
Review: Chinese Nationalism: The State of the Nation

Reviewed Work(s): Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao. by Xiaobing Tang; Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity -- China, 1900-1937. by Lydia H. Liu; Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution. by John Fitzgerald; The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today. by Tu Wei-ming

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Source: *The China Journal*, No. 38 (Jul., 1997), pp. 121-137

Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2950337>

Accessed: 13-05-2019 00:02 UTC

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Review Article

CHINESE NATIONALISM: THE STATE OF THE NATION

Peter Harris

Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao, by Xiaobing Tang. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1996. xi + 289pp. A\$64.95 (hardcover).

Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity — China, 1900-1937, by Lydia H. Liu. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995. xx + 474pp. A\$31.95 (hardcover).

Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution, by John Fitzgerald. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1996. xi + 461pp. US\$45.00 (hardcover).

The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today, edited by Tu Wei-ming. Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1994. xvi + 295pp. A\$23.95 (paperback).

It is not difficult to understand the worldwide upsurge of interest during the last decade in questions relating to the state, the nation and nationalism. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new national states in its place; the fragmentation of Yugoslavia and the ensuing nationalist conflicts in the Balkans; evidence of ultra-nationalist sentiment in Russia, France and Germany; the systemic crisis affecting the national state in Africa; and unpredictable nationalist trends in China — all these have aroused intense speculation about the capacity of national loyalties to survive peacefully, and about the meanings of concepts like nationalism in a world where so many political ideas are in doubt.

THE CHINA JOURNAL, NO.38, JULY 1997

Chinese nationalism has become a focus of attention largely because of fears that rapid economic growth combined with political uncertainty may lead Chinese leaders to assume a more assertive nationalistic stance, especially towards their neighbours in Asia and in their dealings with the United States.¹ These fears have been fuelled by the mood of ambivalence towards China in Washington; by signs that the Chinese government is ready to flex its muscles in international disputes; and by a small but steady stream of nationalistic commentaries emanating from Beijing.²

The general upsurge of interest in nationalism around the world has been reflected in a burgeoning new literature on the subject, building on the pathbreaking theoretical and historical work undertaken in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s by Benedict Anderson, Isaiah Berlin, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Elie Kadoorie, Hans Kohn, Anthony Smith and others. The new literature consists of mainstream works of theory and synthesis, as well as studies of nationalism in particular regions and countries, including China.³ Despite the highly unusual nature of the Chinese experience, it is striking how little of the work on China has yet to find its way out of the specialist world of Chinese studies into mainstream writings. Most of these mainstream writings are still characterized by a marked Eurocentricity (with notable exceptions — for example, the work of Benedict Anderson) and tend to address or draw on

¹ A recent forthright expression of these fears is Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro, *The Coming Conflict with China* (New York: Knopf, 1997). See also the same authors' article 'The Coming Conflict with America', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.76, no.2 (March/April 1997), pp.18-32, in which they predict that the most likely future for China 'is a kind of corporatist, militarized, nationalist state, one with some similarity to the fascist states of Mussolini or Francisco Franco' (p.29).

² Most of these commentaries, notionally unofficial but reflecting views held within sections of the ruling elite, have centred on the need for China to be more assertive in protecting its national values from the influences of the West, especially the United States. The best known outside China is Song Qiang et al., *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* [China Can Say No] (Hong Kong: Ming Bao, 1996), which is mainly devoted to rebuffing American efforts to secure concessions from China in such fields as trade and human rights. Also prominent are the outspoken Beijing-based scholar He Xin and the journal *Zhanlue yu guanli* [Strategy and Management], published by a non-governmental organization closely connected to a group within the PLA. For a recent review of the nationalist mood in some quarters in China, see Muqun Zhu, 'Chinese Nationalism in the Post-Deng Era', *The China Strategic Review*, vol.2, no.2 (March/April 1997), pp.57-86.

³ The literature on China alone is too extensive to catalogue here. The essays in Jonathan Unger (ed.), *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1996) are an excellent starting point. Germaine A. Hoston, *The State, Identity and the National Question in China and Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.535-608, has a comprehensive bibliography up to 1993.

non-European experiences, and particularly the Chinese experience, in cursory and sometimes ill-informed ways.⁴

The four books reviewed in this essay are all worth paying attention to, therefore, for at least two reasons. On the one hand, they add in various ways to China specialists' understanding of the formative processes of nationalism, nation-building and statehood in twentieth-century China. On the other, they provide a fresh opportunity for non-specialists interested in the issues of nationalism and nation-building to consider the unique features of the Chinese case and to learn from them.

The four books span a range of issues and ideas. Three of them — those by Xiaobing Tang, Lydia Liu and John Fitzgerald — focus in different ways on the early decades of this century, and describe how a self-conscious sense of Chinese nationalism came into being and was moulded by a few significant players during that critical period of change. The players include familiar names like Kang Youwei, Yan Fu, Liang Qichao, Zhang Binglin, Sun Yat-sen, Mao Zedong and Dai Jitao, and a few less familiar ones like Zhao Jiabi. The three books also describe how these players strove wittingly or unwittingly to forge a sense of cohesion among the many disparate elements that made up those new-found entities *Zhongguo* (China) and *Zhonghua minguo* (the Republic of China), a name devised by that epitome of Han Chinese nationalism, Zhang Binglin.⁵ The fourth book, a collection of essays edited by Tu Wei-ming, considers various aspects of the meaning of being Chinese in modern times, both in China itself and beyond its frontiers, and deals with several issues pertinent to Chinese nationalism and nationhood.

Two Types of Nationalism

Before considering the books in more detail, it may be worth pausing to focus on a point of language relevant to all of them — the meaning of the term nationalism itself.

⁴ Among the many recent mainstream works representative studies include William Pfaff, *The Wrath of Nations* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); Julia Kristeva, *Nations Without Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Anthony Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), which contains a full bibliography of earlier studies by Anderson, Berlin, and others. These three works all take a wide-ranging approach to the subject but are typical in their neglect of China. Pfaff comes out best by devoting one chapter out of nine to Chinese and other types of 'Asian and African nationalism'; Kristeva does not mention China at all; and Smith makes only passing references to China, which does not feature in his index. Smith is also co-editor with John Hutchinson of *Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), a useful collection of 49 readings, a number of which are country-specific but not one of which deals with China.

⁵ Shimada Kenji, *Pioneer of the Chinese Revolution: Zhang Binglin and Confucianism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p.14.

There is something approaching a consensus nowadays that in English (and some other European languages) the word nationalism has two related but distinct meanings. The first refers to the process whereby a group or community that shares — or at least is convinced that it shares — a common history, culture, language and territory is persuaded to assert its identity in such a way that it acquires the authority to be in charge of its own affairs, usually through the creation of an independent state. Examples of this ethnic or popular nationalism are many, and include (to take a random sample) the Irish, French, Italian, Polish, Kurdish, Vietnamese and Tibetan varieties.

In its second meaning, the term nationalism is used to describe the way that the government or other influential agents within a state already in existence, and having a sense of coherent, homogeneous identity, set about creating a strong, assertive national self-awareness. Examples of this second kind of nationalism include the nationalism of multicultural immigrant states like the United States and Australia, and of colonial and post-colonial states like China, India, Indonesia or Malaysia, to the extent that their elites are faced with the task of creating a state-wide nation within inherited boundaries. This second sort of nationalism — state or civic nationalism, as it is sometimes called — is usually dependent upon, and forged out of, the cultural, political and sometimes territorial centrality of a dominant ethnic group, or *ethnie*, to use Anthony Smith's term.⁶

Examples of such dominant groups include the Han Chinese in China, the Chinese in Singapore, the Javanese in Indonesia and the Anglo-Celts in the United States, Australia and New Zealand. (These groups are in themselves, of course, artificial or imagined constructs in one way or another.) This second form of state-wide nationalism may in turn give rise to further assertions of nationalism of the first kind by minorities or marginal communities subjugated by the dominant group. Examples of this knock-on effect include the nationalist aspirations of Tamils in Sri Lanka, Karens in Burma, Timorese in Indonesia and Tibetans in China, as well as European minorities like the Scots and the Basques.

The agents responsible for persuading a community to strive self-consciously to realize its nationalist ambitions, sometimes against the wishes of some larger authority, are usually both external and internal. Externally they may take the form of an imperial power, or the state authority, or both. Internally they may consist of a broadly-based network of intellectual activists or just a handful of people from an established elite. The members of the network or elite may be more or less securely rooted in the community they represent, and may function within a strong civil society with widely shared values and deeply embedded social and literary codes, or may be

⁶ Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*, p.57 and *passim*.

placed within a much more fragmented population with multiple local allegiances.⁷

As noted earlier, different people use different terms for these two forms of nationalism. Anthony Smith describes them as ethnic and civic nationalism. The historian Norman Davies calls them popular and state nationalism. James Townsend, in his illuminating discussion of the two kinds of nationalism in China, uses the terms ethnic and state nationalism.⁸ In Chinese the distinction is readily made through the use of the two terms *minzuzhuyi* [ethnic nationalism] and *guojiazhuyi* [state nationalism]. Both of these terms are in current use, though the term *minzuzhuyi* is much more frequently used in contexts where the term nationalism would be used in English. *Guojiazhuyi* has some overtones of statism, or *étatisme*, in the French sense of the term — a belief in the state not just as an instrument of national construction, but as the focus of political life and thought in other ways as well — and has clear echoes of nineteenth-century European and more specifically German ideas about the overriding primacy of the state.

Among nationalists in the twentieth century, a failure to differentiate between these two strands of nationalism has been a common feature in both practice and theory, and has resulted in much obfuscation and confusion. In China, few intellectuals or politicians active during the late Qing and early Republican periods made a clear distinction between *minzuzhuyi* and *guojiazhuyi*, an oversight which is hardly surprising given how new and untried the very concepts of nation and nationalism were at the time. The result, as Lydia Liu notes in one of the books under review, was ‘a vast gray area of intellectual discourse in which different people and interest groups [could] pick and choose from among different shades of ... language to energize their own politics’ (p.189), as well as a good deal of muddle, some of it still not sorted out, about key questions in the debate. These included the proper definitions of the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*) and the Chinese state; what larger entity beyond their family and their clan (if they had one) Chinese should be loyal to; and if they were to be loyal to a greater entity called China, how people calling themselves Chinese (*Zhongguoren*, *huaren*, *hanren*, *tangren*) should really think of themselves.

⁷ For more on the different agents and the settings in which they may find themselves, see John Plamenatz, ‘Two Types of Nationalism’, in Eugene Kamenka (ed.), *Nationalism, the Nature and Evolution of an Idea*, cited in Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.99.

⁸ Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*, p.97 et seq.; Norman Davies, ‘West Best, East Beast?’, *Oxford Today*, vol.9, no.2 (Spring 1997), pp.28-31; James Townsend, ‘Chinese Nationalism’, in Unger (ed.), *Chinese Nationalism*, pp.1-30.

Putting the State First

One person who did succeed in distinguishing clearly between ethnic and state nationalism was that outstanding figure in the early history of modern Chinese nationalism, Liang Qichao. During his relatively brief life (he died in 1929 at the age of 56), Liang came to have distinct ideas about the two different strands of nationalism, and about the overriding importance of state nationalism for China's transformation into a sturdy modern state. Like Kang Youwei, Zhang Binglin and many others among his contemporaries in China, America and Europe, Liang's starting point in his reflections about the nation and the state were *renzhong* or *zhongzu*, race, and *zu*, a term used alone and in any number of compound words with the sense of race or kinship.⁹ Liang had a straightforward racial perspective on humankind, which he divided into five main racial groups of different colours and abilities. China he divided into ten races, six of them important. During his formative years in Japan (1901-03), when he absorbed many new ideas through Japanese translations of Western books as well as Japanese commentaries on Western ideas, Liang applied this racial perspective in creative ways to the problem of nations and states.

A nation was, Liang wrote in 1902, the natural outcome of the tendency of human beings to gather for purposes of self-defence into progressively larger groups of people akin to one another, from family (*jiazu*) to village (*xiangzu*) to clan (*buzu*) to (state-level) nation (*guozu*).¹⁰ On the other hand, a state could encompass more than one nation (*minzu*) in the sense of an ethnic community, which he defined in a very modern way as a group of people with a common culture, history and territory. In this context he came to draw a distinction between two phenomena which he described as great and small nationalism (*da minzuzhuyi* and *xiao minzuzhuyi*). Commenting in 1903 on the work of the minor German philosopher Johann Bluntschli, whose ideas on the state impressed him, Liang wrote:

⁹ *Zu* is a term with a long history, dating back to the famous passage in the Tso commentary on the Confucian classic *Chun qiu* [Spring and Autumn Annals]: '*shi Yi zhi zhi you zhi yue fei wo zu lei qi xin bi yi, chu sui da fei wu zu ye qi ken zi wo hu?*' [The work of the historiographer Yi says, 'If he is not of our kin, he is sure to have a different mind'. Although Chu is great, its ruler is not akin to us; — will he be willing to love us?]. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol.5 (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc, 1991), p.355. See Kenji, *Power of the Chinese Revolution*, pp.54-5, for the important implications this passage had for the more or less open approaches to nationalism taken by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao on the one hand, and Zhang Binglin on the other. See also Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (London: Hurst & Co., 1992), pp.72 et seq., for more on Liang's views on race.

¹⁰ 'Xin shixue' [The New Historiography] in Chen Qitai et al. (ed.), *Liang Qichao Lunzhu Xuancui* [The Essential Works of Liang Qichao] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1996), p.681. In 1922, two decades after writing 'Xin shixue', Liang reverted to much the same theme of kinship and nation when he wrote in the context of pre-China political thought that 'States everywhere have their origins in clans [*shizu*]'. Liang Qichao, *Xian Qin zhengzhi sixiang shi* (Beijing, 1923), p.33.

What is small nationalism? It is the Han nation (*Han zu*) as opposed to the other nations (*ta zu*) in the state. What is great nationalism? It is the various nations (*zhu zu*) of the state, core and peripheral, as opposed to the various nations abroad.¹¹

Great nationalism was state nationalism by another name.

Following on from this, Liang wrote approvingly of *guojia sixiang*, 'statist thinking', which he found was widespread in Europe but barely understood in China, and about *guojiazhu yi*, by which he meant state nationalism with an overlay of nineteenth-century Germanic statism.¹² For Liang, those with a 'state mentality' appreciated that citizens (*guomin*) mattered more than nations (*minzu*). China was a multinational state — or more precisely, a state divided into countless small communities. As he put it,

Seen from the outside government authority is unified, whereas within the country (*guo zhong*) there are in fact innumerable small groups and bodies divided by land, blood lineage or occupation. Government authority cannot be described as feeble and yet cannot be described as strong either.¹³

Moreover, China was threatened by outside imperial powers. This being the case it needed the strength that came from state nationalism. It was a needless distraction to attack one of its constituent nationalities, the Manchus, as Sun Yat-sen, Zhang Binglin and other radical nationalists were starting to do. What mattered was creating a framework that could unite a disparate population, much as the United States, for all its shortcomings, had brought together its people as one. As Liang saw it, the American nation (*meiguo minzu*) 'had no land in common, no blood lineage in common, and yet had to be called a single nation (*bu dei bu wei zhi yi zu*)'.¹⁴

Reviled for decades as a monarchist and reactionary, Liang now comes across as a thinker whose ideas were in many ways ahead of his time. Vacillating and uncertain though they sometimes were, his concerns about the destructive effects of violent revolution and ethnic nationalism, about the importance of clearly written history for the cultivation of ordinary citizens, and about the twin political dangers of rashness and utopianism have a distinctly contemporary appeal in the sceptical, post-modern and post-Marxist world of the 1990s. He is, moreover, an appealing person — a literatus, to be

¹¹ 'Zhengzhixue dajia Bolunzhili zhi xueshuo' [The Theories of the Great Political Scientist Bluntschli], in Liang Qichao, *Yingbinshi wenji*, vol.2 (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenhua Jinbu She, 1935), p.18.

¹² Cf. Hao Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp.238-271. For a full account by Liang himself of his views on *guojiazhu yi*, see Liang Qichao, *Xian Qin zhengzhi sixiang shi*, p.33.

¹³ Liang Qichao, 'Guojia sixiang bianqian yitong lun' [On the Development, Differences and Similarities of Statist Thinking], in Liang Qichao, *Yingbinshi wenji*, vol.3, p.50

¹⁴ 'Zhengzhixue dajia Bolunzhili zhi xueshuo', p.18.

sure, a man who addresses his audience with a confident, didactic tone, but also someone tangibly grappling with a range of ideas — variously familiar, new, confusing, alarming and stimulating — and trying to make the gigantic intellectual leap from Confucian tradition to the condition of the modern world.

It is perhaps a measure of the man that Liang has evoked several notable critical studies of his ideas. Two in particular are still valuable despite being over two decades old. These are Philip Huang's assessment of Liang as a liberal thinker and Hao Chang's analysis of Liang's intellectual journey in the period 1890-1907,¹⁵ which discusses the importance to Liang of the concept of *qun*, or community. This was a key term Liang and others used to mean both community and society, as in *renqun* [society], before the Japanese loan word *shehui* became current. Hao Chang sees the term *qun* as constituting a bridge for Liang between the Confucian ideal of a moral community and the incipient idea of a nation.

In *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, the first of the four books being reviewed here, Xiaobing Tang has written a new assessment of Liang's ideas, this time in a postmodernist setting. This stimulating though at times exasperatingly opaque new study of Liang draws extensively on earlier works, and is 'a rereading of Liang Qichao', as the author puts it, rather than an entirely new endeavour, relying 'not so much on new archival research or discovery as on the discourse of modernity as a larger theoretical framework' (p.6).

The study is concerned mainly with describing the evolution of Liang's political and historical thinking, and the ways Liang draws on Chinese and European historical experiences as he perceives them to map out new approaches to historiography, the community, the nation and the state. Despite its lack of really new material, the work is a useful reminder of the ways that intellectuals of Liang's generation were suddenly exposed to the world beyond the Chinese domain, directly and indirectly — Liang, like Kang Youwei, Sun Yat-sen and others, travelled quite widely outside China, even though Japanese was the only foreign language he got to know well. They were caught in a melee of conflicting perspectives, Western and Chinese.

Tang takes the reader step by step through Liang Qichao's intellectual evolution, connecting this to the changes in Liang's own life. It is a pity that Tang does not tell us more about Liang's often hectic life and times. The Hundred Days' reform in 1898, the First World War, Liang's term as a minister in Yuan Shikai's government, and the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 — all slip by scarcely noticed. It would have been helpful to have had more chronological information, or some human colour of the kind Jonathan

¹⁵ Philip C. C. Huang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972); and Hao Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China*.

Spence provides in *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*,¹⁶ so as to make the important connections between what Liang was experiencing and what he was writing. Tang does, however, describe how Liang's four years in Japan from 1898 to 1902 opened up a new intellectual landscape, culminating in two major works, *Xin min shuo* [On the New People] (a series of articles written from 1902 to 1906) and *Xin shixue* [The New Historiography] written in 1902.

In *On the New People*, often called *On the New Citizen*, Liang expounded his ideas about race and nation, and in *The New Historiography* he outlined what he saw as the progressive, racially-based historical evolution of the world, in which the white race and more specifically the Teutons had emerged as the masters of the world. In this and other writings Liang succumbed to the *zeitgeist* in another way as well, and described what he believed were shortcomings in the Chinese national character. These would have to be overcome if the Chinese (broadly defined) were to regroup and reassert themselves against white national imperialism.

Xiaobing Tang emphasizes the conflict at the heart of Liang's nationalism. As he sees it, it is at one and the same time a modern, homogenizing concept and also culturally specific, a symbol of resistance to modernity. This conflict is a recurrent theme in the book. Perhaps there is something to it. Like other reformers in the 1910s and 1920s, Liang's world view was, after all, an uneasy mixture of the Chinese and the Western, particularism and universalism. Part of him took a Herderesque view of the Chinese nation and culture as organic entities with irreducible, indefinable qualities. Part of him believed that they would, in the end, find their place among the community of nations, perhaps as a first step towards some greater blending and integration.

Tang focuses the last third of his book on what he calls the 'spatial logic' of the New Culture of the 1920s. He describes how Liang reacted to the collapse of the old European world after 1914, which he witnessed on visits to London and Paris in 1919. Liang did so by questioning the achievements of science and advocating a form of 'neo-conservative cultural politics', central to which was 'the desire to create a new cultural system ... at once more global and more self-consciously diverse'. Tang claims that in the end Liang thus succeeded in overcoming the constraints of nationalism by reconciling 'anthropological space with historical time', in the sense that he recognized history not as a single time-bound story but as a way of describing different cultures as simultaneous and co-equal, 'a global imaginary of difference'. Tang ends his study lyrically, claiming that 'Liang ... made it clear that to contemplate the totality of human history in time and space was to encounter nothing short of the sublime' (p.165 et seq.).

Liang's later historiography certainly reflected the intense interest in redefining Chinese history and culture that seized many Chinese intellectuals

¹⁶ Jonathan Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution, 1895-1980* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), p.74 et seq.

respondents who had ties to the military were not any more filial, and those employed in private enterprises not any less, than other respondents.²¹

We can examine further whether there is something unusual about Baoding which makes it a very conservative place, relatively untouched by the forces of social change that our initial discussion suggested should be eroding support for traditional family obligations. We can check this possibility through other data in our survey. We asked both parents and children questions about a number of issues unrelated to filial obligations. Table 3 displays the responses of parents and children to questions ranging from other family issues (marriage, premarital sex — lines 1-4), to gender inequality (lines 5-7), socialist values (lines 8-10), individual vs societal interests (lines 11-13), and fatalism vs personal control (lines 14-16).

Detailed examination of the figures in Table 3 reveals a pattern quite different from Tables 1 and 2. For five out of sixteen items there are no significant differences in the overall patterns of parent and child responses. However, for all of the remaining items children express views that differ significantly from those of their parents in a direction that coincides with the conventional wisdom. In other words, children express less support than their parents for 'traditional' attitudes (both those stemming from the Chinese tradition and the socialist tradition) and more support for liberal or even Western-oriented attitudes. They are significantly less likely than their parents to feel that spouses from different backgrounds will have marriage problems (row 1), more likely to approve of premarital sex (row 2), more likely to feel that women and men can have happy lives without marrying (rows 3-4), less likely to favour male bread-winners and female child-rearers (rows 5 and 7), much less likely to prefer public to private property and comradeship to friendship (rows 8-9), less likely to feel that a single set of orthodox values is needed in order to avoid social chaos (line 13), and more cynical, in the sense of less often believing that good and bad deeds of individuals produce good and bad fates (lines 15-16). In short, in a number of realms the younger Baoding respondents express attitudes that differ from their parents in a non-traditional direction, sometimes quite dramatically so. The contrasts in two out of the three items intended to tap socialist attitudes are particularly striking

²¹ A measure of whether the child had spent any time in military service (8 per cent had done so) correlated at the level of $r=.00$ with the Family Obligations Scale and $r=.04$ with the Co-residence Benefits Scale. An alternative measure of whether either the child had served in the military or the parent reported the military as the current or longest employer (11 per cent of our cases) was correlated at $-.01$ and $-.02$ with our two scales of filial obligations. A measure of whether the child was either self-employed or employed in a private enterprise (as a total of 3.4 per cent of our paired children were) was correlated at $.00$ and $.02$ with the two scales. Once again, none of these correlations was statistically significant.

adoption from classical Chinese of terms like *minzu* [democracy]; and indirectly, through transliterating words from Western languages (for example, *shawenzhuyi* [chauvinism], from Russian) and borrowing neologisms, almost always from Japan. 'Neologism', writes Liu, '... is an excellent trope for change, because ... [o]ne does not translate between equivalents; rather, one creates tropes of equivalence in the middle zone ... between the host and the guest languages' (p.40). She goes on to provide an intriguing illustration of this, describing how the concept of 'national character' (*guomin xing*, from the Meiji neologism *kokuminsei*) changed in meaning in different hands (German romantics, the Protestant missionary Arthur Smith, Lu Xun). This in turn, takes her to the main part of her book, which focuses on a series of distinct studies on individualism, realism, the creation of literary canons and other aspects of the complex relationship between literature and nation-building in Republican China.

Liu's point about neologisms is a useful one, both theoretically and because neologisms played such a significant linguistic — and political — role in China in the period 1890 to 1920 (just as they have since the late 1970s, as the Chinese language has struggled to adjust again to unprecedented outside influences). She cites recent research to show that more than a thousand neologisms entered the Chinese language from *kanji* coined in Japan in the late Qing and early Republican era. She notes, too, that many modern Chinese terms previously thought to have been loaned from Japan actually took a round trip, having started as neologisms created by Christian missionaries in China, then adopted by Japanese translators in the second half of the nineteenth century, then found their way back to China again. Appendixes that take up more than a quarter of her book document the migration of the language designating new (mostly Western) things and ideas into modern Chinese, from Japan, from Europe, and from pre-modern China via Japan.

There comes a point, of course, beyond which it is difficult to be precise about the flow of newly created or newly absorbed words in a language, and about the way etymologies change. In the case of China, one of the problems inherent in the study of translingual flows during the late Qing and early Republican eras is that several streams of meaning were moving at once, not always in the same direction. Classical Chinese terms of great longevity, subtlety and variety like *ren* [benevolence], *quan* [authority], *li* [profit], *li* [ritual], *min* [people], *guo* [state] and *zu* [kin, race], terms that often bear the same range of meanings as equivalent contemporary terms such as 'race', 'nation', 'right' and 'duty' in English — acquired new meanings in a number of different ways. They were variously equated with foreign words; formed into compound words to translate foreign words; and re-introduced back into China in new compound words from Japan but without entirely shedding their old, more established meanings. As a result, terms like *minzu* — from the early classical Chinese terms *min* and *zu*, and more recently from the Meiji neologism *minzoku*, itself a rendering of the imprecise English term 'nation'

with its strong nineteenth-century overtones of 'race' — were used in different ways in different contexts, sometimes inconsistently.

Forging the Republic

Consistency of use and clarity of meaning are not, however, characteristic of most political lexicons. Politicians, nationalist leaders among them, tend to rate expediency above consistency in the language they deploy. This was certainly true of the generation of politically active Chinese who grew up in the twilight of the Qing. For these aspiring nationalists, as we have noted, Liang Qichao offered a clear enough analysis of the two forms of nationalism — *guojiazhuyi* and *minzuzhuyi* — facing the people and politicians of China. The first implied the creation of a multi-ethnic state — that is, a state with one large nation made up of several smaller ones; the second meant a Han Chinese state, and more specifically the risk of 'being carried away by a narrow revengeful spirit against the Manchus'.¹⁷ The first possibility, a multi-ethnic state, was ambitious and unusual — after all, the creaking imperial domains of the West such as the Austro-Hungarian empire and the Ottoman empire were moving at the time in the direction of disintegration into nation states, that is, states based on one dominant ethnic community (the Austrians, the Hungarians, the Turks) in whose name successor states would be formed. But the second possibility presaged the hiving off of non-Han nations — and how could that be squared with countering foreign imperial might, and (a related but distinct issue) with sustaining the domain that had once been imperial China?

Different nationalist leaders responded to this choice in different, often inconsistent ways. For Sun Yat-sen the answer was quite straightforward, as we are reminded in John Fitzgerald's new book about China during Sun's heyday, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*. Sun advocated Han Chinese nationalism, which he used initially as a stick with which to beat the Manchus, and which he surreptitiously broadened out later so that it became the nationalism of all China — an example of the leader of a dominant *ethnie* taking a particularly brazen approach to the claims of that group to primacy.

It can be argued that Sun was a more marginal figure between 1912 and his death in 1925 than history has made him. But for better or for worse he is a central figure in Fitzgerald's book, which sets out to describe from a variety of perspectives the awakening national self-consciousness of the Chinese — by which the author himself tends to mean the Han Chinese, rather than the other nations of the Chinese domain — and in particular 'the motif of an awakening to national unity' (p.21) in early Republican China.

The chapter headings of the four central chapters of *Awakening China* neatly convey the overlapping stages in which Fitzgerald sees the Chinese

¹⁷ Hao Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China*, p.261.

state and nation being conceived, built and consolidated during the late Qing and early Republican eras. 'One World, One China' traces the beginnings of national — and nationalist — self-awareness through the ideas of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Zhang Binglin and Sun Yat-sen, and the spread effect of journalists and politicians talking the new language of nation and state. 'One China, One Nation' reflects on the images and self-images of the Chinese, on the ethnographic exploration of remote rural areas and other aspects of the nationalists' search for an authentic China, and on the paradox of nationalism — a modernizing movement that in the name of creating a national identity was often perceived as destroying it. Fitzgerald quotes from the 1920s novel *Alisi Zhongguo youji* [Alice in China] by Shen Congwen:

We know there is a revolution in the south of the country at the moment, and that whenever a revolutionary government is in place it is bound to launch an energetic assault on every kind of custom. No evil system can survive under the new dispensation: all the most curious customs will disappear and all of the people will be turned into New Age people (*xin shidai de ren*) (p.138).

The chapter called 'One Nation, One State' describes the tensions between, on the one side, local and provincial interests — 'feudalism' as these were often called — and, on the other, the propensity of both the Kuomintang (always called in English the Nationalist Party, though Citizens' Party would probably have been more accurate) and the Communist Party to try and create a strongly centralized state. There is a particularly good discussion of how Communists used class concerns to try and cut across local loyalties, and how provincial loyalties were hard to overcome even though they were not, in themselves, antithetical to nationalist aspirations. (Rather, they seemed to exemplify the problems faced by a nationalistic elite working among a fragmented population with multiple local allegiances — one of the typical forms of nationalism mentioned earlier on.) Finally, 'One State, One Party' deals with the way Sun Yat-sen eventually conflated the state and the Kuomintang — a move he symbolized in 1924 by having the five-bar flag of the Republic of China replaced by the red, white and blue flag of the Kuomintang.

By casting aside the Republican flag Sun was not just instituting single-party rule. He was also reaffirming his belief in Han nationalism by giving primacy to the Han Chinese. His devotion to the Han Chinese came through clearly in a speech about his Three People's Principles in 1919:

When the Han race [*Hanzu*, Han race or nation] overthrew the political power of the Manchu Qing dynasty and the people of our country escaped the bondage of that alien race, the goal of nationalism was achieved at last. But then the strangest thing happened: just as the revolution succeeded, some bureaucrats took hold of the idea of a republic of five races [or nations] made up of the Han, the Manchus, the Mongolians, the Moslems, and the Tibetans, and selected a five-colour flag [devised by] some Qing

general as the national flag of the Chinese Republic, with the five colours representing the Han, the Manchus, the Mongolians, the Moslems, and the Tibetans. Members of the revolutionary party took little notice and made use of this decrepit bureaucratic flag, abandoning the national flag of the Republic of China with its Blue Sky and White Sun designed by the first martyr of the Republic, Lu Haodong.¹⁸

In the early 1900s Sun's anti-Manchu, Han Chinese ethnic nationalism stood in clear distinction to Liang Qichao's nationalism, with its statist overtones. But after the fall of the Manchus, Sun's views had to evolve to take into account the change in China's condition. By 1919 what Sun advocated was not, after all, much different from Liang's 'great nationalism'. In the same speech about the Three People's Principles, Sun qualified his open Han nationalism by urging all Han Chinese to aim for the high ideal of giving up their separate identities and merging with the Manchus, Mongols, Moslems and Tibetans — he did not mention other minorities — so as to create a melting-pot nationalism like that of the United States.¹⁹ Sun the Han nationalist wanted to rule the whole of China. He wanted to have his cake and eat it.

The section in John Fitzgerald's book on Sun Yat-sen and the Nationalist flag is, of course, only a small part of the whole work. The book as a whole is wide-ranging and imaginative, a sequence of well-wrought, self-contained studies of the awakening of the Chinese to their new position in the world — to the problems of defining their nation, to the complexity of their cultures, and to the difficulty of forging a sense of national purpose in the face of differences of geography, history, class and language. The author carries off the task of tackling these complex issues by drawing on a broad knowledge of the period and writing in a relaxed and attractive style.

Awakening China focuses on domestic issues and perceptions in China proper (rather than peripheral regions) during the first decades of the Republic, and for this reason not much attention is paid to two significant factors: national minority issues and the external factors affecting — or rather not affecting — Chinese nationalism in the period 1911 to 1937. As far as the second factor is concerned, brief consideration is given (p.169 et seq.) to debates among left-wing intellectuals about the pros and cons of attacking imperialism, and about the reluctance of elements within the Kuomintang, including overseas Chinese supporters, to be overly critical of colonial power for fear of such criticism redounding on them. But there remains the striking fact that whereas in colonized regions such as India, Vietnam and Indonesia, the external (that is, European) colonial power served to awaken strong and

¹⁸ 'The Three Principles of the People' [1919 version] in *Prescriptions for Saving China: Selected Writings of Sun Yat-sen* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1994), p.224. The translation is from John Fitzgerald's book (p.183).

¹⁹ 'The Three Principles of the People', p.225.

sustained nationalist sentiments, among educated Chinese after the fall of the Manchus the impact of colonialism, or rather semi-colonialism, was more intermittent, and remained so until the Japanese occupation.

True, Chinese nationalist feeling was strong at times — in May 1919, or during the May Thirtieth Movement in 1925. But at other times it seemed to bear out Sun Yat-sen's claim that once the Manchus had been overthrown the Han Chinese believed their nationalist aims had been achieved. In a sense, John Fitzgerald deals with this issue by dwelling on such inhibiting factors as the ambivalent attitude of the Chinese intelligentsia, with its low self-esteem, to European power and authority; the growing emphasis of the Communists in China on issues of class, rather than nationhood; the enduring strength of Chinese provincialism; and the organizational problems faced by a new mass party like the Kuomintang. Still, more consideration of this issue would have been welcome, especially since other scholars have offered other explanations for the failure of the nationalist ideal to capture Han sympathies.²⁰ This is a small question about an otherwise very rewarding book.

For those who want to carry the analysis of the Chinese state and ethnic nationalism beyond the scope of John Fitzgerald's book, there is much still to be done. With regard to state nationalism there is as yet no full account of how Sun Yat-sen's successor, Chiang Kai-shek, institutionalized a multinational state, more along Liang Qichao's lines, as it turned out, than Sun Yat-sen's. Nor is a full analysis available of how the Chinese Communist Party dealt with the twin issues of nationalism and nationhood — how it toyed with the Leninist idea of national self-determination in the early 1930s²¹ before shelving it in favour of a clearly delineated multinational state system after 1949. Pathbreaking work has recently been done by Germaine Hoston,²² among others, but there is much ground yet to be covered.

²⁰ See, for example, Myron Cohen, 'Being Chinese: The Peripheralization of Traditional Identity', in Tu Wei-ming (ed.), *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp.88-108, reviewed below.

²¹ A neglected aspect of Mao Zedong's short-lived Soviet Republic in Jiangxi is its 1931 constitution, which gives national minorities the right 'to complete separation from China, and to the formation of an independent state for each'. The full text is in Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz and John K. Fairbank (eds), *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952), p.223. By 1936 Mao had modified this provision by telling Edgar Snow in Yan'an that in any future People's Republic, the main national minorities of China would 'form autonomous republics attached to the Chinese federation'. Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Grove Press, 1973), p.444. See also Colin Mackerras, *China's Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.72-3.

²² Hoston, *The State, Identity and the National Question in China and Japan*.

Into Modern Times

The last of the four books reviewed here, edited by Tu Weiming, takes us beyond the nation-building efforts of the early part of this century and provides a broader look at Chinese national identity and Chinese nationalism. Overall the book sets a high standard, with good contributions from Tu Wei-ming, Mark Elvin and others. Six of the eleven chapters (by Tu Wei-ming, Myron Cohen, David Yen-ho Wu, L. Ling-chi Wang, Victor Hao Li and Leo Ou-fan Lee) deal with problems of contemporary Chinese identity, especially among Chinese on the periphery of Chinese culture and civilization. In the context of a discussion of nationalism these papers, and especially the chapters by Myron Cohen and David Yen-ho Wu, are particularly thought-provoking.

Myron Cohen's chapter (pp.88-108) is entitled 'Being Chinese: The Peripheralization of Traditional Identity', and effectively casts doubt on the assumption I made earlier, when discussing John Fitzgerald's book, that China's modern nationalists constituted a well-formed elite working among a fragmented population with multiple local allegiances. Rather, Myron Cohen maintains, late traditional China was characterized by an unusually and increasingly uniform common culture.

According to Cohen, there were several reasons for this. One was a high level of linguistic unity (rather than the diversity usually emphasized), reinforced not just by the common classical language but also by the widespread use of printed vernacular texts. Another was the sustenance of a statewide elite culture through national examinations. A third was the penetration of this elite culture into local society through ritual and etiquette — form rather than substance, proper behaviour rather than proper ideas. An overarching cultural design involving political, social, religious and symbolic relationships linked local cultures with the imperial state.

Cohen sets against this traditional culture the anti-traditional, iconoclastic thrust of modern Chinese nationalism, as manifested in the May Fourth Movement and in Communist campaigns like the Cultural Revolution. The disparate nature of these two tendencies, Cohen argues, has meant the absence of effective ties between the general population and nationalist elites in Beijing (and also to some extent in Taipei, where some of the same anti-traditionalism was transplanted). It has also meant that whereas in other countries the rationale for nationalism has been forged by educated elites from elements of traditional culture, in China it has not. Instead, to achieve its ends the ruling elite has had to rely on what Cohen calls the 'culture of the barracks' — orders, slogans, mobilization — or rather had to, until the reforms of the last two decades started to erode the distinction between state and popular culture.

Cohen's argument is vividly put, and is an attractive explanation for the slow, fragmentary evolution of Chinese nationalism during the Republican era and for the artificial quality of much of the Chinese nationalist rhetoric emanating from the People's Republic. Cohen does not, perhaps, take properly

into account the existence of a strongly iconoclastic streak in popular movements in China (the Taipings are mentioned, but only in passing). Nor does he allude to the fact that the Communist Party was able to maintain its position precisely because when it was not conducting divisive campaigns it did succeed in tapping traditional beliefs and practices, rather than being divorced from them as, say, certain ruling Communist parties in central Europe were. But Cohen's chapter opens the door to further fruitful discussion of an important new perspective on nationalism.

Myron Cohen also reminds us of the shifting nature of the ethnic distinctions between Han and non-Han by describing the experiences of the people known as Bai or Minjia (a term meaning 'civilians') in southwest Yunnan. Citing a study done by Francis Hsu in the 1940s,²³ he describes how Bai language and culture were gradually absorbed by migrating Han Chinese during the Ming and Qing dynasties, so that by the end of the Qing dynasty Bai culture had been reconfigured as local Chinese custom, and the Bai people thought they spoke a Chinese dialect. In a chapter entitled 'The Construction of Chinese and Non-Chinese Identities' (pp. 148-67), David Yen-ho Wu adds to Cohen's comments by describing his own field research among the Bai in Yunnan in 1985. He discovered then that 'Bai' as an ethnic label was unknown until 1958, when an official list of nationalities was compiled, and that apart from their language, still a distinct Tibeto-Burman language though heavily infiltrated by Chinese, there was nothing except the government's classification to distinguish the Bai from Han Chinese.

These descriptions of the Bai reaffirm the uncertain, even arbitrary, nature of the state nationalism on which the identity of the national state of China now depends. Though several of the nationalities, or national minorities, now making up the People's Republic are clearly definable ethnic groups, others are not, for the Bai or Minjia people are by no means unique in being classified as a national minority while being scarcely distinguishable from Han Chinese. This state of affairs may not matter too much. There are many examples in different countries of arbitrary or vague ethnic classification, a consequence of administrative convenience rather than a response to substantial differences of real or perceived ethnicity. But it reminds us that if other ethnic groups in China with a justified sense of nationalism are ever in a position to press their case, or if the nature of Chinese nationalism ever changes, some reappraisal of the Chinese nation, and of the two types of nationalism, may be called for.

Wellington, New Zealand
June 1997

²³ Francis L. K. Hsu, *Under the Ancestors' Shadow* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948).