THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY
IN POST-TIANANMEN CHINA:
Cultural Nationalism v. State Nationalism

By
Yingjie Guo
MA

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania

May 2001
This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material previously published or written by another person except due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

This thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

Yingjie Guo
May 2001
Contents

Declaration ................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements .................................................. vi
Abstract ........................................................................ viii

1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1
   1. Socio-political Background of the Politics of Identity ................................. 1
   2. Intellectual Background of the Study ........................................................ 3
   3. Aims of the Study ........................................................................................ 8
   4. Methodology ................................................................................................ 9
   5. Basic Arguments ....................................................................................... 11
   6. Structure of the Thesis ............................................................................. 16

2 Rethinking the Nation and Nationalism: Theoretical Positions, Methodological Issues and Working Definitions ................................................................. 18
   1. Value Judgements and Distorted Perspectives of Nationalism .................. 19
   2. Objective and Subjective Aspects of the Nation ........................................... 23
   3. Nation and State as Separate Concepts ......................................................... 28
   4. Nationalism: Identification with the Nation or Loyalty to the State? ........... 30
   5. Nation, National Identity and Nationalism as Applied in This Study .......... 33

3 Reconstructing Official Ideology: The Rise of State Nationalism ..................... 39
   1. Patriotic Indoctrination in the Wake of the Tiananmen Events .................... 40
   2. Party-Centred Nationalism: Guo as a Package .......................................... 45
   3. Party Interest and National Interest ............................................................ 51
   4. Who Are the Nation? .................................................................................... 58
   5. Pan-Chinese Nationalism: A New Patriotic United-Front ............................ 63
   6. Concluding Discussion: the Plight of State Nationalism ............................. 67

4 Rediscovering the National Spirit: The Search for Roots and the Making of Heroes in Chinese Literature .......................................................... 72
   1. The Crisis of Faith and A Heroless China .................................................... 74
   2. The Search for Roots .................................................................................... 79
   3. A New Species of Anti-American Heroes .................................................... 86
   4. Another Kind of Anti-Japanese Hero ............................................................ 89
   5. Conclusion .................................................................................................... 94

5 Rewriting History for the Nation: The ‘Zeng Guofan Phenomenon’ .............. 99
   1. The Ups and Downs of Zeng Guofan since the Late Qing ............................ 100
   2. Han-Centric Conceptions of the Nation under Challenge ............................ 104
   3. The Revolutionary Identity Deconstructed ................................................ 109
   4. Reconstructing the Nation on Cultural Traditions ...................................... 114
   5. The Politics of History and National Identity ............................................ 118

6 Reidentifying the Nation to Its Confucian Tradition: Xutong ......................... 129
   1. Confucians vs. Marxists: Their Contest over Confucianism ..................... 131
2. Class Struggle, Social Development, National Unity and Identity........ 136
3. The Confucian Orthodoxy and the Idea of Chineseness.................. 142
4. Moral Regeneration............................................................................. 149
5. Whither Confucianism? ...................................................................... 153

7 Reclaiming the ‘Othered’ China: Nationalist Appropriations of
   Postcolonialism.................................................................................. 155
   1. Official Campaigns Against ‘Colonial Culture’.......................... 157
   2. Postcolonialist Bombardment on Misrepresentations of China..... 161
   3. The Right and Power to Represent China.................................. 165
   4. Between Cultural Hybridity and Purity........................................ 171
   5. From Modernity to Chineseness.................................................. 177
   6. Concluding Discussion: Another Kind of Occidentalism.............. 182

8 Conclusions.......................................................................................... 188
   1. Cultural Nationalism as a Counter-Discourse to State Nationalism... 188
   2. The Objectives of Cultural Nationalism....................................... 193
   3. Prospects for the Politics of National Identity............................. 204
   4. Implications for Further Research................................................... 213

Bibliography.............................................................................................. 215
## Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Survey of middle school student ambitions, 1981 and 1989</th>
<th>44</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>What ideals do you think university students should have?</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>What does the soviet experience tell you?</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Which of the following people would you like to emulate?</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Major points of contention in the debate on Zeng Guofan</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

I have acquired enormous intellectual and practical debts in the development of
this work. I must, first of all, record my deep sense of gratitude to Dr Baogang He
for sparking my interest in national identity and nationalism. The basic outlines
of my intellectual formation in this discipline were developed under his tutorship
as mentor and supervisor. He averted potential false starts by encouraging me to
improve the conceptual approach and scope, and patiently provided criticism of
each chapter as it was written and rewritten. He was also instrumental in helping
limit the project to tractable dimensions and keeping me on track during the
research and the writing of the thesis. This work has benefited immensely from
his unfailing guidance and encouragement and his wealth of ideas.

I am grateful to Terry Narramore and David Jones for their generous support,
kind encouragement and valuable comments on earlier drafts. I am indebted to
Arif Dirk and Prasenjit Duara for their insightful comments on Chapter 5. Thanks
to Jonathan Unger, who inspired me in many ways and made me feel at home at
the Contemporary China Centre during my research there in 1997. Thanks also to
John Fitzgerald for reading an earlier draft of Chapter 4; my conception of
nationalism in China owes much to his suggestions and writings. Suzanne de
Salis contributed enormously to improve the quality of the manuscript. She
carefully read most chapters twice and weeded out many errors.

The School of Government and the Faculty of Arts provided me with
generous travel grants between 1997 and 1999, which enabled me to carry out
research in Canberra and in China and attend conferences. The ANU offered me a
National Visiting Scholarship in 1997; my visit there was quite productive and
enjoyable.

My greatest debt of gratitude must be reserved for my wife, Shang Wei for
her boundless emotional and material sacrifice in the last few years. The writing
of the thesis would have taken longer but for her technical support. Special thanks
to Olivia Guo for her understanding. Many a weekend family event were forgone
so that this work could take form.

Different versions of three chapters were published separately:
Chapter 3 was presented at the 1999 conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association (26–29 September, University of Sydney) and published in the conference proceedings, pp. 269-77.

Chapter 4 was given as a seminar paper in the School of History, the University of Tasmania, in 1997 and presented at the CSAA conference in Adelaide in 1997. It was later published in Nationalism & Ethnic Politics, vol. 4, nos. 1&2, Spring/Summer, 1998, pp. 163-88.

Chapter 5 was published in Modern China, vol. no. 2, 1999, pp. 142-70 (co-author: Baogang He).

All these three chapters were included in Baogang He and Yingjie Guo, Nationalism and National Identity and Democratisation in China, Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2000.
Abstract

In much of the existing literature on 'Chinese nationalism', the critical distinction between nation and state is rarely made, and 'Chinese nationalism' is generally treated as a generic concept and an undifferentiated whole. Consequently, nationalism often appears as loyalty to the state rather than identification with the nation, and the state usually predominates in what is presumably national identity, whereas the nation becomes something represented by the state in mute acquiescence. Yet, in a 'revolutionary development' in China's politics of national identity since 1989, both the official configurations of the nation and the state's monopolised right to name the nation have come under rigorous challenge.

This study aims to contribute to a better understanding of 'Chinese nationalism' by exploring one of the critical aspects neglected in the literature - the disjunction of people and state that brings the category of nation and the phenomenon of nationalism into play. It relocates arguments about nationalism outside of the common statist frameworks of analysis and examines the cultural nationalists' challenge to the Party-state by means of discourse analysis. It argues that the challenge centres on the projects of revolution and Westernisation, which cultural nationalists hold responsible for the identity crisis in China and the dissipation of the national ethos. A political frontier is drawn between competing projects based on competing evaluations of China's cultural traditions, the socialist legacy, the official version of patriotism, modernity, and authentic experience and authentic community.

The politics of identity unfolds on three levels in the main. On the first level is the struggle for hegemony in determining what constitutes Chineseness. Cultural nationalists demand that what the state is and what it does match the nation's will, beliefs, values, interests and its conception of itself. They further seek to reform the Party-state in accordance with their conception of national essence and national will. Their conception calls in question the legitimacy of a Party-state that portrays itself as the sole legitimate representative of the nation. Furthermore, the reconstructed national identity alters existing systems of meaning - the meaning of Chineseness, the hierarchy of values and the vision of historical destiny. In doing so, it transforms the basis upon which the nation makes decisions about its
collective life and thereby influences those decisions. The CCP's compromise with cultural nationalists suggests that it is no longer able to hold its ground or continue to monopolise the right to name the nation.