Part I

Chinese Religion and Nationalism before 1949
2 The Idea of Chineseness and Ethnic Thought of Wang Fuzhi

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Abstract
This chapter explores Wang Fuzhi’s ethnic thought from new perspectives. First, I will analyze three connotations of Chineseness – geographical, cultural, ethnic – upheld in the history of Chinese ethnic thought. Second, Wang’s major contributions to the development of Chinese ethnic thought is outlined, such as presenting new concepts concerning the nature of the Chinese and the ‘barbarians’, and the new ethics that regards the protection of the Chinese interest as the ultimate good and the supreme natural law. Finally, I will compare Wang’s ethnocentric ideas to the idea of ‘Chinese nation’ advocated by Liang Qichao at the turn of the twentieth century, and examine the impact of Wang’s ethnocentric works on the intellectuals in late nineteenth-century China.

Keywords: Wang Fuzhi, ethnicity, Chinese nationalism, Chineseness

Levenson’s thesis and the connotations of Chineseness

Regarding the origins of Chinese nationalism, the most influential view, in terms of insight and originality, might be that proposed by Joseph Levenson. According to Levenson, Chinese nationalism was mainly the product of the crisis of Chinese culture which was, in turn, the product of the Western impact on premodern China. In his presentation of the famous ‘culturalism to nationalism thesis’, Levenson outlined the historical process of the emergence of nationalism in early twentieth-century China. He argued that Chinese nationalism originated from a change in the object of loyalty. Before the nineteenth century, the ethically legitimate object of loyalty was Chinese culture or ‘human civilization’ (tianxia 天下; or all-under-heaven) for the cultivated elite, and the ‘dynasty’ (chaodai 朝代) for the

1 In this chapter, the term “ethnic thought” has two meanings: the thought on ethnicity and ethnocentric thought.
2 Townsend (1996).
masses. Challenged by the West, Chinese culture lost its appeal of universal validity. As the Chinese intellectuals could not bear to accept a China inferior to the West, and Chinese culture could not serve as the base for regaining superiority, they turned to the Chinese ‘state’ (guo 国) as the new object of loyalty, and the masses were mobilized to follow. The result was the birth of Chinese nationalism. But the story did not end there. The shift from culturalism to nationalism produced an identity crisis, as the allegiance to the Chinese state could not satisfy the Chinese intellectuals’ need for a cultural identity, and neither could Western culture, as it would never be regarded as their own. The spiritual schism caused by the need of abandoning the previous cultural identity on the one hand, and the sense of homelessness in a Westernized world on the other, caused the Chinese intellectuals trapped in a state of spiritual rootlessness, and formed the essence of modern Chinese intellectual history.

Despite its originality and insightfulness, Levenson’s thesis has some drawbacks which have drawn a great deal of criticism. Especially its theoretical simplicity at the expense of historiographical accuracy received major criticism. Scholars have pointed out that there was a tradition in Chinese history which emphasized the ethnic distinction between ‘Chinese’ (hua 華) and ‘barbarians’ (yi 夷). This distinction dated back to the South Song period (1127-1279) or even earlier, a fact which was either silenced by Levenson in his thesis, or distorted when he portrayed the late Ming thinker Wang Fuzhi and the late Qing thinker Zhang Binlin 章炳麟 (1869-1936) as culturalists. Schwartz, Lin, Cohen, Duara, and Townsend also pointed out the methodological prejudice, misunderstanding, or inadequacy inherent in the ‘tradition-modern’ and ‘emotion-reason’ dichotomies employed by Levenson as the analytical framework of the thesis.

Considering the deficiency of Levenson’s thesis in accounting for the emergence of Chinese nationalism, other more accurate and hence less controversial approaches might be worthwhile. I have attempted such an approach, which focuses on the connotations of the term ‘China’ (zhongguo 中國) that were formed and used in Chinese history before the eighteenth century, and analyzes the change of primacy among these connotations.

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4 Levenson (1968, pp. 96-97).

According to a ‘cultural language approach’,⁶ there were three major connotations of the term ‘China’ in Chinese history, namely the geographical, the cultural, and the ethnic.⁷ Before the Song period, the most often used connotations were either the geographical or the cultural ones. But from the Song period on, a gradual shift took place and the ethnic connotation of China became more and more prominent in some intellectuals’ use of the term. The idea that ‘China’ (the geographical-political China) was the China of the ‘Chinese people’ (zhongguoren 中国人) and should not be ruled by aliens eventually appeared from the late Yuan period on. It gathered momentum during the Ming period, but was suppressed under the Manchu reign. In the last years of the Qing period, that idea rapidly peaked due to the provocative propaganda by anti-Manchu revolutionaries. From then on, the ethnic connotation of China became the primary connotation, and the other two were assimilated into it and eventually lost the autonomy they used to enjoy in defining China and Chinese identity. This change of primacy among the three connotations of China marked the emergence of Chinese nationalism.⁸

The merit of this approach lies therein that it partly incorporates Levenson’s insights but without his historical inaccuracies. Levenson was correct in partly identifying two connotations of Chinese identity, namely the cultural one (tianxia) and the geo-political one (guo), but he missed the ethnic one. He was therefore inclined to overemphasize the factor of culture, taking the crisis of Chinese culture as the decisive force in the shift of loyalty from culture to state. What he ignored was the importance of the ethnic connotation of China in defining Chinese identity, and it was the mobilization of this connotation that largely caused the change of the content of Chinese identity, which then led to the emergence of Chinese nationalism.

Focusing on the changes of Chinese identity reflected in the changing primacy of the connotations of China, the above approach might shed a different light on our understanding of the modern intellectual history of China, since the latter was situated in the longue durée of Chinese history viewed as a history of identity (similar to Levenson’s approach) or ethnic thought. Understood in this way, modern Chinese intellectual history would no longer be viewed as a dilemma caused by the difficult transition from

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⁶ Chang (2009b, pp. 8, 18).
⁷ Chang (2015, p. 6).
⁸ Regarding the change of primacy among the three connotations of China from the sixth to the seventeenth century, see Chang (2009b, pp. 227-323).
tradition to modernity, but instead as the creative endeavor in search of new connotations of China and hence new meanings of Chinese identity. In contrast to Levenson’s thesis, which asserted that it was the crisis of the cultural China that resulted in the shift of loyalty to the political China, I would suggest that it was the connotation ethnic China (China as an ethnic polity) which overtook geographical and cultural China and, once mixed with the new idea of modern ‘state’, became the primary connotation in the early twentieth century. This idea then of the ethnic Chinese nation drove the historical Chinese culture to transform and rejuvenate. This stage of ethnic-driven cultural transformation could be viewed as the latest development in the long history of Chinese identity.

The clarification of the three connotations of Chineseness would thus lay the foundation for a new theoretical framework, which is different from that of Levenson, for understanding the formation of Chinese nationalism. In the second section of this chapter, I attempt to explain these connotations. Such understanding will also be used as a guide to analyze the ethnic thought of Wang Fuzhi. In addition, I examine the impact of the circulation of Wang’s ethnocentric works on the educated elites between 1840s and 1894.

A few words regarding the Chinese term of zhongguo 中國 in this chapter might be necessary. It is well-known that the term ‘China’ might be etymologically related to Qin 秦, and thus was probably a term used by peoples outside China to refer to geographical China. If that was indeed the case, it means that there might have been no such term as ‘China’ before the Qin period. On the other hand, the term zhongguo had been used in pre-Qin texts, thus to render it as ‘China’ might be susceptible to a certain form of anachronism, if the term is discussed in the pre-Qin context. Moreover, when the term zhongguo was used in post-Qin historical texts, in some cases it referred to the ‘Central Plain’ (zhongyuan 中原), in other cases it referred to a culture which stood for the human civilization. In both cases, to render the term as ‘China’ would make it difficult to convey the above meanings, since ‘China’ is normally understood as referring to a geographical-political domain rather than a culture, and the scope of this domain is much larger than that of the ‘Central Plain’. Nevertheless, to replace ‘China’ with zhongguo would be rather awkward in style. To balance conceptual accuracy and style, the tentative solution I adopt is to render the term as zhongguo whenever necessary (e.g. when dealing with its connotations in the pre-Qin

9 Duara (1995, p. 90) expressed a similar opinion.
10 Regarding ‘state’ (guo 國), Levenson did not distinguish the political regime which ruled geographical China from ethnic China, which was regarded as an ethnic polity.
period, or when rendering it as ‘China’ might be misleading), and use ‘China’ in the remaining parts of this chapter."

**Zhongguo and its three major connotations**

The term *zhongguo* had already appeared in the Western Zhou period (1046-771 BC). Its earliest use might have either referred to the former domain of the Shang polity (1675-1046 BC) or to *luoyi*雒邑, also known as *Chengzhou*成周. It might also mean ‘the city that was located in the middle of the peoples or polities, with medium distance to them from all directions’. During the ‘Spring and Autumn’ (*chunqiu*春秋, 770-476 BC) period, *zhongguo* had about six meanings: (1) the domain of the king of Zhou 周; (2) the political bloc with the king of Zhou and his guardian vassals as its heads (*zhuxia*諸夏); (3) the political-geographical domain of the *zhuxia* bloc; (4) the area inside the city walls of a polity’s capital; (5) the domain of a polity; (6) *human* civilization. In the Warring States (*zhanguo*戰國, 403-221 BC) texts, *zhongguo* developed at least eight meanings: (1) the *zhuxia* bloc; (2) the Central Plain; (3) Nine Provinces (*jiuzhou*九州); (4) the area of the Three Jins (三晉); (5) the capital of legendary sage-kings; (6) the area within the bounds of a state or one’s homeland; (7) a medium-size state; (8) a cultural community which symbolizes the *human* civilization. When used in the third meaning, *zhongguo* was equivalent to Nine Provinces, ‘four oceans’ (*sihai*四海), or ‘inland among surrounding oceans’ (*hainei*海內), and all three of the latter terms referred to a geopolitical land mass estimated to be a quadratic domain with 3,000 Chinese miles (li 里) on each side.16 It is

11 I would like to thank Professor Cheng-tian Kuo for his suggestion concerning this issue.
12 The rendering of *zhongguo* as ‘the Central State’ by Hsu and Linduff (1988, p. 96) seems to be an example of this view.
13 Chang (2009a, pp. 172-184) listed three meanings of *zhongguo* during the Western Zhou period: (1) *luoyi*; (2) one of Zhou’s capitals; (3) central state (Shang polity).
14 Chang (2009a, pp. 185-190). Regarding the connotation of *zhuxia*, see Chang (2009c).
15 Chang (2009a, pp. 218-233). For a somewhat comprehensive list of all the entries in the Warring States texts in which *zhongguo* was used (there are 108), see Chang (2009c, pp. 219-233). In the recently published critical edition of *Zhan Guo Zong Heng Jia Shu*戰國縱橫家書, there is one additional entry: 「秦雖強, 終不敢出塞流河, 絕中國而攻齊」 (In spite of its superior force, Qin dares not to go out of the fortress and march along the river, cross the Central Plain and attack Qi. *Zhan Guo Zong Heng Jia Shu*, No.8, p. 215), in which the term *zhongguo* might refer to the Central Plain. For the cultural and quasi-ethnic connotations of the concept of China during the Warring States period, see Chang (2009a, pp. 166-180).
noteworthy that, although zhongguo has been translated as ‘the Central State’, ‘the Central Country’ or ‘the Middle Kingdom’ in later times, there seems, in the Warring States texts, to be no example of the term being used to refer to these meanings. In other words, during the Warring States period, it seems that the term was not used to refer to a unitary political community.

Among the above eight meanings, the second (zhongguo = the Central Plain), third (zhongguo = Nine Provinces) and the eighth (zhongguo = a cultural community) could be regarded as the origins of three major connotations of Chineseness in later times. The second and the third meanings formed the political-geographical connotation of Chineseness, whereas the eighth meaning formed the cultural connotation of Chineseness. As for the ethnic connotation of Chineseness, it was derived from the political-geographical one. The three connotations of Chineseness are explained as follows:

The political-geographical connotation of Chineseness

Zhongguo = the Central Plain. The meaning of zhongguo as referring to the Central Plain (the area which has today’s Henan 河南, western part of Shandong 山东 and eastern part of Shanxi 陕西 as its core) could be traced back to its meanings in the Western Zhou 西周 period and the Spring and Autumn period, which respectively referred to the area of the ex-Shang 商 polity and the political-geographical domain of the zhuxia polities. The Central Plain had been the center of the political world from Shang to the Spring and Autumn period, and therefore enjoyed a privileged status compared to other areas. Polities or peoples in this area tended to consider themselves as China, and considered those in other areas as ‘barbarians’.

Zhongguo = Nine Provinces. The idea of Nine Provinces had several origins as well as versions. According to the most famous version, i.e. The Tribute of Yu (禹贡), Nine Provinces was created by the god-sage Yu. Legend says that Yu terminated the Great Flood (the metaphor of chaos and disorder) with a divine hydro-engineering work, which had the strong metaphorical
implication of creating a new order. After the work was done, Yu established the restored lands into nine provinces within the political framework of a unitary kingdom.\(^\text{21}\) It has been pointed out by many scholars that the locations of these provinces reflected the geo-political reality from late Spring and Autumn period to the Warring States period, which suggests that these versions of the Nine Provinces probably appeared during this time.\(^\text{22}\) If that is the case, the significant implication of Yu’s establishment of Nine Provinces is that, at least from the late Spring and Autumn period on, a notion was gradually forming that envisioned a unitary kingdom where the major polities of the time were its local administrative units. In other words, the discourse of Nine Provinces emerging from a multi-polity system presented an imagination of a unitary kingdom. When such a kingdom became a reality from the Qin period on, Nine Provinces also became the symbol of the territorial domain of China. One example could be found in a text from the Han 漢 period:

The reason why the Annals of Spring and Autumn emphasized the Unity was that, due to the Unity, the world within the six limits shared the same customs, and Nine Provinces were ruled under the same set of principles.\(^\text{23}\)

As both the Central Plain and Nine Provinces could be symbols of China, it might be convenient to call the former the ‘symbol of China in the narrow sense’ and the latter the ‘symbol of China in the broad sense’. The Central Plain as the ‘symbol of China in the narrow sense’ had particular significance during the period of multiple kingdoms. During such periods, since no kingdom was able to rule the whole domain of Nine Provinces, the kingdom that ruled the Central Plain enjoyed a more prestigious status as the legitimate ruler of China than the others.\(^\text{24}\)

The cultural connotation of Chineseness

At least by the late Warring States period, a notion had been formed that zhongguo stood for a cultural community in which its peoples shared a common culture. The oft-mentioned characteristics of this common culture included language, costumes, customs, and values. In the case of language

\(^\text{21}\) I follow Legge’s rendering of zhou as ‘province’.
\(^\text{22}\) Chang (2009a, pp. 200-206).
and costumes, the idea that zhongguo was a domain where peoples within it shared the same language and costume could be found in The Springs and Autumn of Mr Lü (呂氏春秋):

The size of the domain composed with polities where their peoples wore the same costume of hats and sashes, reaching each other easily by boats and carriages, and could communicate with each other with no need of translators, was about a square with 3000 li on each side.25

In the debate kindled by king Wu lin of Zhao about converting Chinese costume to that of Hu 胡, one opponent’s argument showed that China was regarded as a cultural community with a civilization higher than that of Hu:

Prince Chen said: ‘... According to your servant’s knowledge, China is the realm in which the wise and intelligent men live, to which the variety of resources and wealth flow and converge, in which the teachings of sages was taught, the values of benevolence and righteousness, the culture delivered through classics like Books of Poetry, Historical Documents, Rites and Music, is practiced, and the excellent arts of all sorts are applied. It is, therefore, a realm to which peoples from afar come and learn, and a role model for barbarians to follow’.26

From the Han period on, the idea of zhongguo as a unitary cultural community continued to be held, and the content of this culture was more or less fixed:

Language (spoken and written): Chinese
Type of economy: sedentary agriculture
Type of polity: a monarch rules over peasants with bureaucrats as aides.
Value system: Confucianism (with sages kings and sages as its symbolic figures) and sacred classics as the core; a doctrine of ethical relations between the ruler and the ruled, parents and children, husband and wife, the elder and the junior, and between friends; the cultural performance of rites and music; the political doctrine of benevolent rule.

One example in the text of the Song period showed this connotation of zhongguo:

26 Zhangguo Ce Jian Zheng, p. 1047.
China (zhongguo) is the world which has been ruled by teachings of sages, where its inhabitants were practicing four major occupations and wore the civilized costumes ... where life is regulated by morality, people are cultivated by civilized rites and music, with the principles regarding five ethical relations prevalent as their norm.27

The ethnic connotation of Zhongguo

Wang Mingke has pointed out that, by the Warring States period, a notion had emerged which considered the mythical figure of Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝) as the common ancestor of various clans living in China.28 According to this notion, for a people to be regarded as ethnic Chinese, their recent ancestor must be acknowledged as the descendent of Yellow Emperor. Otherwise they would be regarded as ethnic ‘barbarians’. In this chapter, I use ‘ethnic Chinese’ to denote peoples imagined as one homogenous ethnic group living in the domain of China, and ‘ethnic China’ to denote China understood (or imagined) as an ethnic polity, namely, a political body composed of people of the same ethnicity.

It is noteworthy that from the Qin period on, the notion of ethnic Chinese was, conceptually speaking, simply the derivative of that of geographical China. The reason for this is as follows: since Yellow Emperor was the ancestor of the ethnic Chinese, he was the very first Chinese and there could be no Chinese prior to him. But if there could be no Chinese prior to Yellow Emperor, he could not be a descendant of any Chinese, how then could he be claimed to be ethnic Chinese? It seems that the only reason to claim so was that he was born and lived in the domain of geographical China. In other words, for the concept of ethnic Chinese to be a reasonable one, it has to build on the concept of geographical China. This means that there could be no concept of ethnic Chinese until the concept of geographical China came into existence. Therefore, in the case of China, the concept of ethnic Chinese and that of geographical China were not two independent concepts, but rather the former was intimately connected with the latter. The inner connection of ethnicity to geography seems to be somewhat particular of China, and might call for further attention.

27 Shi Jie, ‘Deviant Creeds’, first essay, Writings of Mr Shi of Zulai, Book 5, p. 60.
28 Wang (2006, pp. 75-86). It appears that, for the term ‘di’ in Huangdi 黃帝, ‘Lord’ might be a better translation than the conventional ‘Emperor’, as the latter was the translation for Huangdi 皇帝, a term coined by the First Emperor of Qin by combining ‘huang’ and ‘di’.
A note on the relationship of the notion of ‘ethnic Chinese’ with ‘the Han’ or ‘ethnic Han’ might be of some interest. First of all, the term zhongguo was used in the Warring States text to refer to the people living in the geographical zhongguo, who were different in nature to peoples of outside areas: ‘Peoples in the areas located in the five cardinal directions, such as zhongguo, rong, yi, are of their own respective natures. Among these natures, none of them may be applied to any other’. The term zhongguo in the text apparently had an ethnic connotation, referring to a people whose ethnicity was different from other peoples. Compared to this, the term ‘the Han’ or ‘ethnic Han’ appeared later, as it was the product of the establishment of the Han Dynasty. Second, summarized in a very general way, two terminological pairs used to refer to the ethnic Chinese and other peoples of different ethnicity could be found in the texts of historical China. One pair is ‘Chinese versus yidi’. The above-quoted Warring States text provides an example of its use. The other pair is ‘X versus Han’, in which X could be any ethnic group, while Han referred to the ethnic Chinese. It appears that the ‘Chinese versus yidi’ pair, when used by the ethnic Chinese literati, often implied a certain sense of superiority to yidi. According to my limited knowledge of Wang Fuzhi, in his works he very rarely, if ever, used Han to denote ethnic Chinese.

With the three connotations of Chineseness as a tool, researchers can discern two ways in which the term zhongguo was used in Chinese historical materials. One of them is referential, using the term China to refer to a political-geographical domain, a unitary cultural community, or an ethnic group. The other way is normative or identity-laden, using the term zhongguo to express the user’s opinion about what zhongguo is supposed to be, or the zhongguo with which the user identified. These two ways may be independent from each other, but sometimes they coincide. An example of zhongguo used to denote a political geographical domain could be found in the following early Tang 唐 text: ‘The First Emperor (of Qin) built fortresses in remote areas, which contributed to the disintegration of China’. Another middle-Tang text showed that zhongguo was used to denote a unitary cultural community (represented by the zhuxia bloc): ‘In

30 Terms like man蠻, yi, rong戎, di狄 appeared in the Warring States records of ideas of the Spring and Autumn period. One of their original meanings might simply be ‘outsider’ rather than ‘barbarian’. See Chang (2009c).
31 I would like to thank one of the reviewers of this chapter for raising the question of ‘Han’ for discussion.
32 Chu Suiliang , ‘Pleading against the stationing of troops in Gaochang’. 
his Annals of Spring and Autumn, Confucius treating those vassals who adopted the rites of “barbarian” as “barbarian”, whereas treating those who upgraded themselves by following the rites of the Chinese as Chinese.’33

As for China used in the form of ‘people of China’ (zhongguo zhì rén 之人, the Chinese) to denote an ethnic group, the following late Yuan text provided an example: ‘Because, regarding the people of our China, Heaven would certainly mandate men of China to well look after them. There is no possibility that a “barbarian” would be allowed to rule them’.34

Wang Fuzhi’s major contributions to the development of Chinese ethnic thought

More than half a century ago, Etienne Balazs already described Wang’s Discourses on The General Mirrors (Du Tongjian lun 讀通鑑論) as ‘impregnated with a nationalism’, and remarked that some contentions in Wang’s Book of Yellow manifested a ‘nationalist tribune’.35 In 1968, Vierheller published his study of Wang’s ethnic thought and called it ‘proto-nationalism’.36 In the same year, McMorran also completed a PhD dissertation on Wang’s thought as a whole, focusing on his philosophical thought on ‘ether’ (qì 氣 or chi) , treating his ethnic thought as an application of his theory of ether to ethnic issues.37 McMorran called Wang’s ethnic thought ‘nationalism’, which emphasized the distinction between Chinese (hua 華) and ‘barbarians’ (yi 夷) and urged that ‘the Chinese must preserve their integrity as a nation’ by strict observance of the rule of separation which kept China and the ‘external barbarians’ separated from each other.38 In this chapter, I shall deal with Wang’s ethnic thought in the following way. 1) Outline the major contributions made by Wang to the development of Chinese ethnic thought. 2) Analyze the similarity of Wang’s ethnic thought to and its difference from the nationalist ideas in early nineteenth-century China.

As mentioned before, in the history of Chinese ethnic thoughts before Wang, the term zhongguo had two prevalent meanings: one referred to the political regime which ruled over geographical China (either in its narrow or broad sense), the other referred to the unitary cultural community which

33 Han Yu, ‘Yuan dao’, Annotated Works of Han Chanli, Book 1, p. 20.
36 Vierheller (1968); see Lodén (1996, p. 276, n. 14).
37 McMorran (1968).
38 McMorran (1968, pp. 199, 205-208).
was located in geographical China and was the center of human civilization. This cultural community was open to anyone (regardless of the person’s ethnicity) who was willing to join it, and whoever could preserve this cultural community was entitled to rule geographical China.

Wang’s significant contributions to the development of Chinese ethnic thought, which to a certain extent were linked to the formation of Chinese nationalist thought in the early 1900s, are as follows.

First, he upheld the ethnic meaning of zhongguo as the term’s primary meaning, a contention very much against the traditional meanings of the term. In this ethnic meaning, zhongguo was understood as a geographical domain which belonged to the ethnic Chinese alone.

Second, to support the above claim (i.e. China belongs to the Chinese alone), he argued that the Chinese as an ethnic group were formed due to the ‘geographical ether’ (diqi 地氣) of geographical China. The ethnic character of the Chinese was determined by the latter, and was, therefore, different from that of the ‘barbarians’, whose ethnic character was determined by their respective geographical ethers, and these geographical ethers differed from that of geographical China.

Third, he proclaimed that to separate the Chinese from the ‘barbarians’ and to protect the former from being violated or confused by the latter was the primary raison d’être of the regime established by the Chinese.

Fourth, he reinterpreted the meaning of the cardinal Confucian virtues of ‘benevolence’ (ren 仁), ‘righteousness’ (yi 義) and ‘loyalty’ (zhong 忠) from the above ethnocentric standpoint. Regarding benevolence, he argued that the essence of ‘benevolence’ consisted in defending one’s own ethnic fellows from the violation by the other ethnic groups, and that of ‘righteousness’ in ethnic self-rule (ruled by one’s own ethnic people for the interest of the ethnic polity). As for ‘loyalty’, Wang maintained that loyalty was not supposed to be practiced towards whatever regime that ruled geographical China, but must be devoted to the ethnic polity and the ethnic regimes alone, and never to alien regimes. He also reinterpreted another significant concept of ‘orthodoxy’ (zheng 正 or legitimacy), arguing that the regimes which enjoyed the highest degree of orthodoxy were those which defended the Chinese from being violated by the ‘barbarians’. If a regime pursued its own interest at the expense of the interest of the Chinese (e.g. making the polity of China too weak to defend itself against the invasion of the ‘barbarians’, thus paving the way for the latter’s conquest of geographical China and consequently subjugating the

39 For a recent study dealing with this concept and other relevant issues, see Chang 2015.
Chinese), it had committed a crime against China (understood as an ethnic polity). We shall elaborate the above ideas in more detail.

The first important expression of Wang’s aforementioned ideas was an unpublished book, Book of Yellow (Huan Shu 黃書), a work which was said to be completed when Wang was 38. The term Yellow has several meanings: it refers to the color yellow; situated in the context of the legendary lineage of China, it refers to Yellow Emperor, the common ancestor of the Chinese; in the context of the discourse of Five Elements (wuxin 五行), it refers to the central position (zhong 中), as yellow is the color of the earth, and the position of the earth is in the center. In other words, Book of Yellow as the title implied that it was a book written for the Chinese who were the descendants of Yellow Emperor. If the book was written for the Chinese, for what purpose? The central aim was to urge that the protection of the Chinese from offences by the ‘barbarians’ was the foremost raison d’être of the regime established by the Chinese. In the postscript of Book of Yellow, Wang says:

Whoever becomes king by recapitulating the spirit inherent in the legacies from antiquity and following the principle of Nature, if he ruled according to the way set up by Xuan Yuan 軒轅 and established the China of the Chinese, and sheltered her from the disasters caused by alien species made of secondary ethers, upholding and nurturing China so she could fully realize her resources, the Way of governance is exhausted.41

The reason for interpreting the Way (note: “the Way” with a capital W is a term commonly used in English works of Chinese intellectual history. For example, please see Schwartz, Benjamin. 1996. China and Other Matters. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, p. 59, para.2, line 6) of governance as sheltering one’s own kind from the disasters caused by alien kinds was premised by a cosmological theory presented at the very beginning of the book. Wang argued that, although Nature nurtured all the living beings with various resources via their endless and boundless mutual intercourses and interactions, it was also the primary law of Nature to distinguish different species from each other and to protect each from the invasion by or confusion with the others. He admitted that species originated from the same primordial unity, but argued that due to the difference of the environments where they live later on, they developed into different species and must thenceforth not mix with one another.

40 This date was based on 劉毓崧 Liu Yusong’s opinion (Chuan Shan Quan Shu 16, p. 204).
41 Huan Shu, Postscript, p. 538.
According to Wang, it was against Nature's design that creatures differentiated from their original unity into diverse species. However, since Nature could do little to stop that, the self-boundaries drawn up by each species was, consequently, the primary law of Nature for each species to follow. That the sage was said to embody the gracious deeds of Nature was precisely due to their dutifully following the above-mentioned primary law of Nature:

If we observe the Beginning in Nature, we cannot but be amazed by the grandness of its design. How great that there were metals that shone, woods that supported, earth that accumulated, with illuminating fire, blowing wind, and moisturizing water to nurture them, letting these elements mutually nourish and impregnate one another, separating and combining them by continuous and abundant movements of melting and compression. Thus the mighty grace prevails boundlessly with no ending. Nevertheless, it is also Nature's work to clarify creatures of the same kind, closing the boundaries between each other, setting up their own positions and sheltering them, which appears to be Nature's greatest concern. This is why mountain creatures have cloven hoofs and those in the marshes have webbed feet; why the strengths of animals used for riding and animals used for ploughing lie in different directions; why the method of wet-cultivation is suited to the southland, and that of dry-cultivation to the cold climate in the northland. It is not because Nature is so cruel to make creatures dissolve from their original unity and ramify from their primordial lineage, but it could do nothing to stop that. So Nature does the above things to ward off disasters from their invading each other. Therefore the sage who, having observed that all species do so and each encloses its own boundary against the other, undertook the position of master of the world, carried out the work of distinguishing the intelligent from the brute, clarifying the similarity in appearance, building high citadel walls when the boundaries were badly maintained, in order to ward off the disasters of invasion and make members of the same species save themselves collectively. In this sense, the saying ‘the sage's greatness coincides with the grace of Nature' is no exaggeration.42

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42 Huan Shu, 501. Parts of this passage were translated by De Bary (1999, p. 34). I adopt one sentence from his translation with some minimal changes (the sentence about mountain and marsh creatures and the methods of cultivation). The rest of the translation is mine, and I alone am responsible for any errors.
Almost three decades later, Wang repeated this cosmological theory again in his *Explanatory commentaries on Zhang Zai’s Correct Introduction to Knowledge* (*Zhang Zi Zheng Mong Zhu* 張子正蒙注). In his annotation of the sentence ‘the ether of Nature, despite its immensely diverse movements of agglomeration, dispersion, attraction, and repulsion, expresses rules which are natural and not abnormal’, he explained that

When the ether agglomerates, its existence is visible, but when it is dispersed one may suspect that it is non-existent. Once it has agglomerated and assumed forms and images, then as regards talents, matter, nature, and feelings, all accord with their own categories. They accept what is similar and oppose what is different; thus all things flourish in profusion and form their several categories. Moreover, the formation of each of these categories has its own organization (*tiao li* 條理). They are dew, thunder, frost, and snow all occur at their proper times, and animals, plants, birds, and fish all keep to their own species. There can be no frost or snow during the long summer days, nor can there be dew or thunder in the depth of winter. Nor can there be between man and beast, plant and tree, any indiscriminate confusion of their respective principles.

In ‘On Unity and Division’ (*li he* 離合), Chapter Seven of Book of Yellow, Wang presented his theory of geographical ether and its connection to the ethnic character of the Chinese. He outlined the domain of China (roughly corresponding to the domain directly ruled by the Ming Empire), arguing that the geographical ether of this domain was different from those of the areas adjacent to it. He pointed out that this domain of China belonged to the Chinese with Yellow Emperor as their common ancestor. He then made a rather interesting claim that among the descendants of Yellow Emperor, some dwelt in geographical China, others in areas outside it. Due to the difference in geographical ether, they gradually formed into peoples of different ethnicities. Despite them being brothers at the beginning, with the passage of time they lost the memories of their original kinship and slaughtered each other as alien species. Although this is a tragedy, Wang lamented, it must be accepted as the outcome of Nature, and it was

43 *Tiao li* has the connotation of ‘rule’ or ‘principle’.
44 De Bary (1999, pp. 28-29); also see McMorran (1968, pp. 193-194).
45 It is noteworthy that Manchuria, Mongol, Xinjian, Tibet, and Taiwan were not included in the geographical *zhongguo* outlined by Wang.
particularly important to consolidate the barriers between them to save one’s own kind:

From the ancient sage kings onward, some clans were granted with names and prided themselves as the noble ones, whereas some of the others declined and moved to the desert areas. Therefore, the peoples who scattered in South and North and had very different customs were actually descendants of the same few clans at the beginning. Originally, they carried the same lineage, sharing the same blood, being closely bounded by inter-marriages, and were in cordial terms with one another, like arms and armpits. After their bonds dissolved and were forgotten, they, who were brothers and kin in the past, fought each other in the field and received blades (note: the original Chinese means “blades of weapons”) from each other, with flesh and blood splattering around and clans annexing and conquering each other. Are these not the heart-breaking tragedies over which Nature deeply mourned? However, acknowledging the harms caused by alien species, Nature let it be and moved along out of necessity (meaning: cannot but do so). For Nature, it was particularly worrisome that the boundaries were too demolished to save the survivors, so there were mountains and plateaus as walls and rivers as gaps to stop invaders.46

It is noteworthy that this view was repeated in another of his unpublished works: Discourses on The General Mirrors (Du Tongjian lun), which later became his most widely known work: 47

Nature begot all creatures with the primordial ether, and the geographical environments confined them within different areas, which resulted in the transformation of the creatures’ natural endowment and the differentiation of their natural dispositions ... The difference in terrains defined the attributes of the creatures’ natural endowments. These attributes suited their transformed nature, and constituted the principles of their life.48

46 Huan Shu, p. 535.
47 It is almost certain that the work was written in his late years (see Chuan Shan Quan Shu 16, p. 74). Evidence from 1687 indicates that he might have been composing this work in this year. See Chuan Shan Quan Shu 16, p. 371.
48 Du Tongjian Lun, p. 485.
But, in *Discourses on The General Mirrors*, he further expressed an interesting view, maintaining that the Chinese and the ‘barbarians’ were of the same species (which differentiated into different kinds), whereas the greater people (*junzi* 君子) and the lesser people (*xiaoren* 小人) were of different kinds. The difference between the Chinese and the ‘barbarians’ was mainly that of ethnicity rather than nature, and their respective ethnicities were shaped by the geographical ether of the geographical areas where they lived:

In this world, there are two fundamental forbidden lines: that between the Chinese and the barbarians, and that between the greater men and the lesser men. It is not that they were of no difference originally but the ancient kings created artificial forbidden lines between them. The Chinese and the barbarians are born in different areas. Since their areas are different, their ethers (natural endowments) change accordingly into different ones. Since their ethers differ, so do their habits. With their habits being different, their knowledge and conducts could never be the same. In each species, some members are superior and some inferior. However, since species are confined by their respective geographical boundary, and their ethers are different, so species must not confuse together. Confusion like this would result in the destruction of the human pole, and the people of China would consequently be overwhelmed by them (i.e. the ‘barbarians’) and suffer. The reason for preventing that at the very beginning was to maintain the human pole by which the life of human beings is protected, and such an endeavor was in accordance with Nature.

The greater men and the lesser men are born of different kinds. That they are of different kinds are due to their difference in nature. Since their natures differ, so do their habits. As their habits are different, their knowledge and conducts could never be the same. It is true that within the same kind there are those who are clever and those who are brute. However, since people are born of different kinds, and different kinds prefer different things, different kinds must not confuse together. Such a confusion would result in the travesty of humanity, and the poor and the vulnerable would consequently be overwhelmed and suffer.

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49 I.e. the superior members of ‘barbarian’ species must not cross the boundary to rule the Chinese.
50 ‘The human pole’ signifies the boundary between human beings (i.e. Chinese) and uncivilized lesser humans (i.e. the ‘barbarian’).
51 I.e. the clever members of the lesser men must not replace the clever members of the greater men to rule.
The reason for preventing such a confusion from being prevalent was to preserve humanity and to ensure the abundance of human life, and such an endeavor was in accordance with Nature. Alas! The confusion of the lesser men with the greater men was no different from that of the ‘barbarians’ with the Chinese, but some people did not take it seriously, without knowing how disastrous it would be!

Among the lesser men, the clever ones and the brute ones formed different types. The brute ones are content to stay in their brute state and be trapped in it without harming others, whereas the clever ones use their cleverness to harm others. The brute ones are the farmers and gardeners who trapped themselves without harming others ... The merchants are the clever ones among the lesser men, and their disregard for humanity and harming others’ lives is to the utmost extent. Because their ethers and the barbarians’ ethers constantly attract each other, and their essence and that of the barbarians constantly get along with each other, the barbarians’ rise to power and the merchants’ rise in status are concomitant ...

To summarize, there are two fundamental forbidden lines in this world, but their essence is one. Of what does this one essence consist? The distinction between righteousness and interest ... Therefore, although all of them are humans, barbarians differ from the Chinese by their geographical difference, whereas the greater men from the lesser men by their kinds, and the forbidden lines between them cannot but be strictly maintained.  

According to this view, the Chinese and the ‘barbarians’ were of the same species but of different ethnicities (their ethnicities were due to the respective geographical ethers), while the greater persons and the lesser ones were of different kinds in spite of their sameness in ethnicity. Wang asserted that the ethnic character of the ‘barbarians’ was akin to the nature of the clever part of the lesser persons (i.e. the merchants), so the two got on well. He also proclaimed that the Chinese culture was intimately linked with the geographical ether of China’s geographical domain, and, consequently, was not suitable for the ‘barbarians’ to adopt or follow.  

With the theory of ethnic difference as the justification for the separation of the Chinese and ‘barbarians’, Wang asserted that to separate the Chinese from the ‘barbarians’ and to protect the former from being violated or confused by the latter was the primary raison d’être of the regime established by

52 Du Tong Jian Lun, p. 502-503. For another translation, see De Bary (1999, pp. 32-33).
53 Chang (2009b, pp. 315-316).
the Chinese. He urged every Chinese regime to do everything necessary to protect the Chinese from being ruled by the ‘barbarians’, including allowing itself to be usurped or overthrown by another Chinese regime:

Therefore, either one’s intelligence is no greater than looking after oneself, or one’s strength is great enough to conquer the world, whoever can protect one’s own kind deserves to be the latter’s ruler, and whoever can defend one’s own kind deserves to be the latter’s great lord. Therefore, the sage, by first granting all the clans their legitimate titles, showed his unrivaled prestige (as the sole ruler of the Chinese). He then protected this seat of prestige, rectified the disorders, and left this seat to his descendants or sages in later generations. This seat could be succeeded by abdications, inheritance, or revolutions, but must never be taken by the alien kinds.54

Measured by this principle, he condemned the rulers of those regimes in Chinese history, who, driven by the suspicion that the subjects might become too powerful and would eventually take the throne, adopted the policy of centralization of power which weakens the strength of the local districts, making the latter vulnerable when confronting the invasions of the ‘barbarians’. The prominent examples of such regimes were Qin and Song, which, in Wang’s opinion, had committed great crimes against the Chinese.55

In the Postscript of Book of Yellow, Wang presents a reinterpretation of the meanings of benevolence and righteousness, the core virtues of Confucianism. He argues that, against the traditional understanding of their meanings, these virtues must serve the interest of the ethnic polity for the sake of the latter’s preservation, rather than serve the universal human civilization without ethnocentric concern:

At the beginning, human beings relied on their rulers to unite them and establish institutions, so that the latter could set up boundaries for their own groups, keep themselves away from those who were hostile and harmful, and ward off the alien kinds. Therefore, benevolence means

54 Huan Shu, p. 503.
55 See McMorran’s translation (1968, pp. 197-198) of a famous passage from ‘On the Essence of the Pole’, Huan Shu, p. 504. The main theme of Chapter Two of Huan Shu, ‘Gu Yi 古儀 On the ancient model of institutions’, was criticism of the policy of centralization of power, with the Qin and Song dynasties as typical examples.
loving one’s own kind, and righteousness means setting up the rules and norms for one’s own kind to follow, so that the polity was well constructed and could support itself on its own strength. Both of the virtues have as their common aim the nurturing of the vital ether of the Chinese composed of descendants of Yellow Emperor. For the moment, if a people could not defend themselves, what is the point to advocate meanings of benevolence and righteousness other than the above ones?56

In a similar vein, Wang criticizes the ‘sagacious’ statesmen of East Jin (東晉, 317-420) who made a great effort to discourage the military leader Huan Wen’s 桓溫 plan of northern expedition to recover the Central Plain, worrying that if Huan succeeded, he would gain enough prestige to usurp the royal throne. According to Wang, they misunderstood the meaning of loyalty as being loyal to the sovereign, without realizing that loyalty should be devoted to preserving the integrity of one’s own ethnic polity:

Their primary concerns lies with ... preventing the possible usurpation of the seat of the Heaven’s Son, and the public opinions at that time all concurred with their concerns as self-evident. The opinions of the later time followed those of earlier times and thus expressed no disagreement. Alas! If they would have taken into account the fundamental forbidden line in this world, the fundamental distinction between humans and animals, and the great lineage descending from the ancient sage kings (of China), they would realize that if Huan Wen’s military success would eventually lead to his success in usurpation, this would still be preferable to allowing the alien kind be the ruler of the Central Plain (which crossed the forbidden line, blurred the demarcation, and terminated that lineage).57

Another novel as well as shocking idea proposed by Wang is that the crime of violating the political obligation of the subjects to their monarch is lesser than that of violating the political obligation of the Chinese to China. Therefore, if a regime established via usurpation has done well in defending the Chinese from being violated by the ‘barbarians’, it is more legitimate than those which failed to do so, despite the latter being established via less illegitimate ways. He thus praised the Song Dynasty established by Liu Yu as the dynasty which had the highest degree of orthodoxy during the period

56  Huan Shu, Postscript, p. 503.
57  Du Tongjian Lun, p. 487.
between Han and Tang, as Liu Song had done well in both attempting to
and succeeded in recovering parts of the Central Plain.58

Before Wang Fuzhi, the ethnocentric strand of Chinese ethnic thought
had developed for at least several hundred years.59 Wang’s major contri-
bution consisted in his stern assertion of a type of Confucianism with
prominent ethnocentric characters. In the very first few years of the
twentieth century, when Chinese nationalism was germinating while
Confucianism was still the commonly held intellectual orientation, it was
this kind of ethnocentric Confucianism which served revolutionaries like
Zhang Binlin as an ideological canon against the loyalist Confucianism
upheld by Kang Yuwei 康有為. With the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the
birth of the Chinese Republic which had been constantly hard-pressed and
eventually invaded by foreign powers, this ethnocentric Confucianism
developed into a nationalist Confucianism which replaced the culturalist
Confucianism as the mainstream Confucianism for most of the surviving
adherents of Confucianism. Thus viewed, Wang’s ethnic thought did play
a significant part in the formation of Chinese nationalism.

Wang’s view regarding the relation between religion and
ethnicity

If Confucianism was regarded, by some Confucians (Wang Fuzhi seems
to be one of them), as a type of religious alternative to God-worshipping
religions such as Buddhism or Daoism, this would raise an interesting ques-
tion about the relation between religion and ethnicity. Once we take into
account that Confucianism is conventionally regarded as the essence of
Chinese culture, and that the performers of Chinese culture were conven-
tionally regarded as Chinese regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, as well
as that Confucianism was regarded by some as an alternative religion, the
connection between Confucianism and Chinese ethnicity would be as that
between religion and ethnicity, provided that ‘being Chinese’ is regarded
as an ethnic identity.

What was Wang Fuzhi’s view on the connection between religion and
ethnicity in the above sense? One passage in his Du Tong jian lun deserves

58 ‘漢之後, 唐之前, 唯宋氏猶可以為中國主也 In the period after Han and before Tang, Liu
Song was, in comparison with other dynasties, the only dynasty that deserved to be the head
of the ethnic Zhongguo.(Du Tong Jian Lun, p. 549)
some attention. In this passage, Wang comments on the construction of culturally symbolic buildings by the ‘barbarian’ ruler Shile 石勒. In his comment, he mentions two concepts – ‘the lineage of reign’ (zhitong 治統) and ‘the lineage of Dao’ (daotong 道統), in which the former referred to the seat of the son of Heaven whereas the latter refers to Confucian teaching. According to Wang, both of the lineages were so important that they should not be appropriated illegitimately, and whoever do this eventually would be punished by Heaven. He then condemned the corrupted Confucians for selling the lineage of Dao to the barbarians and bandits by suggesting such illegitimate rulers to adopt the Confucian teaching. Once they performed some symbolic practices (e.g. construction of symbolic buildings, such as Mingtang 明堂) which were closely related to Confucian tradition, they were eulogized as sage kings by those corrupted Confucians, who then were rewarded by those rulers. Nevertheless, Wang argues that such symbolic buildings and rituals were not essential to the lineage of Dao, which explains why the aforementioned illegitimate rulers could easily steal them and were willing to do so. As for its essence, this could not be stolen, as it consisted in distinguishing ethical relations, educating people, ruling people benevolently, placing virtue above all other concerns, learning how to improve one’s reverent attention constantly, etc. Since these teachings were all about self-discipline and cultivation, they, according to Wang, could not possibly be welcomed by the illegitimate rulers and were unlikely to be adopted by them, thus they could not be stolen by them.

What Wang says in the above comment could be interpreted as dealing with the issue of the relation between religion and ethnicity. The core of this issue lies in this question: if the barbarians were Confucianized (religion), does that mean they were already sinicized, and thus should be regarded as Chinese (ethnicity)?

Wang’s answer to this question might be more ambiguous than his confident tone let on. If the barbarians were merely Confucianized at the formal level, it is relatively easy to judge that they were not truly Confucianized, and therefore not truly sinicized. But, what if they were Confucianized at the essential level? Would they be consequently judged as indisputably sinicized? According to Wang’s view expressed in the above comment, he could not but concur, which would, however, contradict with his ethnocentrism. It seems that, to maintain a consistent ethnocentrism, Wang would have to claim that religion does not grant ethnicity, only other elements do, and the geographical ether seems to be the foremost among them. This interesting
example indicates that, if in Europe from the Westphalian Treaty onwards, religion determines nationality, in Wang Fuzhi’s thought, religion does not determine ethnicity (understood as proto-nationality). Moreover, if Wang’s view of the distinction between the formal and essential levels of Confucianism was applied to contemporary China, one might say that the so-called revival of Confucianism in mainland China might be merely in the formal sense.

The similarity and difference between Wang’s ethnic thought and early twentieth-century Chinese nationalism

Despite that Wang’s ethnocentric thought has been widely seen as the forerunner of Chinese nationalism, little research has endeavored to fathom either its qualification as ‘nationalism’ or its relations to Chinese nationalism as it emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. This is understandably so, since both questions are not easy to answer. Here I will try to tackle both of these questions in a very rudimentary way.

It has been commonly recognized that nationalism as a concept is notoriously difficult to define. One of the causes of this difficulty, it seems to me, might be that it is a term people use to refer not to a single thing but a wide variety of phenomena. Each definition of nationalism refers to some of the phenomena and leaves more out, while any attempt at proposing a broad enough definition would be too broad to define anything.

To give the title of this section meaning without going astray in order to find an ideal definition of nationalism, I shall compare Wang’s ethnocentric thought to a historical phenomenon that took place at the turn of the twentieth century and which has been generally described as Chinese nationalism. The salient features of this phenomenon include: the apprehension that the Chinese state would become colonies of foreign countries, the fear of extinction in the Darwinist sense of natural selection among countries and races, the consensus that to change the political order of the Chinese state from an imperial organization to a national one was the primary way out of the endangered situation.

Compared to Chinese nationalism, Wang’s ethnocentric thought shares some of the former’s features. In the latter, there is also the fear of being

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61 I would like to thank Professor Lennert Gesterkamp for raising the question of the relation of religion and nationality.
62 See the fourth and fifth sections of Professor Bart Dessein’s article in this volume.
conquered by the ‘barbarians’, and of the fall of civilization as its consequence. The conquest of the Chinese state by aliens was of their gravest concern, as was the possible extinction of the ethnic Chinese. Nevertheless, Wang did not seek to change the imperial order of the state, while the nationalists did. He utterly rejected the possibility of people ruling themselves without a monarchial sovereign leading them. Accordingly, if both Wang and the late-Qing nationalists had ethnic self-government as their primary concern, they were different at least in one point: the former understood ethnic self-government as ‘China ruled by an emperor who is Chinese’, whereas the latter as ‘China ruled not only in the name of but by the Chinese nationals’. With respect to the idea of popular sovereignty, Wang’s ethnocentric thought is in direct opposition to the Chinese nationalists. This is one of the reasons why Cheng-tian Kuo questioned the claim that Wang’s ethnocentric ideas are the origin of Chinese nationalism.

To illustrate the aforementioned difference, some reference to the way Liang Qichao (1873-1929) introduced the conception of ‘nation’ to his fellow Chinese at the eve of the twentieth century might be helpful. The difference may be summarized as follows: China was imagined by Wang as an ethnic imperial state, whereas by Liang as a popular nation, with ethnic Han as its core component but civic in its nature.

In an essay On the General Picture of Competition among the Nations and the future of China (Lun jin shi guomin jin zheng zhi da shi ji zhongguo qian tu 論近世國民競爭之大勢及中國前途), Liang argued that the Chinese in the past had been familiar with the term guojia 國家 (the polity) for a long time, while completely ignorant of the concept of guomin 國民 (nation). The difference between the two, according to Liang, was that with guojia, the state was considered as the private property of the royal house, whereas with guomin the state was understood as the public goods of the people (remin 人民).

63 Du Tong Jian Lun, p. 1048.
64 Townsend pointed out a salient feature of modern nationalism: that all the subjects of the state were citizens, ‘holding formally equal rights and obligations within it’ (1996, p. 24). The essential link of nationalism to the idea of popular sovereignty was noted by Hobsbawn (1990, p. 18-19). The first anti-Manchu revolutionary propaganda journal Guo Min Bao 國民報 (founded in 1901 in Tokyo) had as its English: ‘The Chinese National’.
65 Kuo (2014, pp. 174-175). It should be noted that such a claim was cautiously avoided in Chang (2009b).
66 I would like to thank one of the reviewers of this chapter for raising the question of ‘popular sovereignty’ as a way to examine the difference of Wang’s ethnocentric thought from Chinese nationalism.
67 Liang (1899, p. 309).
The difference in conceptions about the nature of the state, Liang argued, led to the difference in political outcomes. In *guojia*, members of the people or the subjects did not identify with the state (since it was someone else’s private property), thus the strength of the state lay merely in its ruling house. In contrast, members of the people or the subjects in *guomin* strongly identified with the state (since it was their own property), and the strength of the people formed the strength of the state. Since the Darwinist competition between China and other countries in his day was that between *guojia* and *guomin*, Liang warned anxiously that China as a *guojia* was doomed to be overwhelmed by other *guomin*.68

Liang’s distinction between *guojia* and *guomin* was later rephrased, with a somewhat confusing use of terms, as that between *guojia* (i.e. *guomin*) and *tianxia* (all under heaven), *chaotin* (dynastic regime), respectively. In his 1900 essay *On the Causes of China’s Perennial Weakness* (*zhongguo ji ro su yuan lun* 中國積弱溯源論), Liang argued that the primary cause of China’s current problems was the lack of idea of *guojia* (i.e. *guomin*), which had resulted in the erroneous attitude in foreign affairs, the mistaken devotion of political loyalty to the dynastic regime rather than to China as a nation (*guojia*, i.e. *guomin*), and the non-existence of an essential identification of the people (in this essay, Liang confusingly called them *guomin*) with the state.69

In Liang’s 1901 essay *On the Change of the Idea of Nation and the Similarity and Difference among them* (*Guojia si xiang bian qian yi tung lun* 國家思想變遷異同論), he continued to uphold the *guojia-guomin* opposition proposed in 1899, but restated it as that between the ‘complete state’ (*wan quan guojia* 完全國家, i.e. *guomin* in his 1899 essay) and incomplete state, respectively.70 Classified under the category of the incomplete state were states formed according to the principles of patriarchy, chieftainship, and imperial rule. This category stood for the initial stage of evolution in political organizations, and was followed by the stage marked by the category of ‘complete state’. Included in this latter category were states characterized by the principles of nationalism (*minzu zhuyi* 民族主義) and national imperialism (*minzu diguo zhuyi* 民族帝國主義). The next stage which superseded the stage of complete state would be the one characterized by cosmopolitanism (*wanguo datong zhuyi* 萬國大同主義).71

68 Liang (1899, p. 311).
69 Liang (1900, pp. 413-414).
70 Liang (1901, p. 26).
71 Liang (1901, p. 30).
If, instead of being preoccupied by Liang’s confusing use of terms like *goujia* and *guomin*, one focused on the idea he endeavored to articulate behind these terms, one might conclude that the conception he eagerly advocated was to reimagine China as a ‘nation’ which would consider the Chinese state as their own property. For Liang, the key to realizing such a state was democracy, the political institution characterized, according to Liang’s depiction, by people’s rights and power (*minquan* 民權).72

It is noteworthy that in Liang’s discourse about *guomin* (nation) and *minzu zhuyi* (nationalism), the former was viewed by him as the foundation of the latter:

> Since *guojia* (i.e. the complete state – CS) is built by the contract of consent of the people, the people should be entitled to unlimited power, and the government cannot but obey the will of the people. This is the driving force of *min zu zhu yi*.73

Such a view might explain why Liang oddly summarized, in a misleading if not twisted way, the core idea of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* as the principle of national unity and independence:

> A *guomin* (i.e. nation) which by their own will wishes to live under the same law must not be under a foreigner’s jurisdiction. Moreover, this nation, either in whole or in part, must not be ceded to foreign countries, since *guomin* is independent and indivisible.74

In other words, the idea of nation proposed by Liang as the model image for a new Chinese state was characterized by its civic nature.

In contrast to the civic concept of *guomin*, Liang discussed the concept of *minzu* 民族, presenting the latter as an ethnic concept. In his 1903 essay *Teachings of the Master Political Scientist Bluntschli* (Zheng zhi xue Dajia Bo lun zhi li zhi Xueshuo 政治學大家伯倫知理之學說), he emphatically maintained the distinction between the concept of *guomin* and that of

72 The term *‘minquan’* had already appeared in Liang’s 1899 essay ‘On Patriotism’ (*aiguo* lún 爱國論), in which he made the following contentions: ‘What is guo? The conglomeration of people. What is the governance of guo? The people govern their own affairs. What is patriotism? The people love themselves. Therefore, the rise of minquan (people’s rights and power) would be followed by the establishment of *guoquan* 國權, (the state’s rights and power). Accordingly, any discussion of patriotism must start from promoting people’s rights and power’ (1899a, p. 273).
73 Liang (1901, pp. 30-31).
74 Liang (1901, p. 31).
minzu. Referring to Bluntschli’s definitions, Liang claimed that guomin was both a political personality and a legal corporate, whereas minzu was a people with common territory, blood, physical appearance, spoken and written language, religion, customs, and economy. In his vision of a future Chinese state, it was guomin (or guojia as its equivalent) rather than minzu which served as her model image. By imagining China as guomin, Liang pleaded with ‘great nationalism’ (da minzu zhuyi 大民族主義; uniting several minzu within a state into one guomin) and dismissed ‘small nationalism’ (xiao minzu zhuyi 小民族主義; opposing one minzu against another minzu within a state).

The lineage as well as legacies of Wang’s ethnic thought for modern China seem to have remained an under-researched topic. In the historical context of the political separation of Manchu from the ethnic Han imposed by the Qing government, Wang’s ethnocentrism seems to serve the ethnic Han revolutionaries well in fanning the hatred among the ethnic Han against the Manchu, as the ethnic Chinese in Wang’s discourse were automatically understood as ethnic Han and the ‘barbarians’ the Manchu in the Qing context. In an essay Clarifying the Meaning of Hatred against the Manchu (zhen cho man lun 正仇滿論) published in 1901 (probably the first public utterance of anti-Manchuism in the late Qing period), Zhang Binlin made a direct rebuttal against Liang’s On the Causes of China’s Perennial Weakness, in which, as mentioned above, Liang attributed the primary cause of China’s current problems to the lack of an idea of ‘nation’. It is interesting to note that, instead of discrediting Liang’s argument with a frontal attack, Zhang quietly left it unchallenged and adopted a strategy of spinning it around: making an alternative claim to account for the lack of identification of the Chinese subjects with the state. According to Zhang, this lack was due to the state of the ethnic Han being ruled by aliens. Upon close examination, this claim does not succeed in discrediting Liang’s, as Liang argues that the people could not identify themselves with a state which was not their own property, and this lack of identification was found in Chinese history not only in the periods of alien rule, but also in the periods of ethnic Chinese rule. In this debate, if Liang had the Western idea of nation as his theoretical source, Zhang seemed to rely on nothing but an ethnocentrism with Wang Fuzhi as its most recent source.

75 Liang (1903, p. 1068).
76 Liang (1903, pp. 1067, 1069).
77 Liang (1903, pp. 1069-1070). On this issue, see the second section of Professor Julia Schneider’s article in this volume.
History shows that it was Zhang’s ethnocentric appeal that eventually triumphed over Liang’s discourse of nation among the revolutionaries, which seemed to give Wang Fuzhi’s ethnic thought the upper hand in the solution of the Alien Rule Question. Nevertheless, history also shows that the same ethnic thought was considered unfit for an ethnic Han state established by the 1911 Revolution. From the Republican period onwards, Wang’s theory of geographical ether and the demand of ethnic self-rule as its corollary were quietly ignored, as it would make the Chinese government’s sovereignty or territorial claims over Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, Taiwan, and the South China Sea unfounded (not to mention his proclamation that Vietnam shares the same geographical ether with geographical China, and thus should be annexed by China).

The immediate impact caused by Wang’s ethnic thought after its diffusion in the mid-nineteenth century remains another under-researched topic. To end this chapter, I shall deal with one aspect of this topic in a very brief way.

In 1842, Wang’s *Huan Shu* was already listed among his known works, and *Du Tong Jian Lun* was already in limited circulation in 1858. Both works were prominent in delivering Wang’s urge for an ethnic self-government. After the publication of Wang’s major works in 1865 by Zeng Guochuan 曾國荃 (金陵節署本 Jin Lin high Commission edition), *Huan Shu* and *Du Tong Jian Lun* became accessible to a wider public.

It is noteworthy that, from 1865 to 1895, the ethnocentric hostility against barbarian rule and the strong urge for ethnic self-government expressed in these two works seemed to arouse little resonance in their literati readers and little concern in the Manchu government. A diary entry in 1867 by Zhoa Liewen 趙烈文 summarized the main theme of *Huan Shu* with comments which showed an understanding but no agreement.

In 1876, Guo Songtau 郭嵩燾 asked the government to grant Wang a ritual position of “subordinate worship” (*congsi* 從祀) in the Confucian temple. The reason upheld by Guo was that Wang was distinguished in his Classics studies, Li shue 理學 and virtues. The suggestion was turned down by the Ministry of Rites, not because of Wang’s hostility against the barbarians (including Manchu) but, to Guo’s surprise and disappointment, because of his Hunan country fellow Li Huan 李桓, who maintained that Wang was underqualified and disapproved such an honor. In 1895, another similar

78 Deng (1842); *Chuan Shan Quan Shu* 16, p. 613.
79 *Chuan Shan Quan Shu* 16, p. 619.
80 *Chuan Shan Quen Shu* 16, p. 582, 603.
attempt was made by Kong Xianglin 孔祥霖.81 In his memorial, Kong praised Wang’s Du Tong Jian Lun for the following merits:

As for his discourses on political history, they contained insights and knowledge on affairs from antiquity to the recent times. In these discourses, he analyzed the causes of success and decline, good governance and corruptions of polities. Apart from that, he also emphasized the supremacy of kingship and the importance of expulsing the ‘barbarians’, and condemned the factional politics. His opinions were so profound and incisive that they made readers of them thrilled and take them as reminders. Thus they could be regarded as valuable teachings for endless generations. That was why during the periods of Xianfeng and Tungzhi, half of the military leaders who ended the Taiping Rebellion were literati from Hunan,82 which must be largely attributed to the teachings of Wang’s posthumous works ... The Hunanese earnestly followed the teachings from his works, so most of them were well-informed in the art of warfare and capable of military affairs, which eventually led to their success in ending the great disaster of the Taiping Rebellion ... Thus judged, Wang was indeed a senior loyalist of the Ming Dynasty, but he was also a contributive subject to our dynasty.83

Kong’s eulogy of Wang is noteworthy in at least three aspects. First, it raises questions regarding to what extent and in what way the leaders of the Hunanese army were influenced by Wang’s Du Tong JianLun. As mentioned above, Zeng Guochuan’s consultant Zhoa Leiwen had already read this work in 1858, and Zeng Guofang 曾國藩 might have received a copy of the work in 1861.84 According to Zeng Guofang’s diary, he seems to start reading Du Tong Jian Lun in 1862 for two months, and did not resume reading it until 1866, after the Taiping Rebellion had been ended in 1864.85

It is well known that the Taiping Rebellion made an ethnocentric appeal to the Chinese against the ‘Manchu barbarian monsters’ in 1852, and the ethnocentric ideas contained in it, despite being similar to those of Wang Fuzhi, more likely may have come from the influence of Tiandi Association

81 He (1996, p. 82).
82 Hunan was Wang’s home province.
83 Chuan Shan Quan shu 16, p. 686.
84 Zeng Guofang 曾國藩 started his campaign against the Taiping Rebellion in 1854, see Guo Tingyi (1969, p. 113); Chuan Shan Quan shu 16, p. 579.
85 Chuan shan quan shu 16, pp. 564-569.
However, there seems to be no evidence indicating that Wang’s ethnocentrism made any visible impact on either Zhao Liewen or Zeng Guofang from 1858 to 1862.

Second, if Taiping Rebellion’s ethnocentric appeal was similar to that of Wang Fuzhi, Zeng Guofang’s effort in crushing it was utterly contrary to Wang’s ethnocentric urge. Taking this into account, Kong’s eulogy appeared to be hilariously ironical in attributing the Zeng brothers’ success in suppressing an anti-Manchu regime to Wang’s teachings on the one hand, and calling Wang ‘a contributive subject’ to the Manchu regime on the other.

Third, the fact that Kong, in his memorial submitted to the Manchu emperor, dared to list Wang’s emphasis on the expulsion of the ‘barbarians’ among the valuable parts of his discourses seems rather curious. What was equally curious was that his memorial seems not to have been reprimanded by the court, despite his suggestion being turned down. These facts strongly suggest that Wang’s ethnocentric statements might have been received with little concern by the Chinese literati and the Manchu ruler, at least before 1895. How his ethnocentric thought was used to facilitate the revolutionary propaganda in the first few years of the twentieth century will be the subject of a more extensive research.

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87 He (1996, p. 83). Qin (2008, p. 86) claimed that it was turned down by the Minister of Rites Li Hongzao 李鴻藻 and other officials, but no relevant record could be found in the source she quoted.


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