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# History and Globalization in China's Long Twentieth Century

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This commentary reflects on the contributions of the five principal essayists in this volume of *Modern China*. It seeks to grasp the role and weight of historical and distinctively Chinese factors in relation to global forces operating in China since the early twentieth century in these macroscopic essays. Building on their contributions, I develop a "globalization paradigm" in which the embeddedness of nations in global discourses and practices are often misrecognized as national and domestic. But while many national practices represent globally familiar reactions to recognized global tendencies, several of these essays help us to identify often unarticulated historical tendencies and emergent practices, including those from the Chinese socialist experience. They suggest ways in which Chinese and global practices become intertwined, as for instance adaptations of the Qing imperial idea to the current day. These practices not only make China different from other nations, but also have the potential to make a difference in the world.

**Keywords:** *globalization paradigm; misrecognition; Qing empire; nationalism*

The five original contributions to this volume of *Modern China* are broad synthetic essays that seek to locate the significance of contemporary Chinese state-society experience within a wider context. The essays break down along two axes of significance: the historical and comparative. Of course, most scholars recognize the significance of the other axis, but the thrust of their essays tend to focus on one.

The essays by Wang Hui and Philip Huang explore the enduring power of historical forces that are long term, going back to late imperial times, whereas the essays by Sun Liping, Kang Xiaoguang and Han Heng, and Wang Shaoguang look at the Chinese experience in contemporary and comparative terms. For Sun, Kang, and Han, the relevant framework is that of

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**Author's Note:** Thanks are due to Viren Murthy for his comments.

post-totalitarian transitional societies, while Wang conducts his analysis within an implicit framework of popular participation in contemporary societies generally.

Each of these essays makes a unique contribution at a macroscopic level. My goal is to evaluate the contribution of these perspectives to our understanding of China, at once, as a historical and a globally integrated society. Without being able to see how the one is mediated by the other we will not only be hobbled by a shallow understanding of China, but prey to the one-sided ideologies of nationalism and globalization respectively. My essay represents an interpretation of the significance of state-society relations in twentieth-century China that has emerged from the dialogue with the contributors, by drawing on their views as well as questioning and supplementing them.

As a reflection on his four-volume magnum opus, *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, Wang Hui's article is perhaps the most ambitious and complex work. It furnishes us with some basic concepts to navigate our way through the modern transition. It seeks to chart a way through the perilous antinomies of Western history, especially those between empire and nation and tradition and modernity that have so distorted the history of China. Of course, Wang Hui knows better than most that any effort to recover some essential Chinese meaning can only take place through the epistemological categories of social scientific thought; as he says, "these concepts and paradigms usually take on meaning only in light of modern thinking and theories" (this issue). Essentially, Wang adopts a critical hermeneutic approach that seeks to understand and appreciate another's perspective, albeit by subjecting it—in his case, neo-Confucian thought—to historical analysis. Yet he does hope to achieve some alteration of ourselves by recovering the other's project.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Wang tries to recover neo-Confucian conceptions such as the critical separation of rites and music from institutions as modes of governance that overlaps with the *fengjian/junxian* separation. Attendant on these separations is the perception of history as objective determination by circumstances (*shishi*) but also as a subjective or willed principling of these circumstances (*lishi*). Most of all, in this article, Wang seeks to reconstitute the "object" of his inquiry—imperial China—at some distance from the social scientific concept of empire that is usually only understood in opposition to its binary, the nation-state. There is a pathos intended in his conception of "imperial" in "imperial China": it is neither the empire that is the opposite of, nor the prototype of the modern nation-state. If it had a telos, it was a different one.

To be sure, this empire has elements of both the modern nation-state and empire and much else besides. The rational bureaucratic state, similar in many ways to the nation-state, combines with patrimonial sovereignty and evolves a range of institutions and legitimating strategies in dealing with its subjects, but not in the homogenizing manner of the nation-state. The late imperial state is in fact a historical legacy of the various different groups that dominated it, including the Mongols and the Manchus. By late imperial times, Confucianism becomes a legitimizing principle—among others—to which the Manchus have contributed as much as the Han Chinese. Thus the empire becomes a multiply and pluralistically structured formation that has a particular mode of dealing with different ethnicities. Given this historical legacy, it cannot be pulled apart to create a special nationality, as for instance the Japanese did by claiming Manchukuo to be the land of the Manchus. Here Wang acknowledges his debt to the Gongyang school represented in its last days by Kang Youwei, which he suggests actually had already incorporated the Manchu contributions to the idea of a Chinese empire.

Wang's effort to capture the historical integrity of Chinese ideas without reducing them to essentialist cultural principles is notable. In this regard, he is markedly different from an earlier generation of scholarship on civilizations, most notably represented by Louis Dumont's renowned study of India, *Homo Hierarchicus*, which saw Indian civilization as dominated by radically different and ahistorical principles of hierarchy and pollution. At the same time, Wang does not want to reduce imperial China to the telos of the nation-state, whether as its antithesis or as a proto-nation, although it may well share characteristics with other non-Western formations. However, perhaps, partly because Wang has successfully avoided essentializing, it is hard to put one's finger on how exactly we are to grasp the historical significance of imperial China in the modern era.

In other words, while we can see that the physical extent of the Qing empire continues into the contemporary era, the suggestion that this constitutes a historical legacy raises more questions than it answers. The nation-state system of which modern China is an important part is built around very different principles of affiliation than those that Wang himself has described. The nation form requires a homogenized and relatively unmediated relationship between the citizen and the state even in the minority regions to which it guarantees autonomy. There is a fundamental incommensurability between the principles of the Chinese imperial formation built between elite ruling structures and modern ideas of sovereignty. This is why we have historically seen independence movements in the outlying regions of Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet that are absent in the Han

mainland.<sup>2</sup> My point is not that these regions are not a part of China, but rather that the principles sanctioning the historical relationship cannot be evoked to justify the present relationships. Perhaps we need a study of the global emergence of the multinational or multicultural nation-state at the beginning of the twentieth century to grasp how the legitimacy of an earlier formation became incorporated into another. Wang Hui's work would be most relevant to this understanding.

I am entirely in agreement with Wang Hui's depiction of nationalism as a particularization of a new universalism different from the Confucian universalism. Indeed, I have strenuously argued that the nation-state has to misrecognize this universalism to build its authority within the national society. The institutionalization of modern nationalism involves a complex process of both recognition and misrecognition of its belonging in a new world order. Older societies have had to overhaul their institutions and world views radically to conform to the models of the modern nation-state system and the telos of progressive history. In East Asia the story of this reordering is told through the modernization paradigm and was particularly successful in Meiji Japan and post-1949 China.

I believe this story is better told through a "globalization paradigm" than one of modernization. At the outset I wish to clarify that by globalization paradigm, I do not suggest that globalization is ethically preferable to some other model, but rather that it has been the dominant *epistemological* or *cognitive* framework for organizing society in the world for over a century. When statesmen and leaders of the twentieth century sought to modernize their societies, they projected a reorganization that conformed to the rational, scientific, and ethical ideals of the Enlightenment. The models were encased in the nation form and globally circulated from developed capitalist societies (the United Kingdom, France, the United States, and later, Germany and the Soviet Union). Drawing from Etienne Balibar, the nation form can be described as the imaginary of a people with common origins, fictive ethnicity, rights to territory, and a historical destiny to realize the telos (usually) of the Enlightenment (Balibar, 1991: 86–106).<sup>3</sup> In this sense the nation form and the nation-state are not the opposite of globalization. Rather they represent an early stage of globalization—or cognitive globalization—where misrecognition of its global origins is crucial. Thus the nation form is a central institution of the "globalization paradigm" (see Duara, 2003: 22–25).

The nation—both the nation-state and nationalists—often exhibits an ambivalent if not schizophrenic attitude toward its constitution by the global system of nation-states. On the one hand, it adopts, often rapidly and urgently, global institutions and ideologies and acknowledges the necessity

of these transformations to be *recognized* as a player in the system of nation-states. On the other hand, it tends to overlook the ways in which it is in fact the product of foreign ideas and practices and of its own adherence to external norms of “state-like” behavior. Instead, nations prefer to *misrecognize* their origins, seeing or presenting only the part of the story in which they emerged as the expression of the will and culture of their citizens. History and the idea of an evolving national subject or agent of history often embeds the dual logic of recognition and misrecognition.

Systemically, misrecognition arises because the nation-state also represents the authority—indeed the only legitimate authority—to regulate, limit, resist, or aggress on competitors and reshape society and identity to attain global and national goals. Nationalism as the predominant ideology of the nation-state has tended to locate sovereignty in the “authentic” history and traditions of the people—in the regime of authenticity—even while these have been considerably re-signified, if not invented, to fit the nationalist project. Thus, while world and regional cultures have been the source of many circulatory practices transforming societies into nations and interstate recognition has been a crucial source of national sovereignty, all nations—whether in East Asia or elsewhere—tend to misrecognize sovereignty as emanating almost exclusively from within the people and culture of the nation (Duara, 2003: 29–33).

This founding dualism among nations tends to produce a structural tension, often schizoid, between a desire to belong or partake of a global culture and to retreat to the national or more local haven. Note that the East Asian region may at different times and for different groups belong to either side of this duality—as home or the world. In China, this dualism goes as far back as the late nineteenth century when reformers couched their tentative affiliation with global knowledge through the *ti-yong* (Chinese learning for the essence, Western learning for practical use) formulation; similar formulations also appeared in other East Asian societies.

If we adopt this relatively strong sense of structure of the nation-form in twentieth-century China, how can historical developments or contemporary events affect it? What relevance can the Chinese empire, built on different principles and goals, have in the current era? One of the most perspicacious students of modern China, Joseph Levenson, had a lucid understanding of this problem. He argued that the modern transformation had changed the very meaning and role of “Chineseness.” From a cultural universe where there was no significant *outside* to Confucian ideals, values, and practices, Confucianism and Chineseness became a site of self-conscious values preserved in a world with other national cultural museums and repertoires for

identity. The *ti* and the *yong* had traded places. Levenson saw this transition to the modern nation-state as a struggle between history and value. Where once history was value, now the two are separated and value is historicized and subordinated (Levenson, 1965).

Levenson, I believe, had too strong a conviction in the ideological structure of modernity and the nation. In today's discourse, we may say that it is History—in the sense of national entities evolving over time toward the end(s) of History—that has no significant outside. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri refer to a contemporary version of this condition simply as “Empire,” a logic of capitalist rule that lacks boundaries and a center but encompasses the entire civilized world. Neither does Empire, according to Hardt and Negri (2000: xv), have temporal boundaries; in this sense it is “outside of history or at the end of history.” But neither (national) modernity nor Empire is an absolute given; it is not an ontological condition but, in fact, a historical one, as much as the Confucian universe may have been. In other words, these assumptions about the world—whether about its commodification, rationalization, nationalization, secularization, and so on—remain *efforts* by historical agents, human and institutional, to realize them. To be sure, they are powerful and even hegemonic efforts that can create something called an era and give it a name (modernity), but they involve struggles and compromises, adaptations and subversions, resistances and innovations, contingency and irruptions. In today's China we may see some of this nonconformance in the flowering of the religious, martial arts, and healing practices evoking an older cosmology, in the return of older conceptions of the polygamous family, as well as in class-based demands by migrants and peasants that severely pressure the order.

Modernizing ideologies of the nation-state seek to spell out clear and often constitutional differences among categories, for instance between public and private (religion and secularity, ethnicity, and so on). But while these may be declared at a constitutional level, the historical reality continues to confound this differentiation, or at least to follow older patterns not based on such categorical differentiations. Philip Huang's article makes an interesting case at this level for historical continuity in his conception of centralized minimalism and reliance on the “third realm” from Qing practices of governance into the Maoist and post-Mao period. During the Qing, Huang argues, the size and logic of the imperial bureaucracy disposed it to develop the practice of centralized minimalism: to allow local communities and their representatives who had the sanction of the imperial state to manage their own problems (perhaps the *fengjian* model of imperial times did have an impact). In a sense this is a downward extension of the gentry

society model: to entrust an ideologically state-oriented elite with the imprimatur of state power without expending fiscal and political power on social maintenance. It should be noted that critical to this entrustment is an ideological commonality—a cultural nexus, if I may—that kept local society and state in balance.

Certainly, Huang is right that *minban* schools and other forms of collective self-governance during the Maoist era look similar to the quasi-formal minimalism of the Qing. Indeed, Mao's antibureaucratism may also look a bit like the hybrid *fengjian* advocated by Qing reformers like Feng Guifen. But as Huang acknowledges, the difference in the ability of the Party-state to penetrate and transform people and their organizations was unprecedented. Certainly the goals of the new state for the people were entirely different; they were to mobilize and sacrifice for the nation and socialism. Yet, scattered references from the period and developments during the post-Mao period reveal that these efforts were realized less through structural transformations (of the sort suggested by Foucault's governmentality or Mann's infrastructural state) than ideological campaigns. As such, it is not surprising to see the return of so many historical realities to the countryside in the post-Mao era, including Huang's "third realm" activities.

When I first went to China in the mid-1980s, I was struck by something for which there really was no proper name: it was the ingenious intertwining of socialist and capitalist modes of organization to be found *within a single entity*. Thus a socialist bus company (*danwei*) would lease out minibuses among a small group of its workers for private profit and a public school administration would manufacture and sell milk cartons on the side for a profit. Presumably there was some profit and responsibility sharing between the public and the private, the socialist and the capitalist entities. I am strongly inclined to see in these the legacy of Huang's "third realm."

To what extent do these instances weaken the structural limits of the globalization paradigm I am offering? Do they modify the dual logic of nationalism whereby important, institutional knowledge, information, and even understanding flow in and out through global circuits but are often misrecognized as indigenous and authentic? Can these historical or for that matter, new—historical—forces reshape the nation form in the global system of nation-states, that contra Hardt and Negri, still substantially dominates and monopolizes power in the world? I think there are two ways to approach this problem of limits. One is the way we have already pointed to: the survival and adaptation of historical relationships—like the third sphere. The critical issue here is that they tend to remain historical relationships "in themselves"—as "practice" in Sun Liping's terms—and tend not to be conceptualized in



contemporary discourse or consciousness probably because these relationships sit uneasily with the categories of the modern nation-state. Other historical forms like the Falungong, which is a contemporary version of redemptive societies like the Yiguandao and others, are not permitted to exist because they practice a cosmology that is completely inconsistent with the principles of the modern state. Although the Falungong is by no means comparable to transnational Islamic fundamentalism, they are perceived by the Chinese state in a way similar to Western states' perception of the latter as a threat to the social and political order.

Although the notion of the third realm is hardly as subversive as these older cosmologies, it gives us an entrée not just to the past but also the inarticulate and emergent present. In their presentation, Kang and Han give us a persuasive account of how the state in China seeks to preserve social order through a mode of graduated controls. Their observation that the gradual and piecemeal nature of reforms in China itself enabled such an evolution presents an instructive contrast to the more difficult transitions in the rest of the ex-socialist world. Moreover, their identification of which areas are subject to the greatest controls (religion and politics) and which to most encouragement (economic), while not counterintuitive, certainly fits Wang Hui and others' argument that China is creating a capitalist consensus based on depoliticization—perhaps a Chinese version of a neo-liberal order.

The article, however, leaves many questions unanswered. Because the perspective is top-down, it suggests a very coherent state structure where control and surveillance is systematic. Does this really fit our understanding of the Chinese state or the Party-state? What about disjunctures within the political system (center versus locality)? What about pressures on local political structures that result in arbitrariness? In his critique of the authoritarian model, Wang Shaoguang offers up various means by which the public and different groups among them respond to potentially unpopular policies. To be sure, Wang's instances are still quite dramatic and highly visible. But these must also exist at a more local level and in a more routinized way. How else does one explain the greater tolerance for local religious activities in parts of China such as Fujian and elsewhere? There must also be a much greater interpenetration of Party-state and society than Kang and Heng's model assumes. Is it perhaps because of this interpenetration, which to be sure can be both functional and dysfunctional, that conceptions of the third realm are not admissible in the ideology of the state?

The second way to identify how historical developments and new events impact structure is to locate elements of the structure itself that are more or less permeable to change. What are the hard and soft boundaries of the

nation form? While the idea of a national people—the imagined community—evolving through historical time into a progressive future is clearly fundamental to the nation-state, to what extent can the national community be de-territorialized and still retain the nation form? How important is the nature of the bond that holds together the national community? Whereas early-twentieth-century notions of national commonality often evoked common racial or blood ties, mid-century doctrines of nationality typically upheld these bonds to be historical and culturally evolved primordial solidarities. At a still further remove from the racialized nation is the idea of the multicultural or multinational nation-state pioneered by the Republic of China and developed by the Soviet Union.

A key feature of the nation-state system, territoriality, has had a variable significance in the twentieth-century history of China. The nationalism of the 1911 revolutionaries tended to be more racialized than civic-territorial in their conception of the nation. Soon after the revolution, Sun Yat-sen adopted the model of the Republic of the Five Nationalities, but after the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, Chiang Kai-shek wavered between upholding the territorial nation and a racialized nation with a common ancestor. It was during this period too that extraterritorials such as Chinese overseas were given the same rights of citizenship and educated to be loyal to China above all. The People's Republic of China (PRC) opted for a territorial-civic model of nationality where not only did minorities have affirmative action rights but Chinese overseas ceased to have rights as Chinese citizens.

More recently, the economic linkages established between the overseas Chinese and the mainland have been accompanied by shifts in the spatial imagination of the nation. Ideologies of de-territorialized nationalism have tended to flourish at the cost, frequently, of the territorially integrated nation of the PRC. Such ideologies seek an alternative fictive ethnicity in the form of identification as the children of the Yellow Emperor (*yanhuang zisun*) or in the new attention to Confucianism, to notions of Chinese and Asian values. These may be seen as new formats for both identity and alliance with the diasporic communities in the pursuit of global competitiveness and counter-hegemony to the West. Moreover, they represent the uses of history in a way that the martial arts or popular religion based on earlier cosmologies, and to a lesser extent, the third realm, cannot always be used.

The effect of this re-territorialization of national development and emergence of the de-territorialized ideologies of nationalism has been very clear. The imbalance of regional development in China has led to increasing inequities, and at the ethnic frontiers of the nation, it has led to counter-movements of irredentist or ethnic nationalism in Tibet, Inner Mongolia,

and Xinjiang. The recent campaign to develop the West—*xibu dakaifa*—is a response to this perceived imbalance. But whether it works to ameliorate imbalances or to siphon off resources and increase surveillance in these regions is yet to be seen. Judging from this history, it seems clear that the social and ideological boundaries of the nation can have considerable variability in what it should bound and bond, but the trans-nationalization of the economy does not seem to have affected the function or need for a bounded national community as the engine of competitiveness.

Another way to approach the question of the porosity of the nation form is to ask about the content of national ideologies. Recently, many scholars have suggested that nationalism can take a substantially different route depending on which group is formulating its goals and programs. Thus, the anti-imperialist movement or the socialists had a much stronger redistributive conception of national goals and were also able to keep powerful transnational competitors at bay through the assertion of sovereign power. Indeed, socialism represented potentially the greatest challenge to the nation form that arose in close relationship with capitalism. The founding slogan of socialist anti-imperialism, “workers of the world unite,” and support for solidarity of the oppressed of the world by the Soviet Union and China transcended national identification. It recognized clearly the condition of global unification produced by capitalism. The Chinese revolution was both socialist and nationalist, and for much of the period, the two were not in contradiction.

Wang Hui (this issue) notes that to rail against nationalism because it was constructed from global resources by elites is to ignore the abundant and complex historical process of the Chinese revolution. He says,

While producing its own “noumenon” or “origin,” nationalism also appealed to mass mobilization whereby those with so-called consciousness strove to connect their thinking about the nation’s fate under given “trends of the times” (*shishi*) with the values to which they were dedicated. For example, the Chinese revolution, as a sweeping social movement and as a national liberation movement of unusual scale and depth, encompassed many historical elements aside from the category of nationalism. Nationalism cannot cover everything about China during the twentieth century.

This is a useful reminder of the complex intertwining of nationalism and revolution that sought to achieve the most profound goals of the Enlightenment. Unlike the top-down administrative transformations sought by many developing and modernizing regimes across the world, the Chinese revolution sought to remake society and the human being from

below and within, that is by affecting or generating a certain degree of voluntarism for the people without history. To quote Lindblom from Wang Shaoguang's article, it was a consensus based on "massive unilateral persuasion" (this issue). This included not only indoctrination through the ritual theatre of rebirth (*fanshen*) in the mass criticism and struggle campaigns, but also a mammoth reproduction and re-signification of peasant culture that had been destroyed during the Republican period and the revolution itself—a kind of reconstitution of the cultural nexus of power. The selection and redaction of popular cultural products—songs, drama, ritual—and their circulation through a host of new media accompanied Mao's call to indigenize and popularize (*minzuhua*) socialism. The successes of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in raising the living standards and development of the people in China are undeniable.

The costs of this kind of mobilization are also well known and need not detain us here. Rather, I want to understand how and why the nexus between revolutionary justice and nationalism came apart. In other words, how and why did a movement dedicated to provisioning an alternative to an unjust world order of capitalist nation-states become absorbed by this very order? Furthermore, since China will, if it has not already, become one of the leaders of this system, what resources can it mobilize from its experiences to make the system more just?

Sun Liping concurs with the opinion that holds that socialist societies were veering toward convergence. At one point, he remarks that these societies really sought to leap forward to join developed societies; at another, he quotes Lowenthal to the effect that technological imperatives cause socialist societies to converge with capitalist societies. While agreeing with both of those observations, I wish to underscore the more fundamental ideological power of the system that China was forced to join at the beginning of the twentieth century. The system of nation-states evolved to enhance the competitiveness of each nation for accumulation on a global scale. Socialism was born amidst hostile nation-states and retained this nation form. By the time it was established in China, its encasement in the nation form was already taken for granted. Moreover, although the socialist states denounced the international system as capitalistic, they were invested in the entire narrative of progress and competition. This is most evident in the slogans of the Great Leap Forward, which sought to overtake steel production in Britain and France in fifteen years and sanctioned the mobilization of people to sacrifice for the socialist nation. The nation form that was structurally and historically tied to global competition seems to have overcome the impetus for globally redistributive justice of which socialists had dreamed.

The thrust of my essay has been to show that the hegemony of the capitalistic system of nation-states has tended to overpower and appropriate historical tendencies predating the PRC as well as the enormous force of the socialist revolution. To be sure, capitalism and nationalism do not—or did not—always have identical aims, but in recent years, they seem to have become closely allied as they were in the pre-socialist world.

Yet by drawing on the work of the scholars represented in this dialogue, I have also tried to show that some boundaries of the system are more porous than others. As capitalism develops new media technologies and cross-border ventures involving cooperation as well as competition, the nation-state itself has to adapt and respond to the challenges. Wang Shaoguang has observed how internet use and media reinforce each other to draw popular attention to issues affecting the national agenda. Philip Huang's effort to show the continuing role of the third realm has a great deal of promise and can be combined with Sun Liping's attention to the changing realm of practice to see how capitalism and nationalism are being incrementally reshaped. If practice can often smuggle in unarticulated histories in the emergent, regimes, of course, also self-consciously utilize historical narratives to secure their goals.<sup>4</sup> The regime in China continues to evoke socialism—albeit harmonious—as its goal. We must hope that there are enough forces in China and the world with the historical memory of the dream of universal social justice to push the emergent superpower in that direction.

## Notes

1. By “other” I mean here the late imperial past.

2. Joseph Esherick (2007: 243) has recently asked the “Attaturk counterfactual” question: why did China not focus on the Han nation and grant plebiscite to the other ethnic nationalities as most other empires did? He argues that the territorial continuity of the Qing empire into the modern nation-state was greatly contingent on the Western imperialists' interest in keeping China from being divided up.

3. Of course, both socialism and anti-imperialist nationalism made modifications to nationalism, but they tended to retain both the nation form as well as the telos of rationality and progress. The relationship of the telos and the nation form to capitalism is a more complex one that I will delve further into below.

4. Indeed, one can often see the nexus between the historical and the global in the relations between articulated historical narratives and adaptive survivals from the past.

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