1978), pp.69-86, reference to culturalism on p.70.

13 Allen Whiting, 'Assertive Nationalism in Chinese Foreign Policy', *Asian Survey*, vol.23, no.8 (August 1983), pp.913-33; and Michel Oksenberg, 'China's Confident Nationalism', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.65, no.3 (1986-87), pp.501-23.

The rise of Chinese nationalism is obviously of global importance but it is neither novel nor surprising in the light of comparative history. A primary assumption about the modern era is that it is an age of nationalism, linked to the institutions and doctrines of the modern nation-state that came into being with the European age of revolution and Napoleonic Wars. These doctrines and institutions eventually spread throughout the world, so that today virtually all the world's states and peoples have made the transition from an absence of nationalism, or at most possession of some form of 'pre-modern nationalism', to an embrace of modern nationalism. If this is all the thesis tells us – that China, too, has moved from a pre-nationalist world – it is scarcely news. There is more to the thesis than that, I think. First, it tries to explain why the Chinese empire was so much more durable than other pre-modern systems, finding the answer in China's kind of cultural identity. Second, it argues that China's entry into a world of sovereign nation-states was unusually prolonged and traumatic because it forced the Chinese to reject their age-old cultural identity and adopt a new politicized one. Third, it suggests that this long, wrenching 'identity crisis' makes contemporary Chinese nationalism unusually intense, becoming in the resolution of the crisis something like the religion of modern China. I will argue that each of these three propositions remains more problematic than the thesis allows, but they clearly raise important issues.

Some might argue that the culturalism to nationalism thesis is a straw man, an outdated interpretation reflecting the uncritical application to China of modernization theory, or other allegedly ethnocentric biases of Western scholarship, whereas more recent scholarship has challenged and modified many of its propositions.[14] However, the thesis about nationalism seems much more durable than the broader modernization paradigm to which it is obviously related. It remains influential in the work of China scholars[15] and is widely

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14 A thorough discussion of this issue, with citation and analysis of scores of scholarly works that challenge older paradigms, with which the thesis is clearly associated, is found in Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1984).

15 For example, a recent synthesis of Chinese history challenges many older interpretations but emphasizes the 'lack of unequivocal nationalist feelings among the Chinese' and the classical focus on 'culturalism rather than nationalism'; Ray Huang, *China: A Macrohistory* (M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 1988), p.114, and pp.29, 187 and 191.

accepted outside the China field as an authoritative interpretation. Although recent scholarship offers many new insights into issues relating to Chinese nationalism, I know of no published work that engages directly the thesis's portrayal of Chinese nationalism. The critique that follows identifies some conceptual problems with the key terms of nationalism and culturalism, then notes some empirical problems, and closes with a brief evaluation of the thesis.

A Critique of the Thesis

Conceptual Problems: Benjamin Akzin called the literature on nationalism a 'terminological jungle,[16] and more than one explorer has been lost in it. The most important point to note here is that the word covers a wide range of social phenomena, so there is no way to assess the thesis without specifying some of them. I must also clarify how I will use the equally troublesome word 'nation'.

Among all the definitional controversies about nationalism, says Anthony Smith, none has been 'so prolonged and confusing as that between 'statists' and 'ethnicists'. The former define the nation as a 'territorial-political unit', with nationalism involving an aspiration for self-government; the latter see the nation as a 'large, politicized ethnic group defined by common culture and alleged descent', with nationalism turning into a cultural movement.[17] This confusion permits the meaning of nation to range from an ethnic group that does not constitute a state, to a state that contains more than one ethnic group. My discussion adopts the 'ethnicist' view that a nation is a particular kind of ethnic group. The ethnic group itself is 'defined by common culture and alleged descent', or more precisely as a group of people who differentiate themselves from others on the basis of a set of perceived cultural differences.[18] Although there is also dispute on what sets a nation apart from the general category of ethnic group, there is some consensus on the idea that the nation is a 'large, politicized ethnic

16 Benjamin Akzin, *State and Nation* (Hutchinson, London, 1964), pp.7-10.

17 Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (Harper and Row, New York, 1971), p.176.

18 This formulation draws on Fredrik Barth, 'Introduction', in Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Differences* (Little, Brown, Boston, 1969), pp.9-38: Paul R. Brass, 'Ethnicity and Nationality Formation', *Ethnicity*, vol.3, no.3 (September 1976), pp.225-41; and George DeVos and Lola Romanucci-Ross (eds.), *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change* (Mayfield, Palo Alto, 1975), pp.5-41.

group', or an ethnic group that seeks or has acquired some degree of political recognition or autonomy.[19] In other words, for our purposes, a nation is a cultural community that is or seeks to become a political community as well.

This concept of nation clarifies the core idea of nationalism. Ernest Gellner says it is 'the striving to make culture and polity congruent'.[20] Nationalism proposes that nations should become states (or at least politically autonomous) and states should become nations (or at least relatively unified and distinct from others in culture). Smith's earlier distinction now supports two families of nationalism: ethnic nationalism, in which an existing ethnic group strives to attain, enhance, or protect its nationhood, perhaps by becoming an independent state; and state nationalism, in which an existing state strives to become a unified nation (the idea of nation-building) or claims that its goals embody those of a nation and are essential to its nationhood. Nationalism may serve either a state or a nation, or a mix of these communities. But *how* does nationalism serve? Again, scholars disagree, offering three versions of what nationalism is.

One view sees nationalism as a doctrine or set of ideas. For Hans Kohn, it is a 'political creed' that 'centres the supreme loyalty of the overwhelming majority of the people upon the nation-state, either existing or desired', and that regards the nation-state as both an ideal and indispensable organization.[21] The doctrine may be specified more precisely, and ethnocentrically, as 'a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century [which] holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations...and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government.[22] For others nationalism is political action or movement. It is 'the assertion of the will to constitute an autonomous political community by a self-conscious group'[23] or 'an

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19 The idea that a nation is distinguished from other ethnic groups by a higher degree of politicization is found in Akzin, Brass, and Smith; see also the seminal work of Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, 2nd ed. (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, 1966), esp. pp.96-105.

20 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1983), p.43.

21 Hans Kohn, 'Nationalism', *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968), vol.11, p.63.

22 Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Hutchinson, London, 1960), p. 9.

23 Charles W. Anderson, Fred R. von der Mehden and Crawford Young, *Issues of Political Development* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1967), p.17.

ideological movement, for the attainment and maintenance of self-government and independence on behalf of a group, some of whose members conceive it to constitute an actual or potential "nation" like others'.[24] Finally, some define nationalism as sentiment, consciousness, or state of mind, emphasizing individuals' awareness of and loyalty to the nation and its traditions.[25]

To summarize, my critique of the thesis departs from the idea that a nation is a large politicized ethnic group; that nationalism consists of doctrines, movements or sentiments supporting a nation; and that state and ethnic nationalism are two different, although possibly overlapping, varieties of nationalism. Some authorities insist that nationalism has existed only in modern times, generally since about 1800, whereas others allow for some pre-modern forms. Smith accepts the pre-modern possibility in what he calls 'ethnocentric nationalism', and Akzin cites China as an ancient nation that entered modern history with nationality and nationalism both present.[26] I accept the possibility of a pre-modern nationalism that lacks the core propositions of modern nationalism: that nations should be states, holding formally equal status in a world order properly composed of such states, whose members are citizens with equal rights and obligations. The thesis emphasizes none of these distinctions, although by nationalism it clearly means modern nationalism.

Culturalism raises problems of a different sort because it is a word that does not appear in standard dictionaries and seems little used outside the China field. China scholars are at liberty, therefore, to use it as they please. The main usage has been the 'culturalism as identity' idea outlined in earlier passages. It has always been a difficult term to handle, however, and Joseph Levenson himself recognized two difficulties in his concept of culturalism.

The first was that culturalism as identity was difficult to distinguish from what I will call 'culturalism as movement'. The distinction arises from what culturalism means in two different political contexts. In one context loyalty to the culture and belief in its superiority is so profound

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24 Smith, op. cit., p.171.

25 See Akzin, op. cit., pp.41, 46, 77-79; Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Nationalism* (Kelley, New York, 1966), p.xviii; Boyd C. Shafer, *Nationalism: Myth and Reality* (Harvest, New York, 1955), p. 10; and Louis Snyder, *Global Mini-Nationalisms: Autonomy or Independence* (Greenwood, Westport, Conn., 1982), p.xv.

26 See the discussion in Smith, op. cit., chapter 7, and Akzin, op. cit., pp. 181-82.

that bearers of the culture recognize no competition. This is culturalism as identity, an unquestioned world view that cannot conceivably be lost or proven wrong. The other context involves awareness of competition, hence the prospect of choice among alternatives and the need for some defence and legitimation of the culture, even by those – indeed precisely by those – who believe most intensely in its superiority. This is 'culturalism as movement', in which conscious argument and action become necessary to defend a culture under threat. Levenson emphasized that 'true culturalism' had no conception of rivalry whereas Liang Qichao knew China and its culture had rivals; therefore, Liang's was not 'true' but rather 'decaying culturalism', a 'cultural loyalty which he feels he must justify' and which Levenson sometimes labelled 'culturalistic'.[27] Others, too, have noted how easily culturalism supported or merged with a 'cultural nationalism' that vigorously defended Chinese culture against foreign competitors.[28] If culturalism as identity slides easily into culturalism as movement, despite the fact that the latter reverses a key condition of the former, it is not surprising to see the word stretched in other ways as well. In one version it becomes a label for the imperial political and social system as a whole.[29] In another it refers to the approach of scholars (like Levenson) who emphasize this cultural problem, not to the Chinese view of their culture.[30]

Levenson's second cautionary note on the use of culturalism came as an afterthought in reflections on the dichotomies he analysed in his four books on Confucian China and its modern fate. The passage is worth quoting at length:

> Accordingly, when I conjure up dichotomies – objective/subjective, intellectual/emotional, history/value, traditional/modern, culturalism/nationalism, Confucianist/legalist, and the like – these are offered, not as stark confrontations really 'there' in history, but as heuristic devices for explaining (not conforming to) the life situation. Only categories clash, categories of explanation... Antitheses are abstractions, proposed only to

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27 Levenson, *Liang* (op. cit)., pp.2, 110-19.

28 Ojha, op. cit., pp.x-xi, 26-50; John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 4th edition (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1979), p.99.

29 Leon E. Stover, *The Cultural Ecology of Chinese Civilization* (Mentor, New York, 1974).

30 Arif Dirlik, 'Culture, Society and Revolution: A Critical Discussion of American Studies of Modern Chinese Thought', *Working Papers in Asian/Pacific Studies* (Duke University, Asian/Pacific Studies Institute Durham, N.C., 1985) esp. pp.7-8, 40, 52.

> let us see how, and why, their starkness in definition is mitigated in history.[31]

In effect, Levenson is telling us not to take the thesis too literally because he poses the contrast between culturalism and nationalism as a 'heuristic device', not as a confrontation really 'there' in history. The thesis is a metaphor for China's modern transformation, not a precise description of historical processes. It suggests a set of categories to study, with every expectation that the student will find the 'starkness' of these categories 'mitigated in history'. The problem is that some may adopt the concept but not Levenson's caution about the method. Great misunderstanding can result if metaphors are taken literally.[32]

The thesis's vulnerability to conceptual confusion is compounded by certain assumptions and normative judgments that bedevil the study of nationalism in general. Assumptions about nationalism's supremacy, universality, and irresistibility appear in definitions that stipulate it centres 'supreme loyalty' on the nation-state, or that proclaim its capacity to over-ride all other political loyalties and objectives. They appear as well in the tidal metaphor so favoured by analysts of the rise of modern nationalism and nation-states. These assumptions often prove true but they are not laws of history. Contrary to much that is said about nationalism by its analysts or adherents, nations fluctuate in boundaries, in beliefs about what is essential to their existence, in intensity of commitment from members, and in how members' loyalties are shared with other communities. Nationalist movements and doctrines rise and fall, expand and contract, and change their statements about what the nation is or is going to be. Most states today include more than one nation or potential nations, with complex overlapping or competing national claims on their citizens. The survival or revival of 'ethnic nationalisms' within states once supposed to be assimilating them is well documented.[33] There is more than one kind of nation, and the nation is but one kind of political community. The study of a particular

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31 Levenson, *Confucian China* (op. cit.), General Preface, p.xi.

32 For a parallel argument that misuse of a 'metaphor of growth', has distorted Western theories of development, see Robert A. Nisbet, *Social Change and History: Aspects of the Western Theory of Development* (Oxford University Press, London, 1969).

33 See, in particular, Walker Connor, 'Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?', *World Politics*, vol.24, no.3 (April 1972), pp.319-55; and Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981).

nation and its nationalism requires appreciation of its changing relationships with other nations and political communities.

Normative judgments about nationalism are also common. To the ardent nationalist it is a good thing, but many contemporary analysts, sobered by two centuries of imperialism, revolution, and war, take a negative view. Isaiah Berlin saw nationalism as a 'bent twig', a pathological reaction to science and rationalism, an 'inflamed condition of national consciousness' usually caused by 'some form of collective humiliation'.[34] John Dunn called it 'the very tissue of modern political sentiment', yet condemned its 'moral shabbiness' as 'the starkest political shame of the twentieth century'.[35] Deutsch synthesizes much of this doubt and condemnation in his idea that nationalism produces for a nation and its leaders 'a gain in power and a loss in judgment'.[36] Because it is thought to unite and strengthen a nation internally but to enhance its fear and misunderstanding of external forces, nationalism may be thought a good thing for a country fighting for unity or independence, a bad thing for one strong enough to impose its will on others. Not surprisingly, many prefer to describe the sentiments of their own citizens as 'patriotic', whereas others are 'nationalistic' (currently a preferred Chinese perspective). How do these normative notions come into play in the culturalism to nationalism thesis? There is a tendency, I think, to see the absence of nationalism in imperial China as a fatal weakness; once the tide is running, failure to join it becomes a moral flaw akin to treason. Yet in the era of the PRC, nationalism begins to assume an irrational and dangerous quality that distorts China's true interests and threatens other states.

This discussion yields three conclusions. First, both nationalism and culturalism carry multiple meanings and refer to complex phenomena, so the thesis is bound to be confusing unless one specifies how its terms are used. It is especially important to consider the nation as a kind of political community, to examine its relationships with other communities, and to distinguish among varieties of nations and nationalisms. Second, the thesis errs in opposing culturalism to nationalism and ethnicity, in arguing that culturalism blocked

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34 Isaiah Berlin, 'The Bent Twig: A Note on Nationalism', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.51, no.1 (1972), pp.11-30.

35 John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979), pp. 55-57.

36 Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Its Alternatives* (Knopf, New York, 1969), pp.32-33.

nationalism and had to dissipate for the latter to rise. Culturalism was actually an assertion of Chinese ethnicity as it emphasized the cultural distinctions separating Chinese from others and the importance of maintaining those distinctions. Because one of the key distinctions in question was the imperial system, culturalism also asserted the existence of a nation – an ethnic group with its own political order. Culturalism was quite different from modern nationalism, but it was not inherently incompatible with ethnicity and nationalism. Third, the thesis is sometimes used metaphorically, and like all references to nationalism may carry questionable assumptions and normative connotations. Such usages may be illuminating and appropriate at times, but we must handle them with caution.

Empirical Questions: The next step is to apply the ideas introduced thus far in a discussion of the thesis's empirical validity. The thesis covers far too much ground to examine carefully in an article, and the range of knowledge required to do so is, in any case, beyond my capacity. What I will do is pose a few questions and hypotheses inspired by fragmentary evidence to suggest where the thesis's strengths and weaknesses might lie. The discussion follows a periodization suggested by the thesis: culturalist dominance (Imperial China), transition to nationalism (c. 1860-1919), and nationalist dominance (post-1919). It employs the concepts already introduced of nation, state and ethnic nationalism, and nationalism as doctrine, movement and sentiment. Such discussion cannot proceed, however, without resolving the problem of what culturalism means.

The idea of culturalism as 'identity' – the most common formulation – works as a 'heuristic device' for Levenson but is difficult to apply in more rigorous fashion. It seems obvious that Chinese 'identity' did not literally transform itself from 'cultural' to 'national' in the past one or two centuries. There is no single identity of either sort for all Chinese in either period, and the two identities in question actually go together in complex ways. It is better to think of culturalism as a belief, doctrine, or set of ideas that can be specified with a bit more precision, and then to ask how strong it was among different groups at different times.

Accordingly, for purposes of this discussion, I take culturalism to be the belief that China was a cultural community whose boundaries were determined by the knowledge and practice of principles expressed through China's elite cultural tradition; that this community was unique and unrivalled because it was the world's only true civilization; that it was properly governed by an emperor who held absolute authority over

his subjects, consisting of all those participating in the civilization; and that the political authority of the emperor and his officials rested in principle on superior cultural attainments, especially learning and a capacity to govern by moral example. This set of beliefs had several important implications for the community it defined. Most importantly it specified a particular set of cultural markers, drawn mainly from the Confucian philosophical and moral tradition, that would be distinguished from, and exist independently of, more general cultural characteristics demarcating ethnic groups. Chinese, Mongols, Manchus, Arabs, Turks and the like could all join the community by accepting the principles, and be excluded from it if they did not. It was intellectual commitment to the principles that counted, not the specific culture into which one was born, because the principles could be learned or renounced. The community's precise membership and boundaries could fluctuate so long as the belief was maintained in significant regions. Rulers, too, could gain or lose legitimacy, which was based on superior command or demonstration of the principles, and not on ethnic background.

There is no doubt that this set of beliefs was extremely important to the maintenance of empire. It established grounds for accepting the downfall of Chinese dynasties and installation of alien ones. It justified imperial rule over non-Chinese peoples and recruitment of some of them into the imperial bureaucracy. It rationalized fluidity of the empire's territorial boundaries and population. It influenced the language of imperial discourse and the quality of imperial relationships with other communities. But what was culturalism's actual extent and influence? My first hypothesis is that the thesis overstates culturalism's strength, which was limited in two important ways.

The first limitation was largely one of class. Culturalism derived from an elite tradition passed on through scholarly study and official practice, making it unlikely that many ordinary subjects understood or accepted the core beliefs. This is not to suggest a sharp separation of elite and folk cultures but rather a complex mixture of class and ethnic distinctions. Each of the many ethnic groups that comprised the empire had its own cultural markers, readily recognized by itself and the others with which it had contact. The Chinese were by far the most numerous of these groups, and for imperial history as a whole they were the most powerful in every respect – although one or another of the non-Chinese groups held military superiority at times. The Chinese were also a nation (so, too, were some of the others) because the imperial political system was primarily theirs in population, territory, officialdom and culture. Culturalism was strongest among a community of elites that occupied

the upper levels of these diverse peoples, which were distinguished by language, religion, food, dress, rituals and the like, and its influence extended into the general population. But although it was a major cultural identification for those at the top, for the majority it would have been of less importance than their primary ethnic identification. It seems likely that most Chinese thought of their cultural and political community – their nation – as a Chinese one, and that culturalism, to the extent that they understood it, reinforced their sense that the empire was also properly Chinese.

The second limitation is that there were alternatives to culturalism, as statecraft and ethnicity both competed or intermingled with it; 'pure' culturalism was modified by considerations of state power as well as by Chinese ethnic assertiveness. The imperial state had to be concerned about territory and its defence, sometimes interacting with others on an equal footing that violated culturalist assumptions.[37] Internally, its law distinguished between subjects and aliens, asserting sovereignty over resident aliens despite the culturalist logic that foreigners ('barbarians') would not be subjects of the empire.[38] Aliens were recruited into the bureaucracy, sometimes in significant numbers, taking Chinese names and demonstrating the idea that the empire was a community based on culturalist belief and practice. But Mongol and Manchu dynasties established legal distinctions among Chinese and non-Chinese subjects, some non-Chinese continued to be marked as foreigners long after they were almost wholly assimilated, and some aliens served with honour as imperial officials even as their households were still registered locally as foreigners.[39] Scholars like Wang Fuzhi (1619-92) gave doctrinal expression to Han Chinese chauvinism, and anti-foreign sentiment

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37 Morris Rossabi (ed.), *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and its Neighbors, 10th-14th Centuries* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983).

38 R. Randle Edwards, 'Ch'ing Legal Jurisdiction over Foreigners', in Jerome Alan Cohen, R. Randle Edwards and Fu-mei Chang Chen (eds), *Essays on China's Legal Tradition* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980), pp.222-69; and Vi Kyuin Wellington Koo, 'The Status of Aliens in China', *Studies in History, Economics and Public Law* (Columbia University), vol.50, no.2 (1912), pp.13-56.

39 T'ung-tsu Ch'u, *Law and Society in Traditional China* (Mouton, Paris, 1961), pp.201-06; Derk Bodde and Clarence Morris, *Law in Imperial China* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1967), pp.168-70; and Donald Daniel Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews: The Jewish Community of Kaifeng* (E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1972).

played a role in Chinese conflicts with both Mongols and Manchus.[40] In the latter case, secret societies kept anti-Manchu sentiment simmering for two centuries, until it surfaced again in the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64) and the burgeoning Chinese nationalist movement at the end of the century. Popular sentiment supporting these non-culturalist doctrines and movements in popular culture was evident in patriotic themes, emphasizing national history and heroes.[41]

One should not exaggerate these non-culturalist phenomena or read back into them modern nationalistic content. The point is simply to observe that culturalism's dominance was modified or even challenged by competing views in imperial law and statecraft and in both elite and popular ideas about Chinese relations with other ethnic groups. My hypothesis is that a fuller account would show important variations in culturalism's influence over time, pre-1850 periods when something like 'culturalism as a movement' developed, and throughout imperial history a greater role for issues involving ethnic differences than the culturalism-to-nationalism thesis suggests.

In the critical transition period from culturalism to nationalism – the late nineteenth century through the May Fourth era – the thesis is at its strongest. Explicit nationalist doctrines and movements emerged, accompanied by rising nationalist sentiments among educated and urban groups. By the 1920s, for most politically conscious Chinese, nationalism had replaced or at least overshadowed culturalism as the proper model for the Chinese political community. This meant that political and cultural communities should coincide, requiring efforts to strengthen the cultural as well as political unity of the Chinese state; that China should accept the norms of the international system of states, acknowledging the formal equality of other states and asserting

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40 See the discussion of Wang's ideas in Etienne Balazs, *Political Theory and Administrative Reality in Traditional China* (School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1965), pp.37-50. Varied manifestations of Chinese resistance to the Manchus are analysed in Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills, Jr (eds), *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region. and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979); and Frederic Wakeman, Jr and Carolyn Grant (eds), *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975).

41 Yuji Muramatsu, 'Some Themes in Chinese Rebel Ideologies', in Arthur F. Wright (ed.), *The Confucian Persuasion* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1960), pp.241-67; and Robert Ruhlmann, 'Traditional Heroes in Chinese Popular Fiction', in Arthur F. Wright (ed.), *Confucianism and Chinese Civilization* (Atheneum, New York, 1964), pp.122-57.

vigorously its own territorial sovereignty; and that the Chinese state should transform its subjects into citizens, assigning them equal rights and obligations within the state, which would command their primary political loyalties.

Some aspects of this transition remain problematic, however. Accounts of both Chinese and foreign observers affirm that large sections of the population, mainly rural, remained uninvolved in political issues outside their localities. Despite all the nationalist activity and rhetoric, the country was not truly united during the period; Chinese political figures spent most of their energies fighting each other. The thesis postulates a prolonged crisis, of course, which it attributes to the trauma of exchanging culturalist for nationalist identity. The crisis was evidently real, but it is less clear that it was one of national identity.

The fact that many Chinese escaped the nationalist tide is no surprise, given the historical background and the weak development of modern education and communications in most of the country. It need not detain us here except as a cautionary footnote on tidal metaphors. The more significant limitations in the thesis lie in the problematic meaning of the transition from culturalism to nationalism and in the puzzle of why the crisis of modern China was (perhaps 'is') so prolonged. I suggest that the adoption of modern nationalism was a decisive break from culturalism but left unanswered some important questions about the implications of that nationalism; and that the crisis was one more of political authority than of Chinese identity.

Culturalism left an ambiguous legacy. Those elements within it that explicitly contradicted modern nationalism had to be discarded, but two of its implications were readily adaptable in the new era. Culturalism had always served as an ideology of empire, justifying Chinese rule over non-Chinese peoples as well as non-Chinese rule over the Chinese. In a sense it postulated a super-nation, a community defined by universally-valid principles (though not universally accepted ones) and ruled through an imperial political system centred on China, one that transcended the specific cultural traditions of the peoples included. One need not question the sincerity or commitment of culturalists to observe that this was a very nice doctrine for emperors and their officials – that is, for anyone participating in the rule of, or benefits from, a multi-national political system. It was a point of view readily transferred to state nationalism, which asserts that the state represents the true interests of its people as a whole, who constitute a nation in being or becoming, whatever their past cultural and political differences. On the other hand, the culture of culturalism's empire was Chinese; the principle allowed non-Chinese to enter (even rule) the community and Chinese to defect

from it, but there was never any doubt that culturalism promoted a Chinese culture and others' participation in its practice. In effect, culturalism emphasized and extolled Chinese ethnicity, permitting an easy shift to cultural or ethnic nationalism – that is, political defence of Chinese culture and insistence that the Han Chinese must have their own unified state. In short, culturalism could lend its ideas to either state nationalism or ethnic nationalism, to support for a new China-centred state ruling the old empire and for a new political community among ethnic Chinese; one could retain its *de facto* specification of the Chinese content of the community's culture, or its more formalistic insistence that the political community rested on ideas transcending the particular ethnic identity of its members.

Culturalism's protean qualities made the transition to modern nationalism easier than the thesis suggests. The practice of the imperial state was formally brought into line with international norms in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the transition among intellectuals was accomplished in roughly a generation. But just as culturalism had never really settled questions of ethnicity within the empire, so acceptance of modern nationalism did not resolve the possible contradictions between state and ethnic nationalism. Perhaps culturalism's capacity to tolerate such ambiguities remains its primary legacy today. (More on that later.)

In any case, modern Chinese nationalism initially displayed a strong ethnic, even xenophobic, strain in opposing imperialism and Manchu rule. Turn-of-the-century ethnic nationalism placed its mark on the formative years of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and the new Republic of China (ROC), witnessed in extensive mobilization of overseas Chinese communities in support of the anti-Manchu cause and the later granting of representation to these communities in Republican national assemblies. Particularly telling was the late Qing adoption of the principle of *jus sanguinis*, confirmed in the Nationality Law of 1909, granting citizenship to all Chinese anywhere, and later allowing 'dual nationality' for Chinese subjects of another country who would also retain Chinese citizenship.[42] Nonetheless, once Nationalist and Communist states emerged from the turmoil of revolution, they asserted sovereignty over old imperial territories and saw non-Chineseness as no barrier to incorporation in a Chinese state. Like culturalism before it,

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42 Harley Farnsworth MacNair, *The Chinese Abroad, Their Position and Protection: A Study in International Law and Practice* (Commercial Press, Shanghai, 1925); and Chutung Tsai, 'The Chinese Nationality Law, 1909', *The American Journal of International Law*, vol.4, no.2 (April 1910), pp.404-11.

modern nationalism permitted more than one definition of the Chinese nation.

A second problem involves the way the thesis construes the crisis of modern China. In a provocative study of Chinese political culture, Lucian Pye asserted that 'the Chinese have been generally spared the crisis of identity common to most other transitional systems', that 'they have little doubt about their identities as Chinese', and that 'the more they have been exposed to the outside world the more self-consciously Chinese they have become'. The primary problem, argues Pye, has been an 'authority crisis' brought on by erosion of the legitimacy of existing political authority and the search by Chinese for new forms of authority that can 'satisfy their need to reassert a historic self-confidence and also provide the basis for reordering their society in modern times'.[43] These are sweeping assertions indeed, hence subject to a variety of challenges, but I want to endorse their main thrust in the present context, which is that the culturalism-to-nationalism thesis overstates modern China's identity crisis and directs attention away from a severe and prolonged crisis of political authority.

In the main, there has been little disagreement among twentieth-century political elites on the basic postulates of modern Chinese nationalism. Different regimes and competing elites have expressed similar nationalist rhetoric and goals. Nonetheless, debilitating internal political conflicts have continued even as China has faced severe economic crises and international threats. This does not mean nationalist rhetoric lacks conviction or substance. Rather it suggests that the crisis of political authority is so profound that it has overshadowed threats to national security or well-being. Except for a few brief periods (mainly 1985-98, 1919-27, and 1935-41), the integrity and survival of the nation has been a less pressing and divisive issue than how the Chinese polity should be structured, who should hold political authority, and what doctrine should guide social and economic development. I am not suggesting that the transition from culturalism to nationalism was painless or that the Chinese have had no problems in defining or redefining their nation. My point is that these problems have been less acute than the thesis suggests and that modern China's 'identity crisis' is difficult to separate from crises driven by elite political conflicts.

The logic of the culturalism-to-nationalism thesis suggests that Chinese nationalism entered its high-tide phase about 1919, building to

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43 Lucian Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics: A Psychocultural Study of the Authority Crisis in Political Development* (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, 1968), pp.5-6, passim.

the establishment of the PRC in 1949. The new regime was a product of a movement with strong nationalist credentials.[44] Its restoration of national unity and central power to a degree unknown since the mid-Qing, coupled with a strong organizational reach into the grass roots of Chinese society, enabled it to mount a vigorous development program. The resulting rise in Chinese power and international stature satisfied some nationalist aspirations and raised awareness at home and abroad of possible Chinese pursuit of expanded nationalist ambitions. As suggested earlier, it was not difficult for observers to see nationalism everywhere in PRC history, goals, and behaviour.

Once again, the thesis captures an important truth about rising Chinese nationalism while distorting or oversimplifying some of its manifestations. My discussion of the progress of nationalist doctrines, movements, and sentiments suggests three points about the post-1949 period. First, a state nationalism has dominated official doctrine, placing its mark on most government statements and policies, but contradictions remain in the state's definition of citizenship and its inability or unwillingness to abandon or suppress ethnic nationalism. Second, some nationalist movements have occurred since 1949, and a powerful potential for them persists, but they have not dominated PRC political behaviour. Third, nationalist sentiments have grown among Chinese citizens, but major questions remain about the *focus* of nationalist sentiments – that is, about how the nation is defined – and the *intensity* of nationalism relative to other commitments.

State nationalism portrays the state as the embodiment of the nation's will, seeking for its goals the kind of loyalty and support granted the nation itself and trying to create a sense of nationhood among all its citizens. It is often difficult to distinguish state from ethnic nationalism in a country like China where political and cultural communities are largely congruent, both historically and today. But they are not totally congruent, now or in the past, and recognition of the difference is essential in analysis of contemporary Chinese nationalism. The PRC is a multi-national state, approximately 93 per cent of its population consisting of Han Chinese (usually referred to in this essay simply as 'Chinese'), the other 7 per cent non-Chinese divided officially among 55 minority nationalities. State nationalism asserts that the

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44 The classic statement remains Chalmers A. Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937-1945* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1962). While aspects of Johnson's thesis are controversial, the importance of the CCP's incorporation and use of nationalism is not.

Chinese nation includes all PRC citizens irrespective of their nationality. Like culturalism, it acknowledges the ethnic differences among its population but insists that all are members of a larger nation that binds them together despite these historical ethnic differences. The state cannot deny the potential for ethnic nationalism on behalf of a nationality, or that many of its citizens lack strong attachments to larger political communities. Hence state nationalism requires 'nation-building'; creation of a new Chinese nation that incorporates all of its nationalities; concentration of political loyalty on the state; and repudiation of the idea that Chinese history and culture are purely a Han affair. The terms 'nationalism' and 'chauvinism' usually refer in official discourse to reactionary attachments to nationalities, whereas 'patriotism' is the desired love and support for the new China, always indistinguishable from the Chinese state and its objectives.[45]

State nationalism accords closely with conventional international norms emphasizing the indivisibility of territorial sovereignty and citizenship. PRC pronouncements usually support these norms vigorously. A key illustration has been the PRC's retreat from the principle of 'dual nationality' for overseas Chinese that had emerged during the flowering of Chinese ethnic nationalism earlier in the century. After many partial or *ad hoc* compromises on the issue from the early 1950s on, the PRC Nationality Law of 1980 explicitly rejected dual nationality, provided for naturalization of aliens as Chinese nationals and renunciation of Chinese nationality by ethnic Chinese, and stated that children born of Chinese nationals settled abroad could not hold Chinese nationality if they had acquired foreign nationality by birth.[46] In keeping with this principle, the PRC has generally urged Chinese settled abroad to choose the nationality of their country of residence, giving up Chinese nationality.

State nationalism has met strong competition from two sources, however. One is the prominence in CCP doctrine, especially in the

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45 The origins and evolution of PRC policy toward its nationalities are analysed in June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People's Republic of China* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1976); and Thomas Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities: Autonomy or Assimilation?* (M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 1989). For an example of Chinese assertions that the Chinese nation is actually multinational, and that 'China' (*Zhongguo*) historically included all the nationalities and their territories, see *Social Sciences in China*, vol.3, no.4 (December 1982), pp. 237-38.

46 'The Nationality Law of the People's Republic of China', *Beijing Review*, vol.23, no.40 (6 October 1980), pp.17-18.

Maoist era, of class struggle and its impact on the real meaning of citizenship. Class-based definitions of the 'people' and recurring movements of class struggle divided the Chinese nation up to 1979, in effect revoking the citizenship of millions of its members by labelling them as enemy classes devoid of political rights. Nationalist movements frequently identify as 'traitors' members of the nation who allegedly collaborate with a foreign enemy, but CCP practice extended this act of national excommunication to vast numbers of people for purely internal political reasons, often on the thinnest of evidence. The legal and doctrinal implications of this are complex but one must recognize that it contradicts the substance of both state and ethnic nationalism, dividing the nation rather than unifying it by imposing arbitrary and shifting political criteria for membership.[47]

The other problem is ethnic nationalism's stubborn refusal to dissipate, even in some doctrinal forms. On internal issues, state nationalism has been relatively effective in resisting open espousal of Han Chinese ethnic nationalism, but it has not silenced statements of ethnic nationalism from Tibetans and some other minority nationalities. Externally, Chinese ethnic nationalism found expression after 1949 in granting overseas Chinese representation in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the National People's Congress (NPC), as well as in other policies addressing this group. With the trend that led to explicit renunciation of dual nationality in 1980, formal policy changed. Overseas Chinese no longer have seats in the NPC and their representatives in the CPPCC are said to be 'Chinese nationals residing abroad', that is, not overseas Chinese who hold foreign nationality.[48] Much confusion remains in both Chinese and foreign views of this matter, however, and the PRC continues to assume or imply that ethnic Chinese the world over have some special bond or even obligation toward the PRC, albeit of variable intensity. Particularly significant is China's position on the nationality of Hong Kong

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47 See Richard Kurt Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1981).

48 *Encyclopedia of New China* (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1987), p.151. Key documents of the early CPPCC and NPC are found in Theodore H. E. Chen (ed.), *The Chinese Communist Regime: Documents and Commentary* (Praeger, New York, 1967). Complexities of PRC policy and terminology with respect to overseas Chinese are analysed in Stephen Fitzgerald, *China and the Overseas Chinese: A Study of Peking's Changing Policy, 1949-1970* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972) and Wang Gungwu, 'External China as a New Policy Area', *Pacific Affairs*, vol.58, no.1 (Spring 1985), pp.28-43.

residents, expounded in the 1984 'Sino-British Joint Declaration' and the 1988 Draft 'Basic Law', which implies that all ethnic Chinese residents are automatically Chinese nationals. The suggestion that Hong Kong's ethnic Chinese will automatically acquire PRC citizenship in 1997, whereas non-Chinese will not, contradicts the principle of state nationalism expressed in the PRC constitution and Nationality Law. If Hong Kong and Macao are Chinese territory, all their permanent residents who do not hold foreign nationality should become Chinese nationals, with the non-Chinese treated like the minority nationalities of the PRC.[49] Here, as with class struggle, there are competing doctrinal views of the Chinese nation that confuse the meaning of Chinese nationalism and qualify our evaluation of its significance.

Movements and sentiments that can be identified as reflecting both state and ethnic nationalism, often thoroughly mixed, have a prominent place in PRC history. At the broadest level, state nationalism and its nation-building aspirations invest state policy with a nationalistic tone. Development becomes a national cause, a collective effort to transform China into a newly powerful and modernized state as well as a new national community integrating all of the state's territories and peoples. If one accepts Deutsch's argument that nationalism grows with the intensification of 'complementary communications',[50] then the post-1949 expansion of surface and air transportation, postal and electronic communications, film and publishing industries, literacy and education, and use of the national language (*putonghua*) – all accompanied by or infused with official propaganda emphasizing national unity, goals, and accomplishments – must have produced a significant increase in national consciousness. From this perspective, the real nationalist revolution in China came after 1949 in the building of an infrastructure that reached all of the state's citizens and regions.

The PRC's international conflicts have also stimulated nationalist movements and sentiments. The Korean War was the prototype, with its use of force in support of state objectives, backed by a Resist America-Aid Korea campaign that mobilized popular energies for the war effort through a variety of nationalistic anti-American claims and appeals. No subsequent conflict quite matched this first one's intense concentration

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49 On vagueness and inconsistency in the PRC position here, see Frank Ching, 'Chinese Nationality in the Basic Law', in Peter Wesley-Smith and Albert Chen (eds), *The Basic Law and Hong Kong's Future* (Butterworths, Hong Kong, 1988), pp.288-93: and Robin M. White, 'Nationality Aspects of the Hong Kong Settlement', *Journal of International Law*, vol.20, no.1 (Winter 1988), pp.225-51.

50 Deutsch, *supra*, n.19.

of military action, domestic mobilization, and popular emotion, but some mixture of extraterritorial (that is, involving areas of disputed or foreign sovereignty) military action coupled with nationalistic rhetoric and supporting popular demonstrations can be found in the Taiwan Straits crises of the mid-1950s, the Sino-Indian border war of 1962, Sino-Soviet border clashes of the 1960s, the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979, and the Chinese seizure of the Xisha Islands (the Paracels) in 1974 followed by occasional Sino-Vietnamese skirmishes around those islands and more assertions of PRC claims to all the islands (primarily including the Nansha or Spratly group) in the South China Sea.[51] The continuing drama of PRC efforts to regain Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan also ensures a steady diet of nationalistic themes in the official media. Although the primary nationalist components in these conflicts involve state pronouncements and popular demonstrations, and even external military action, they also enter popular culture as subject matter for film, drama, poetry and song. In these media they compete with more peaceful images of the nation that dwell on its history, monuments, landscape, and ethnic diversity.

Because nation-building and international conflicts reflect state interests and goals, they tend to define the issues in terms of state nationalism. Nonetheless, mobilization of popular support against foreign threats often appeals to Han history and symbols and we may assume that much of the Chinese response sees the nation defended as Han, not as the multinational community portrayed in state nationalism. Is there more direct evidence of ethnic nationalism and conflict in the PRC? There is no doubt that Chinese inclinations to distinguish sharply between foreigners and themselves – an inclination I see stemming in part from culturalism's emphasis upon Chinese ethnicity – is alive and well, surfacing in Han-minority relations as well as in Chinese treatment of foreigners residing or travelling in their country. The desire to segregate foreigners is official policy, not just a popular attitude, and although the state emphasizes the Chineseness of its minority population, it also endorses a continuing sense of their distinctiveness by granting minorities various kinds of special representation and autonomy.

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51 PRC claims in the South China Sea, which are disputed by many other states in the region, are analysed in Marwyn S. Samuels, *Contest for the South China Sea* (Methuen, New York, 1982). There was a suggestion, not approved, that the islands in question be incorporated in the new PRC province of Hainan when that large island off the southern coast was separated from Guangdong Province in 1988; see *Beijing Review* (21 September 1987), p.5.

Ethnic consciousness in China has also become conflictual and violent, most notably in Tibet where ethnic nationalism has triumphed for now over the state's version of Han-Tibetan relations. Similar though less intense conflict has appeared in Han relations with the Uighurs and other Muslim nationalities, notably in Xinjiang and Yunnan. Some Red Guard behaviour during the Cultural Revolution revealed Han hostility toward Tibetan, Mongol and Islamic nationalities as well as more generalized xenophobia. More recent years have witnessed repeated incidents between Chinese and African students, and a few more or less spontaneous demonstrations of anti-foreign, especially anti-Japanese, sentiment. The official press condemns all such nationalist, chauvinist, or racist ideas and actions, which it attributes to lingering influences from China's feudal and semi-colonial past; and it continues to call for patriotism among all Chinese coupled with internationalism in their relations with foreigners. Nonetheless, like popular sentiment, official attitudes and policies toward other states continue to show the influence of international rivalries of the past.[52]

Although the PRC has led what might be called a nationalist revolution in Chinese political behaviour and sentiment, the intensity and focus of this revolution remain uncertain. It is difficult to judge the intensity of nationalist belief in China because its profession is something like a state religion. Like professions of morality among politicians, it may tell us more about conventions of political discourse than the reality of either public behaviour or private belief. Much of our evidence on Chinese nationalism, from 1949 to the present, is from state proclamations, state-promoted demonstrations, or state-sponsored and censored public expression. With this caution in mind, I suggest two generalizations. First, nationalism was most intense in the period between 1949 and 1969 when the Korean War, tension in the Taiwan Straits, and the Soviet threat of the 1960s made calls for defence of the nation more credible and emotional. Thereafter, Chinese leaders began their long effort to resolve the crisis left by the Cultural Revolution, and foreign enemies, in the main, became progressively less threatening. Second, the primary effect of the post-1978 reforms (so far as nationalism is concerned) has been to encourage a kind of privatization, a retreat from politics and an increasingly open pursuit of individual,

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52 See Allen S. Whiting, *China Eyes Japan* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989) for thorough analysis of Chinese images of and policies toward Japan, emphasizing the historical image of Japan as the enemy of Chinese nationalism and giving special attention to anti-Japanese demonstrations among Chinese students in 1985.

family or group interest. The official gloss portraying a united people striving together for China's modernization does not jibe with the realities of Chinese behaviour. The nationalism most stimulated by the reforms was Tibetan, not Chinese.

State nationalism has not made the PRC's international behaviour particularly aggressive or inflexible, according to most observers, but rather cautious and opportunistic. China has pursued its interests vigorously, backing them with force on several occasions, but has manoeuvred and even retreated on many issues involving nationalistic concerns. In the 1970s the PRC abandoned its earlier demands for severance of American relations with Taiwan as a condition for US-China rapprochement, accepting *de facto* relations with the US between 1972 and 1978 even as formal American recognition of and support for the Republic of China on Taiwan continued. Some see the PRC's position on Hong Kong as nationalistic, but it had always insisted on its sovereignty there and could hardly be expected to relinquish that claim. The formula of 'one country, two systems' for Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan involves important concessions on matters of local autonomy, although the PRC insists on the formalities of its sovereignty over these areas.

As for popular nationalism in China, I have already suggested that it is less intense than the state would have us believe. It is also probably less oriented toward state nationalism. No doubt most officials involved in national affairs take state nationalism seriously, with relatively full understanding and acceptance of its premises. That stance may be widely shared in more highly educated and politically conscious circles. But the evidence available suggests that for most Chinese it is the Han Chinese nation, not the PRC state, that is the focus of national sentiment. Judging from Han-minority relations, from Chinese attitudes toward foreigners, and from Chinese attitudes toward other ethnic Chinese who are not PRC citizens, this ethnic nationalism is more spontaneous, volatile and potent than the state nationalism that it often challenges. In sum, I am suggesting that state nationalism is weaker than official communications proclaim; that ethnic nationalism, among both Han and minorities, is more powerful than the state likes to admit; and that neither state nor ethnic nationalism among the Han Chinese has been particularly intense in the post-Cultural Revolution era.

Summary and Evaluation: The culturalism-to-nationalism thesis has two primary strengths. Most importantly, it identifies a fundamental change in prevailing elite belief and official doctrine about the nature of the Chinese community and its place in the world. This belief in imperial

times was culturalism as defined at the outset of the preceding section. It was widely held among those educated in the Confucian tradition and it was part of the ideology of the imperial state. As orthodox state doctrine, culturalism gave way to modern nationalism under the impact of imperialism, the transition taking place between the mid-nineteenth century and the May Fourth era. The two doctrines were incompatible in three respects. First, although both doctrines recognized ethnic diversity within a broader cultural and political community of empire or modern state (both ruling much the same territory and population at times), culturalism placed primary emphasis on cultural determinants of community boundaries and membership, whereas modern nationalism defined the community as a territorial state in the process of achieving a higher degree of cultural and political integration. Second, culturalism did not acknowledge the formal equality of states in an international system of such states, nor did it see other cultural or political systems as competitors that could challenge Chinese ways, whereas modern nationalism asserted the reverse in both cases. Third, culturalism saw the common people as subjects of an absolute political authority, whereas modern nationalism insisted that all subjects would become citizens of the state, holding formally equal rights and obligations within it.

A second strength is the thesis's conceptualization of a broader pattern of intellectual change that accompanied the decline of empire and its replacement by a new kind of state. Levenson made use of the thesis as a 'heuristic device', counterposing abstractions that are 'not literally there in history'. It refers to a struggle in the minds of China's intellectual elites as they tried to resolve questions about their own and their nation's 'identity', a struggle resolved in this formulation by abandoning culturalism and adopting nationalism. By dramatizing the struggle as a confrontation between polar concepts, the thesis emphasizes the intellectual and psychological dimensions of the debate and sharpens the focus on its key issues. I hope that my efforts to respond to the broader ramifications of the thesis show that it does indeed have value as a 'heuristic device', even though one may qualify it sharply.

The thesis's main weakness is that it exaggerates the totality and clarity of the change in question. It overstates both the dominance of culturalism and the weakness of pre-modern nationalism in imperial times, as well as overstating the eclipse of culturalism and triumph of nationalism in modern times. Contrary to the thrust of the thesis, culturalism could co-exist with other ideas about state and nation, could lend support in modern times to both state and ethnic nationalism, and hence could retain some influence on Chinese nationalism down to the

present. Culturalism and state nationalism have been dominant elite doctrines in their respective eras, but neither has monopolized the field of ideas and sentiments about the Chinese nation.

These errors occur because the thesis focuses on intellectual history, elite behaviour, and official rhetoric, without taking full account of popular sentiments or the realities of statecraft, and because it does not consider carefully the conceptual problems involved in the study of nationalism and ethnicity. In particular, it does not analyse closely the Chinese nation and its changing relationship to other Chinese and non-Chinese communities. The study of Chinese nationalism requires examination of the social landscape in which it operates, to supplement the thesis by linking intellectual history to an anthropology of the Chinese nation. In the concluding part of this paper, I will try to demonstrate such an approach by a few general observations on different Chinese nations and their changing composition and significance.[53]

Changing Chinese Nations

A Han Chinese nation has existed for centuries, recognized by the Chinese and others as a distinct cultural and political community. There is disagreement on when this nation came into being, that is, when the Chinese became conscious of their shared culture and began to view that cultural community as requiring its own political system. One argument dates the nation from the first imperial unification in the Qin-Han period, with its combination of cultural standardization and political centralization,[54] whereas a strict culturalist perspective can assert that it was 'impossible for such a thing as a nation' to exist in imperial China.[55] This is a dispute involving both conceptual choice and empirical evidence. My conceptual choice reveals a pre-modern nation in China but I am not qualified to assess the evidence that might date that nation's founding. It is sufficient here to observe that the Qin-Han unification established an administrative and ideological framework within which the Chinese nation evolved. Internal divisions, alien conquests, Tang

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53 Although I cite few titles, the discussion that follows reflects my understanding of a large literature that examines these issues in depth and provides a growing scholarly foundation for the approach I suggest.

54 Wang Lei, 'The Definition of 'Nation' and the Formation of the Han Nationality', *Social Sciences in China*, vol.4, no.2 (June 1983), pp.167-88.

55 Etienne Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy*, trans. by H.M. Wright (ed.), by Arthur F. Wright (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1964), p.22.

cosmopolitanism, elite culturalism, peasant particularism, and Han and non-Han migrations and assimilation (in both directions) all complicated but did not block the nation's evolution. By the later dynasties, it was distinguished from other ethnic groups and nations by a sense of a common history, with myths of origin and descent; a distinctive written language and literary forms associated with it; some common folklore, life rituals and religious practices; and a core political elite, with a common education and orientation toward government service, that staffed the imperial bureaucracy, provided Chinese rule of most localities even under alien emperors, and circulated through official assignments and other travel throughout the empire.

For many reasons, however, this nation was not a continuous or even prominent focus for organization or loyalty. The imperial government's philosophy of rule, coupled with class barriers and regional differentiation, weakened its direct control of localities. Within and between regions were pronounced communal cleavages. In peripheral regions these stemmed in part from the presence of non-Han subjects, but the fundamental problem was communal divisions among the Han and a persistent tendency among commoners (and not a few elites) to attach their primary loyalties to these localized communities and organizations. Foremost among them were kinship associations, but they included villages, marketing systems, religious sects, secret societies, and self-defence organizations The largest communities within the Han nation were ethnic or sub-ethnic groups (scholars differ on the proper or least confusing term) defined by language or 'dialect', related cultural markers, and common provenance or residence. All of these communities possessed at least intermittent political organizations, including armed forces, for managing internal affairs and external conflicts. As they were the primary objects of loyalty for most Chinese, they reduced the importance of the nation in the Chinese universe of communities and were an obstacle to nationalist movements or doctrines that demanded major sacrifices on its behalf.

Communal cleavages did not destroy the nation because of the overlay of the imperial government, always re-centralized after periods of disunity; the existence of a pre-modern nationalism, expressed in national history, myth and doctrine, that did not support political separatism for regional and ethnic (sub-ethnic) communities; and the presence of political elites who constituted a true national community and tied localities indirectly to the imperial system by their participation in both local and national affairs. But the elites, too, contributed to the low salience of the nation by their belief in culturalism, which postulated a second kind of Chinese nation that could include aliens, and

even alien rulers, and could exclude Chinese who failed to adhere to Confucian norms. When the great Chinese emigration got underway in Ming times (it was to continue off and on to the present), a further complication arose with the overseas Chinese. Ming and Qing governments tended to assume that emigrants were unworthy subjects who had forsaken home and ancestors;[56] from the perspective of culturalism they had ceased to be Chinese. Nonetheless, as we have noted, a late-nineteenth century revisionist culturalism could view overseas Chinese as imperial subjects because they were obviously Chinese in culture. The point is that culturalism blurred the nation's boundaries, opening up the possibilities of a Chinese nation that included non-Han and one that included Chinese not really subject to the nation's political authority, both a bit different from the core Chinese nation. These different nations are more apparent today, with our norms of indivisible sovereignty and citizenship, and are politically very significant.

The Chinese nation in which modern nationalism emerged bore little resemblance to the ideal-type nation of Western theory. It was one among many communities to which Chinese belonged, and seldom the most important one to them, and even its leaders offered no explicit doctrine that we can comfortably call nationalism. But it was there and it endured, with its core territory and population relatively stable over the centuries. Charles Tilly reminds us that the construction of national states in Europe was a hazardous enterprise, despite the European political tradition that supposedly favoured such formations. Of some five hundred more-or-less independent political units in Europe in 1500, only about twenty-five were left in 1900; and even the survivors went through precarious episodes in which their integrity and future were much in doubt.[57] Something more than common culture held Chinese together, as there were ample opportunities to divide the empire along its internal regional or communal lines. The strength of the nation, including a form of pre-modern nationalism, must have been an important element here. Culturalism and particularism both lowered the salience of the core nation, placing other loyalties above it, but neither challenged the idea that it was a political and cultural community that ought to remain intact. Culturalism played a particularly important role by rationalizing periods of alien rule and glorifying what was in fact the

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56 MacNair, op. cit., chap.1.

57 Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975), pp.15, 38-39.

core nation's culture and tradition. Chinese attitudes toward the nation seem to have been flexible and pragmatic, enabling it to endure ruptures, discontinuities, contradictions and competing loyalties, without disintegrating.

This perspective helps explain why the rise of modern nationalism failed to produce a stable national unification. Old conceptions began to shift without crystallizing into unitary form. The Han Chinese nation of ethnic nationalism quickly eclipsed the culturalist version, adding to the core Chinese nation those overseas Chinese who responded to its appeals. Dual nationality and representation in national political bodies gave overseas Chinese legal membership in the nation they were supporting with their funds, bodies, and overseas havens. The nation of culturalism and empire that included non-Chinese did not disappear, because no Chinese government would abandon territorial claims so closely linked to national tradition and security, but it became changed in significant ways. The *de facto* separation or autonomy of most non-Han peripheral regions took them out of the mainstream of Chinese politics. Moreover, ethnic nationalism necessarily altered their relationship to the core nation. Logically, under this doctrine, the most distinct non-Chinese groups – really nations themselves – deserved formal autonomy if not independence, and some Chinese followed this logic by acknowledging such groups were not part of the Chinese nation. Generally, however, the KMT moved toward a policy of assimilation, arguing that these territories remained Chinese and that their peoples either were, or by assimilation should become, ethnically indistinguishable from the Han. In effect, modern nationalism was pushing the Chinese state toward a formal position on how an integrated nation could emerge from the multi-national empire. Ethnic nationalism encouraged assimilation of minorities into a Han nation or, less acceptably, independence or autonomy for all nationalities; state nationalism asserted that all nationalities could unite in a greater political and cultural community based on the territorial state.

Within the core Han nation, old regional and communal cleavages resisted national integration, while new classes contributed to rival political movements and ideologies that heightened the crisis of political authority. The paradoxical result became decades of rising nationalism coupled with persistent national disunity. The latter generally prevailed, postponing realization of nationalist goals, but the core nation survived and with it elite commitment to build a modern nation on the ruins of the empire. The CCP's victory in 1949 temporarily ended the crisis of political authority – it was to recur in the Cultural Revolution and the

1980s – permitting a new effort to define what an integrated modern Chinese nation could be.

For several reasons, the CCP committed itself after 1949 to state nationalism as a doctrine for creating a single Chinese nation. The outcome of the Second World War and the decisive military triumph of the People's Liberation Army extended PRC authority into most of the old imperial domains, so the new government faced immediately the reality of its multinational state; and state nationalism, like culturalism before it, was an appealing doctrine for legitimating this political and cultural formation. Soviet doctrine and example provided a ready-made model for creating a new state-wide nation that included within it several more or less autonomous older nationalities, which could continue to exist as their members added on the new super-nationality. Internationally, the PRC's acceptance of formal international norms pushed it to abandon dual nationality, although this remained ambiguous until adoption of the Nationality Law of 1980. In doctrine, then, the PRC had established a single Chinese nation coterminous with the territorial state.

In practice, the issue is not resolved because four different Chinese nations continue to exist. The first is the official one of state nationalism, composed of all PRC citizens, Han and non-Han alike. The second, defined by ethnic nationalism and political reality, is the PRC's Han nation, composed of the core Han population, distinct from non-Han nations within the PRC as well as from Chinese outside the PRC who are subject to other political authorities. The third, a product of ethnic nationalism and the vagaries of Chinese political and migratory history, consists of the PRC plus the 'compatriots' or *tongbao* (in mainland terminology) of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao, whom both the PRC and ROC see as part of the same nation-state even though presently under different political authorities. The fourth includes other overseas Chinese who retain some idea, however attenuated, of dual nationality; this is a nation made possible by a continuing sense of Chineseness combined with the idea that residence and citizenship in another country do not preclude political as well as cultural attachment to China. The study of Chinese nationalism must include these four nations, taking into account their internal cohesion and cleavages as well as their complex relations with each other and with other nations. They are important, not because their boundaries and membership are clear-cut, but because they all contribute to Chinese nationalism and what it means for themselves and others with whom they are in contact. Because all four nations are in flux, Chinese nationalism remains an elusive and unpredictable phenomenon.

The official nation is mainly one of aspiration, not social reality. No doubt many educated Han, and some minorities, accept the idea that Chineseness is shared among all the nationalities, but most of the movement toward integration of this nation results from assimilation of the non-Han into Chinese culture. The most active nationalism within the PRC is currently Tibetan, with stirrings among the Uighurs, other Muslims, and Mongols. Ethnic nationalism among minorities makes it clear that some may choose greater differentiation and autonomy over integration into a new PRC nation, a trend that on all sides can only strengthen awareness of the distinctiveness and dominance of the core Han Chinese nation. That core nation is also changing, as it adds new members by assimilation or by the projected infusion of Hong Kong and Macao compatriots at the end of the decade. Its earlier nationalist mobilization, which was moderated in the 1970s and 1980s, could easily revive in the face of a clear foreign threat or severe conflict with elements of other Chinese nations. Nonetheless, the core nation currently seems less involved in nationalist issues and movements than either the PRC or compatriot nations.

The third nation of compatriots is the most complex and unpredictable. For many years after 1949 the gulf between the PRC and the three territories was so great that the nation existed only as a legal fiction. Growing contacts with the mainland, first on the part of Hong Kong and Macao, then Taiwan in the 1980s, rekindled awareness that the territories do constitute a nation in some sense and that unification is possible. For Hong Kong and Macao, it is now a virtual certainty. The ROC shows no signs of yielding to PRC versions of reunification, but Taibei has contributed significantly to a renewed sense of nationhood by its vigorous promotion of contacts. At the same time, a contradictory trend exists in the rise of more open claims for Taiwanese self-determination or independence. Moreover, because many residents of Hong Kong and Macao object to reunification on PRC terms, or under the auspices of the current PRC regime, they, too, may push for greater autonomy or even independence, or may at least resist assimilation. In other words, this nation is in the midst of dramatic change that could lead to reunification of all the territories, to more explicit demands for independence or autonomy for Taiwan and Hong Kong, or to many other combinations in between. Whatever the outcome, it is important to note that nationalist activity in the 1980s was more vigorous in Tibet and Taiwan, and perhaps even in Hong Kong, than in the core Chinese nation.

The fourth nation that incorporates some overseas Chinese cannot take unified political form, as most of its external members have

primary obligations to non-Chinese states. Nonetheless, it has contributed both politically and economically to the PRC, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, continuing to nurture the idea that important community bonds remain. The history of this association and concern about its future role make it a very sensitive political issue, especially in Southeast Asia. The fourth nation also participated in the mobilization of external Chinese in support of the 1989 democracy movement in China, perhaps the greatest such mobilization since turn-of-the-century support for various reformist and revolutionary activities in China. Some kind of national consciousness is obviously at work when Chinese of all the nations described here can rally around a political movement within the PRC, although one must note that the 'nationalism' of the supporters of this movement was labelled 'unpatriotic' by PRC authorities. Nationalism continues to divide the Chinese as often as it unifies them.

How these different formations of Chinese nations will sort themselves out is difficult to foresee. We must anticipate continuing changes in their relations with each other, and with other nations, as well as in the intensity and focus of ethnic sentiments among their members. Possible changes include the escalation of new Chinese nationalisms, perhaps leading to independence movements in Taiwan, Tibet and even Hong Kong; or a reunification, on either a unitary or federal basis, that brings three of the nations – but not the overseas Chinese – into the same political system. Studying Chinese nationalism does not enable us to predict such outcomes, but it does tell us something about the limits of change. We can be sure that reunification would not remove a sense of ethnic (or subethnic) differentiation among the peoples brought together, nor would independence for Taiwan or Hong Kong remove their sense of attachment to some kind of Chinese community. It seems to be a characteristic of Chinese nationalism that it permits shifting loyalties among different political authorities to coexist with an abiding sense of Chinese nationhood.

Hong Kong
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