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**THE NATIONLESS STATE:
THE SEARCH FOR A NATION IN MODERN
CHINESE NATIONALISM**

John Fitzgerald

These people are so shameless and so quick of hand that at any time they can proclaim themselves *representatives* of some group or other. Louis XIV said 'We are the State', they say 'We are the Nation'.

Liang Qichao, May Day, 1925¹

The history of modern China, in the round, is recounted as a struggle for national reunification and liberation traced through the rise and fall of successive state formations in the imperial, early Republican (1912-27), Nationalist (1928-49) and Communist periods. What lends continuity to this history from one regime to the next is the motif of a unitary state reconstituting itself from the rubble of a disintegrating empire. Continuity derives as well from an implicit identification of the unitary state with the nation on whose behalf the state is presumed to act: the ideal of the unitary state is linked with the idea of a national people firstly in the story of their common struggle and secondly in the assumption that the one, the state, 'represents' the other, the nation. The nation is presumed to be as continuous as the hoary ideal of the unitary state itself despite the relatively recent vintage of the concept of the nation in China, despite the equally recent genesis of the idea that the state should represent anything at all, and despite the

¹ *Wuchan jieji yu wuye jieji* [The Property-less Class and the Unemployed Class], in Li Xinghua (ed.), *Liang Qichao xuanji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1984), p.853. Emphasis added.

extraordinarily abrupt and violent moments of transition from one state formation to the next.

Certainly, the disjuncture between state formations is consistent with a sequential history of the regeneration of the state. Particular regimes may come and go, but China is still China. The assertion of *national* continuity, however, rests uneasily alongside the distinctive and often competing definitions of the nation which have been put forward by each state-building movement in its turn. Can the composition of the Chinese people change from one era to the next and the Chinese nation still be counted the same nation? Put simply, each of the major state movements of the past century has advocated a distinctive and mutually exclusive definition of the national self: Confucian reformers associated the collective self with a distinctive civilization, liberal republicans conceived of the nation as a body of citizens, Nationalist (Kuomintang) revolutionaries thought of a Chinese race, and China's Marxist-Leninists have qualified citizen and race by reference to social class. The uneasy fit between the asserted continuity of the unitary state and these sharp discontinuities in the definition of the nation raises the question I wish to pursue here. Who or what was the nation to which constitutional reformers, republican revolutionaries, May Fourth activists and the theorists of the Nationalist and Communist parties all referred when they resolved to 'save the country' (*jiuguo*)? By what procedures was it defined? Most particularly, was it ever more than a floating referent of the state, which signified the nation by 'representing' it?

I propose to explore the relationship between state and nation in the Chinese revolution by introducing recent theoretical writings on post-colonial nationalism, drawing comparisons with other nation-building movements and isolating a number of common elements among the discontinuities in national self-representation in the Chinese case — chiefly the ideal of the unitary state, the political struggle to give it particular form and associated attempts to reconfigure the nation on the part of the successive state formations that have sought to represent the nation to itself and to the world. My purpose is not to establish the continuity of nationalist thought itself, which is properly the task of nationalist histories, but to focus on its disjunctures, and to suggest that the appearance of a continuous history derives less from the preservation of a Chinese nation than from the ideal of the unitary state which transcends all state formations and is made identical with the idea of China itself. The state which *is* China has, I believe, no given nation. Instead the Chinese nation has been created and recreated in the struggle for state power, and it has ultimately been defined by the state as a reward of victory. The state's search for a nation need not imply that there was no nation out there, so to speak, waiting to be found. It means only that the people encountered by state-building movements did not quite match up to the kind of nation the revolutionaries were looking for to help build their sovereign and unified state.

The Nationless State

The phrase I have chosen to denote the problem, 'nationless state', requires some elaboration. The more familiar term, 'stateless nation', is grounded in an assumption that nations are out there in the world striving to realize their destiny as nation-states, even if only a small proportion ever succeed in crystallizing around states. Ernest Gellner estimates that for every nation which has established its own state there are perhaps nine whose aspirations to statehood remain (and will remain) unrealized.² The emphasis on the objective existence of the nation implied by the term stateless nation is nevertheless compromised by its general usage. In common parlance, a nation which cannot boast a state barely merits recognition at all unless its aspirations for statehood happen to threaten the stability of its parent state or to complicate relations among its neighbours. It is under these circumstances that the term generally makes its appearance; that is, when a self-defined nation fights for its independence and sovereignty and places a stable international system under threat.

The term employed here, nationless state, suggests something else again. In the first place, it focuses attention on the state in an analysis of the historical development of nationalism, and implies that the nation is an essentially-contested concept in a political discourse concerned with the assertion of state unity, sovereignty and independence within the international state system.³ In the case of China, as Prasenjit Duara has pointed out, state-building has proven quite inseparable from nation-building.⁴ The term nationless state implies an additional measure of scepticism about the existence of a Chinese nation outside the state framework. It asks us to stand at a critical distance from the state's own presumption that the nation it represents is an autonomous entity which could conceivably exist in the forms in which the state has chosen to represent it but *independently of the state*. By nationless state, in other words, I am referring to the historical development of a state or proto-state formation which operates in the name of an indeterminate nation that the state itself identifies and summons into being.

In the Chinese revolution, the state was not just midwife at the birth of the nation but in fact its sire. So the founder of the Nationalist Party, Sun Yat-sen, is appropriately remembered as the 'father of the country' (*guofu*). The state not only delivered the nation into the world but determined what form it should take, and nationality (or ethnicity) was only one of the factors which state-builders took into consideration. In fact, the state set out to create a

² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p.45.

³ I use the terms 'essentially-contested concept' and 'discourse' in the senses elaborated by William Connolly in *The Terms of Political Discourse*, second edition (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983).

⁴ Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp.2-4.

nation after its own likeness and selected only those national attributes (ethnic, geographic, cultural and social) which happened to suit the attainment and retention of state unity, sovereignty and independence in a world of nation-states. Inclusion on equal terms in this international system was the final measure of the attainment of nationhood, and hence the nation assumed forms suited to the achievement of statehood. The nation was, in other words, a desideratum of state-building, its forms determined by nothing so much as the need for the state to represent something other than itself. It took shape as a correlative of the state, gradually and incrementally, and mirrored the shape of the particular state formation which acted to represent it. In employing the term 'nationless state', I wish in the first instance to draw attention to this process of representation, or nation-defining, in state-building, and to invite closer inspection of this process.

But my aim is not simply to describe a process. A second purpose is to relocate arguments about nationalism and Marxism in anti-imperialist movements, and more particularly in the Chinese revolution, outside of orthodox Marxist and anti-Marxist frameworks of analysis. As we follow the search by the post-colonial state for a nation it can call its own, we find that one of the many ways in which the state conceives of its national constituency is in terms of social class. At this point state-builders come into contact with Marxism and have to deal with it. I shall propose an alternative method of analysing this contact between the newly emergent state-formation and Marxism, centred on the idea of the class-nation.

Nationalism, Socialism and National Liberation in Comparative Perspective

National and social revolutionaries both seek 'to assert and make good their claims to state sovereignty'.⁵ Since sovereign states are, by their nature, nation-states, the claim to state sovereignty may be said to make nationalists of national and social revolutionaries alike. What is more, the revolutionary who struggles for state sovereignty in the name of a nation allegedly under threat generally assumes that the struggle to liberate the state is *identical with* the salvation of the nation. What then distinguishes the social from the national revolutionary in national-liberation struggles is neither the arena in which the struggle takes place nor the trophy for which they compete. The arena is inevitably a national one and the prize is state power. Rather, what distinguishes the one from the other is the identity of the national self which each state formation seeks to represent in asserting its sovereignty.

⁵ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.164.

Identifying this national self is one of the functions of nationalist thought.⁶ Nationalist thought, although nothing if not particular, generally develops along fairly predictable lines and the terms in which nationals identify and celebrate their singularity have a banal familiarity about them. Americans sing of their fruited plains, Australians sing of their sweeping ones. Much the same applies to the development of nationalist thought among colonial elites, although in this case nationalism is channelled into fixed and related problematics by the elite's confrontation with imperialism. Anti-colonial nationalism has been described as a 'derivative discourse' of Orientalism, drawing closely upon the style of thought in which the dominant imperial powers characterize their 'oriental' subjects. But, notes Partha Chatterjee,

the problematic in nationalist thought is exactly the reverse of that of Orientalism. That is to say, the 'object' in nationalist thought is still the Oriental, who retains the essentialist character depicted in Orientalist discourse. Only he is not passive, non-participating. He is seen to possess a 'subjectivity' which he himself can 'make'.⁷

In anti-colonial nationalism, men and women of colonized societies assume an active role in deciding their own fate, but within an essentialist style of thought that is appropriated from their colonial oppressors.

Nationalist thought develops in association with the struggle for state power among nationalist elites and between nationalists and the colonial powers. Chatterjee identifies a number of stages in this progression, or what he calls 'programmatically phases . . . [each] marked by innovations in political objectives, in strategy and tactics, in selecting the types of issues on which to focus its ideological sights and concentrate is polemical attack'. The term 'programmatically phases' assumes a goal toward which each stage is moving, or at least a line along which evolution is taking place.⁸ The goal of nationalist thought is the creation of a sovereign national subject which parallels the struggle for sovereign state power taking place in the political field.

Chatterjee himself offers one model of such evolution based on his reading of Gramsci and Indian history. The first phase of nationalist thought seeks to combine the 'superior material qualities of Western cultures with the [presumed] spiritual qualities of the East'. Nationalist thought starts out as a defence of a so-called national tradition which is thought to be under threat from the imperialist powers and their colonial state, and yet the defence of this 'tradition' is caught in a paradox between alternating impulses to destroy and to preserve the traditional. Nationalist thought is characteristically self-contradictory. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted of India, the impulse to

⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.38.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.42-3.

distinguish between the 'national' culture and that of the West 'is combined with an aspiration to modernity that can be defined only in terms of the post-Enlightenment rationalism of European culture'. As a result of these contradictory impulses, it is felt at each phase of the development of nationalist thought that if imitation goes too far the identity of the nation will be surrendered. By way of coping with this contradiction, nationalist thought attempts to define, once and for all, an ultimate self-referent which is beyond dispute; that is, it feels compelled to draw a line in defining the nation beyond which any concession is tantamount to treason against the 'nation'.⁹ The only constant in this process is the attempt to draw a line, not the actual placement of it: the line which defines the boundary of the nation moves slowly but surely, from one phase to the next, along a course charted through nationalist debate but propelled by concern for asserting state sovereignty and independence. The line moves further in the direction of the state in Chatterjee's account of subsequent stages of nationalist thought. The second phase, well illustrated in the career of Gandhi, attempts to mobilize people in the cause of an anti-colonial struggle while distancing them from the structures of the state. The third phase is concerned above all with 'the rational organization of power', exemplified in Nehru's equation of nation, people and state, in particular his overriding concern to relate all other social and economic issues to the political goal of creating a sovereign state.¹⁰

The parallel between each of Chatterjee's phases and the development of modern Chinese nationalism is striking, despite significant differences in the character of the state in India and China. The first of Chatterjee's phases recalls the 'culturalism' of nineteenth-century Chinese reformers, which is customarily distinguished from nationalism in Western historiography. Indeed, we generally presume later developments in nationalist thought — specifically the twentieth-century identification of the nation as the race or the whole people — to be the definitive form of nationalism. But if we consider nationalist thought more broadly as a series of evolving problematics within a single discourse, in the manner of Chatterjee, then nineteenth-century culturalism may be reclaimed as a phase of modern nationalism. Even culturalism is profoundly concerned with the preservation of the nation, the difference lying in the conception of the nation it seeks to preserve. More to my present purpose, this perspective also frees us from assuming that the nation as 'race' is the unique or final form of nationalism beyond which nationalist thought cannot proceed without turning into something else again — something we might perhaps mistake for socialism.

The second of Chatterjee's phases, associated with Gandhi's mobilization of popular resources outside state structures, seems to have had no parallel in

⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Towards a Discourse on Nationalism', *Economic and Political Weekly* (Delhi), 11 July 1987, p.1137. I am indebted to Chakrabarty for the metaphor of the 'moving line'.

¹⁰ Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, p.51.

China. Mass resistance would have waited in vain for a stable colonial state in Beijing.¹¹ In any event China had no Gandhi. The third phase, nationalism's 'moment of arrival' under Nehru, has much in common with the nationalism of the Chinese Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang. Cultural tradition still plays a part in identifying the nation in this phase but a part subordinated to the idea of a national 'people'. Nehru recalled in his book, *The Discovery of India* (1945), that when he toured the countryside he would frequently be greeted by cries of 'Victory to Mother India', and would turn and ask the crowd 'who [is] this Bharat Mata, Mother India, whose victory they wanted? My question would amuse them and surprise them'. The people were understandably puzzled, not about the object but about the subject of their quest for national emancipation. Who or what was India? Nehru would then set them at ease, pointing out that 'what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over this vast land. Bharat Mata, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people'.¹² The tone of Nehru's lectures would have been familiar to any audience in China exposed to the uplifting speeches of Sun Yat-sen and members of his Nationalist Party. Nehru and Sun Yat-sen both tried to teach the people that they made up the nation and that, for all their differences, the nation made them one. In the meanwhile, the Congress Party of India and the Nationalist Party of China offered the only concrete evidence of the existence of a single people in India and China. Before the people had come to a realization of their unity as a nation, each of the parties would substitute for the nation by representing it as a unified state.

While there were certainly close parallels between Nehru's pedagogical nationalism and the nationalism of the Chinese Nationalist Party, the Nationalist Party phase did not mark nationalism's 'moment of arrival' in China as it did in India. Nationalist thought could not settle comfortably into a sense of national self bounded by culture or people in China because events gave it little cause for complacency. The early Republican government showed scant inclination to represent the mythical people and, more to the point, even less capacity to assert national sovereignty. And unlike India, where the nationalist movement had essentially one foreign state to contend with, Chinese nationalists confronted a dozen powers exercising varying degrees of influence on Chinese soil. Their authority was not always

¹¹ Perhaps the nearest equivalent to this phase in China was the anarchist movement. See Arif Dirlik's three recent works, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991) and, with Ming K. Chan, *Schools into Fields and Factories: Anarchists, the Guomindang, and the National Labor University in Shanghai, 1927-1932* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

¹² Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*. First published 1945 (New York: Anchor, 1960), p.29. See also Sanjay Seth, 'Identity and "History": Nehru's Search for India', *Thesis Eleven*, no.32 (1992), pp.37-54.

formalised in treaties, and their influence reached far beyond the isolated concessions and leased territories which presented relatively easy targets for nationalist attack. The diffusion and formal insubstantiality of the foreign presence in China, relative to India, made imperialism more difficult to conceptualize and much harder to sell as the target for a popular movement. The enemy of the nation was not the English, nor the Japanese or the Americans, but 'imperialism'.

China, what is more, enjoyed nominal sovereignty throughout the Republic and, with the exception of the foreign concessions, was under the rule of native administrations. In appearance and in fact, Chinese were ruling Chinese. Indian nationalism could achieve its objective of state independence and sovereignty by the seizure of state power — setting up an Indian national state in place of an effective colonial one — but in China the lack of an effective native state and the persistence of foreign intervention in domestic affairs left nationalists with the task of creating an entirely new kind of state. This state-building project made China a far more volatile setting than India for the introduction of class into nationalist thought. Once conceived in terms of class, the multi-layered linkages between domestic and foreign political, social and economic interests could become targets of class struggle conceived in the language of state nationalism. Such a prospect is not anticipated in Chatterjee's account of the Indian case.

Abdullah Laroui deals with class and nation more explicitly in his work on intellectual elites in the Islamic world. Like Chatterjee, Laroui classifies the development of nationalist thought into phases, or evolving problematics, but he finds a definitive place for class in the most highly developed form of nationalism. Laroui neglects mention of the second of Chatterjee's phases, which may be peculiar to India (or to Gandhi), but adds a further third phase which he terms 'class nationalism'.

Where, in confrontation with Europe, the fundamentalist opposed a culture (Chinese, Indian, Islamic) and the liberal opposed a nation (Chinese, Turkish, Egyptian, Iranian), the revolutionary opposes a class — one that is often extended to include all that part of the human race exploited by the European bourgeoisie. One may refer to it as class nationalism that nevertheless retains many of the motifs of political and cultural nationalisms; hence the difficulties experienced by many of the analysts who have attempted to define it.¹³

¹³ Abdullah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp.121-2. I am grateful to Brenda Sansom for bringing this work to my attention. See Brenda Sansom, 'Minsheng and National Liberation: Socialist Theory in the Guomindang', PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1988. See also Arif Dirlik, *Culture, Society and Revolution: A Critical Discussion of American Studies of Modern Chinese Thought* (Durham: Asian/Pacific Studies Institute, 1985). It is important to distinguish here between Laroui's 'class nationalism' and the term 'class nation' as sometimes used to describe the isomorphism between ethnicity and social

In so far as Nehru and Sun Yat-sen set 'the people as nation' in opposition to the West, they may loosely be classed among Laroui's liberals. Similarly, early Indian and Chinese Marxists who counterposed a 'national class' to European imperialism may be considered among Laroui's class 'revolutionaries'. Nation and class are by no means identical concepts, but Asian Marxists imagined them as co-extensive in fact: the Indian, the Indonesian and the Chinese peoples were national proletariats within a world system governed by the European bourgeoisie.¹⁴ This is, however, a deceptive example which illustrates no more than the point of transition between liberal and class nationalism. Elementary ideas of class and class interest also featured in Laroui's liberal nationalism and in Chatterjee's state nationalism. Nehru himself made the uncompromising observation that 'economic interests shape the political views of groups and classes. Neither reason nor moral considerations override those interests'.¹⁵ In the Chinese revolution even Communists have been reluctant to make such ambitious claims for class interest or have at least tried to make allowance for reasoned persuasion among the 'wavering' classes. In the course of its development, however, Chinese nationalism reached and exhausted Laroui's final phase of class nationalism because it articulated class differences within society in pursuit of the goals of the nation state. Chinese Marxists did not stop at defining the national people as an underprivileged class in a world capitalist system. They went on to divide their own society into revolutionary and counter-revolutionary classes, and to identify the nation exclusively with classes whose interests appeared consistent with achieving the state goals of unity and independence. The nationalist movement targeted a colonial state in India, but in China it inspired a civil war. The state, in this case, uncovered a very different kind of nation from any that had come before in the post-colonial repertoire.

Even here an Indian Marxist, M. N. Roy, anticipated later developments in China. Reflecting with some irony on the much-proclaimed spiritual essence of India, Roy wrote that the 'peculiarity' of India 'does not lie in the spiritual character of its people *but in the reactionary character of its bourgeoisie*'. Why was the bourgeoisie reactionary? Not on account of its resistance to proletarian socialist revolution but because its material interests rendered it, in Roy's words, 'historically incapable of . . . lead[ing] the

class in particular historical communities. The Hungarian gentry and German traders of the Habsburg empire are termed 'class nations', in this different sense, in A. J. P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1809-1918* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948).

¹⁴ Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967).

¹⁵ Cited in Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, p.140.

nationalist movement'.¹⁶ To Roy, domestic bourgeois ties to international capital prejudiced the struggle for state sovereignty, and hence the bourgeoisie did not deserve inclusion in the nation. Nehru's nation, 'the people of India . . . who were spread out all over this vast land' as Nehru described them, became in Roy's hands *some* of the people of India, whose interests happened to coincide with those of the state movement for unity and independence. But the Indian nation did, in the end, more closely approximate Nehru's 'people of India' than it did Roy's proletariat. Why was it in China that Roy's more selective class-nation took hold?

China the State, China the Nation

We have noted some of the historical reasons why China should have been the site of a class war conducted in the name of the nation. Paramount among these was the history of China as a unitary state. Hegel gave this observation priority in his comparisons of the civilisations of China and India: 'This is the first point to be observed: if China may be regarded as nothing else but a State, Hindu political existence presents us with a people, but *no State*' (Hegel's emphasis).¹⁷ Even conceding that Hegel's ideal of the state effectively excluded the principalities of India — and that he was inclined to reduce China to nothing but a state — his more general point that China's identity took the form of historical consciousness of a unitary state remains quite valid. He need not have confined his sights to history. The universal written language and the high culture of imperial China corresponded closely with the reach of the state and lived on in the performance of state functions. Confucianism was a state ideology. Hegel might confidently have predicted, even if he could not have known, that while Hinduism would thrive in twentieth-century India, Confucianian civilisation would not survive the destruction of the imperial Chinese state.

Yet the Chinese state could survive the death of Confucianism. Conservative nineteenth-century Chinese scholars foresaw the decline and disappearance of Confucianism with some clarity, and feared that China would disappear as a state as well.¹⁸ On this point they were wrong. While

¹⁶ Cited in Sanjay Seth, 'Marxism and the Question of Nationalism in a Colonial Context: The Case of British India', PhD Dissertation, Australian National University, Canberra, 1989, p.114.

¹⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (translated by J. Sibree) (New York: Willey Book Co., 1944), p.161. Compare Von Schlegel's comment, made at roughly the same time: 'In China, before the introduction of the Indian religion of Buddha . . . the state is all in all'. See Frederick Von Schlegel, *The Philosophy of History* (translated by J. B. Robertson) (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847), p.124.

¹⁸ So Yu Yue, 'As I look at the situation of China today, there are three things I am most fearful about. One is that the name of China or "Central Nation" will be changed . . .

Confucianism did not survive the transformation of the state, the state survived precisely because it was transformed. China survived the death of Confucianism and much else besides because the idea of China was attached to the ideal of a unitary state rather than to the ideology of a particular regime. Indeed, nationalist thought generally assumed that the danger to which China was most vulnerable in the twentieth century was the destruction neither of ideology or culture, nor even of a national people, but the disappearance of the unitary state. Not unreasonably, the great dread of Chinese nationalists from nineteenth-century modernizers to twentieth-century communists has been the collapse and disappearance of the unitary state, a fear well captured in the phrase 'the death of the state' (*wang guo*).

In early usage the term 'death of the state' referred to little more than the downfall of a dynasty and, as one dynasty was generally replaced by another in the older cyclical view of history, it implied little more than an historical transition between ruling houses. Nothing stood to die out — neither people nor race, tradition nor state — apart from a particular imperial line of succession. But once history had shifted from a cyclical to a secular route and appeared to set its sights on progress, the phrase 'death of the state' implied a threat of far graver proportions. Progress offered little reassurance on its relentless forward march that the collapse of a recognizably Chinese state would yield another in its place, or even that the 'Chinese people' would survive the collapse of the state.¹⁹ The survival of the people was thought to be linked irrevocably to the survival of the unitary state, and the term 'loss of the state' summoned up morbid fears of genocide.²⁰

But who, after all, would die if the state were lost? More to the point, who would be saved along with the country if it were saved (*jiu guo*)? The idea of a distinctly Chinese people had some precedent in the public life of the empire but exactly which Chinese people would be rescued along with the state had to be discovered in the act of national salvation. There is no one word in the Chinese language referring to 'nation', as distinct from state (*guo*), and the want of a definitive name has encouraged state-builders to define the nation in ways consistent with their state-building efforts. The variety of terms which have been used where we might expect to find 'nation' give a fair indication of the range of options open to various state actors in their efforts to find a people whom they might represent. Words in common usage have included 'citizen' (*guomin, gongmin*), 'people' (*renmin*) and 'race' (*minzu*), along with the derivatives 'Han race' (*Hanzu*) and 'Chinese race' (*Zhonghua minzu*). Each implies a different nation. Precisely which word most accurately

China can remain China or 'Central Nation' as long as she does not communicate with any of the other eight continents. My second fear is that Confucianism will be undermined and eventually destroyed . . .' Cited in Dun J. Li, *China in Transition 1517-1911* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1969), p.163.

¹⁹ Meisner, *Li Ta-chao*, p.19.

²⁰ Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (London: Hurst & Co., 1992).

reflected the nation was to be discovered in the act of saving the state: the nation was neither more nor less than those people who would be represented when the state saved itself.

This particular problem of terminology reflects, in a broader sense, difficulties of conceptualization that hounded nationalists at every turn in their attempts to conceive of the national project in an ethical language which distinguished in most unrepresentative fashion between rulers (*jun*) and ruled (*min*), and which was grounded in an ethical-cyclical rather than secular conception of time. So the identity of the people raised ethical and historical questions as well as political ones. Indeed, there was not even a serviceable word for the historical and ethical community of 'China'. Among the many faults which Liang Qichao attributed to the 'Chinese people' was their inability to put a name to their own country: 'Hundreds of millions of people have maintained this country in the world for several thousand years', Liang complained in 1900, 'and yet to this day they have not got a name for their country'.²¹ Liang repeated the same claim in several of his essays and always in the same tone of astonishment.²² China had, it was true, been given a name in recent times but not by the Chinese themselves. Even the word 'China' (*Zhongguo*) 'is what people of other races call us. It is not a name the people of this country have selected for themselves'.²³ The Chinese custom of referring to their historical community by dynasty (*chaodai*) rather than by country (*guojia*) implied that there was in fact no Chinese nation at all. But in Liang's view the want of a name was not so much an indication of the want of a nation as an indictment of the cultural and intellectual immaturity of a people who had consistently failed to recognize that they constituted a nation. There was a nation, he asserted, and the lack of a name was no more than a

21 Liang Qichao, 'Zhongguo jiruo suyuan lun' [On the Source of China's Weakness], 1900, in *Yinbingshi wenji* [Collected Essays from the Ice-Drinker's Studio] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, n.d.), vol.2, coll. 5, pp.12-42, esp. p.15.

22 See also 'Zhongguo shi xulun' [Preface to A History of China], 1901, in *Yinbingshi heji*, [Collected Works from the Ice-Drinker's Studio] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, n.d.), vol.3, coll.6, p.3.

23 Liang Qichao, 'Zhongguo jiruo', p.15. The term *Zhongguo* was certainly in use in China before the modern period but it designated neither the country nor the state itself. *Zhongguo* referred only in the most general of terms to the place of the emperor at the centre of the world. Its first appearance in the formal designation of state was in the attenuated form of *Zhonghu minguo* [Republic of China] in 1912. But old habits die hard. Not far from the capital, locals coped with the collapse of 'The Great Qing State' (*Da qing guo*) by referring to their country simply as 'The Great State' (*Da guo*) into the 1930s. See Reginald F. Johnstone, *Twilight in the Forbidden City* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934), p.115.

'conceptual' error 'lodged in every person's brain'. The act of *naming* the people would make a nation of them.²⁴

At the same time, the name chosen to define the people would determine who should be counted among them and how they should be expected to behave as a nation. Liang Qichao himself opted for the ideal of the citizen. He believed that the term race could not be applied to the Chinese nation. There was no necessary correlation between ethnic groups and states in the composition of nation-states, and a racial definition of the nation might well prove a barrier to state-building in a multi-ethnic community such as China. In China, he continued, the interests of state required nationalists to sever the connection between ethnicity and national identity in order to maintain the territorial integrity of an empire which was home to many ethnic groups. Liang invented the term 'broad nationalism' (*da minzu zhuyi*) to distinguish his ideal of corporate national identity, focusing on the nation-state, from the 'narrow nationalism' (*xiao minzu zhuyi*) which focused on ethnicity. He defined ethnic identity (*minzu*) using customary distinctions of common territory, ancestry, language, religion and custom, but defined the citizenry subjectively as a group whose consciousness of their corporate identity bestowed upon them individual identities as citizens. Ethnicity was a birthmark people carried in their sleep, in contrast to citizenship, which was a graduate diploma from the state granted to those who had awakened as citizens. Liang then devised an ethics of national citizenship which linked the awakened self with the community of the nation-state through the ideal of the 'citizen'. In time, he came to use the terms citizen and state (*guojia*) interchangeably and to press for their simultaneous awakening. The awakening of the nation, for Liang, was coterminous with the manufacture of an awakened citizenry.²⁵

Revolutionary nationalists, however, identified the nation with the idea of race. Sun Yat-sen repudiated the 'Western' model of the nation-state favoured by Liang Qichao, in which citizens relate directly to the state as individuals, but his concept of 'race' was no less state-oriented in its origins and its orientation.²⁶ Certainly, Sun's personal self-awakening was bound up with an acute consciousness of skin colour and facial features, and with a heightened sensitivity to etiquette rather than to ethics. But his concern for the race was inseparable from his fear of the 'death of the state'. The fate in store for China was likely to be far worse than that endured by the Koreans and Vietnamese, he counselled, who were already 'slaves who had lost their states' (*wang guo*

²⁴ Liang Qichao, 'Zhongguo jiruo', p.14.

²⁵ Hao Chang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp.260-1.

²⁶ Sun Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I, The Three Principles of the People* (translated by Frank W. Price and edited by L. T. Chen) (Chungking: Ministry of Information, 1943), p.115.

nu). The people of China, however, would not even be preserved as slaves because in China the loss of state threatened the 'destruction of our race'.²⁷

Making a virtue of necessity, Sun insisted that observations such as Liang Qichao's on the lack of distinction between nation and state in the Chinese language was a logical corollary of the identity of race and state in China's history. Other countries were obliged to draw appropriate distinctions between the state and the nation because they were historically benighted by the coexistence of several 'races' under the one state, or by the division of one 'race' among many states. China, Sun argued, was singularly favoured in this respect:

China, since the Qin and Han dynasties, has been developing a single state out of a single race, while foreign countries have developed many states from one race and have included many nationalities within one state.²⁸

Not surprisingly, Sun concluded that his own Principle of Nationalism was equivalent to the 'doctrine of the state'.²⁹ His candid identification of nationalism as a state doctrine rested, nevertheless, on an assertion of the racial unity of the Chinese people which seemed to defy the evidence of the senses. In fact, his definition of the Chinese race was heavily qualified by his understanding of the nature, limits and function of the state itself. When Sun insisted that the Chinese people were racially distinct from all other 'races' of the world, he drew the boundaries of the race along the borders of the Chinese state and would allow no comparable ethnic distinctions to be drawn within China itself. The gene-pool of the race, in other words, happened to coincide with the borders of the state. Minority peoples were asked to adjust their belief and behaviour accordingly if they wished to be counted among the 'Chinese people'. In time, the Nationalist government prescribed an elaborate cultural regimen to assist the people of Tibet, Mongolia, Manchuria, Xinjiang and the Han regions to achieve a thorough comprehension of their common racial identity and to recover the sentiment of 'central loyalty' toward the Nationalist state.³⁰

²⁷ Sun Yat-sen, *San Min*, pp.12, 38. On Sun's concern with etiquette, see my forthcoming book, *The Irony of the Chinese Revolution: The Nationalist Revolution and the 'Awakening' of Modern China* (Stanford University Press).

²⁸ Sun Yat-sen, *San Min*, p.6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

³⁰ Chiang Kai-shek presented a similar argument at a much later stage, the better to illustrate the point that the Chinese people 'constitute not only one nation, but one race'. See Chiang Kai-shek, *China's Destiny*, first published in 1943 (translated by Wang Chung-hui) (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), pp.10-13. Two of Chiang's closest associates, the Chen brothers, implemented this vision in a language-reform program in the 1930s and 1940s. Chen Guofu believed that 'China's ability to achieve unity is entirely dependent on having a unified written language', and his brother, Chen

Others held different notions of what the threat of the 'death of the state' implied for the nation, arising in part from differing conceptions of the nation itself. Two of the leading intellectuals who were to found the Chinese Communist Party, Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu, engaged in a novel debate on the prospect of the collapse of the state some years before turning to Marxism for answers to the question. For Li Dazhao, the death of the state did not threaten racial genocide but involved instead a grave risk of loss of territory, cohesion and national identity. Still, the prospect of its loss filled him with an equal sense of dread: whether it was thought to entail loss of race, territory or political identity, the loss of the state was counted the greatest loss of all.³¹ Nevertheless, the identification of the nation was confounded by the task of evaluating *particular* state formations in China's history as a unitary state. Li Dazhao had only recently expressed his dread of 'loss of the state' when his friend, Chen Duxiu, published an article on the subject in 1913. A state which failed to inspire patriotism was, in Chen's view, not a state at all, because a true state was one which inspired a national people to achieve the ends of the state itself. 'Once the meaning of the state has been cleared up', Chen proclaimed, '... one can even go so far as to say that we Chinese have never as yet set up a state'.³² From these reflections, Chen Duxiu derived the radical conclusion that the collapse of the Republican state, as it was presently constituted, would be a matter of little moment to those who professed concern for the 'death of the state'.

In conceiving of patriotism as love of the state, Chen Duxiu was led inevitably to the conclusion that a state-directed patriotism was bound to fail in the absence of a perfect state. Li Dazhao then proposed a corrective, in the form of a particular kind of relationship between citizen and state: patriotism could be expressed in the act of *perfecting the state*, and made universal by extending the authority of the state over all its citizens.³³ The nation, in turn,

Lifu, put forward a plan for compulsory instruction in Chinese script for all minority peoples on the frontiers. See John De Francis, *Nationalism and Language Reform in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p.83.

³¹ Li cited in illustration of 'loss of state' the case of the Jews, 'a lost people who dream about recovering their country', as fair warning of the fate in store for the Chinese people should they fail to preserve their state. Meisner, *Li Ta-chao*, p.19.

³² Chen Duxiu, 'Patriotism and Consciousness of Self', *Jiayin zazhi* [Tiger Magazine], vol.1, no.4 (10 November 1914). Chen's article is excerpted and translated, along with Li Dazhao's reply 'Pessimism and Consciousness of Self', *Jiayin zazhi* [Tiger Magazine], vol.1, no.8 (10 August 1915), in Hélène Carrère d'Encausse and Stuart R. Schram, *Marxism and Asia: An Introduction with Readings* (London: Penguin Press, 1969), pp.204-8. The present translation is adapted from p.205.

³³ Li Dazhao, 'Pessimism and Consciousness of Self', in Carrère d'Encausse and Schram, *Marxism and Asia*, pp.207-8. Li Dazhao's emphasis on the will in his rebuttal of Chen Duxiu was seminal. Maurice Meisner has noted that Li's stress at this point 'on the

consisted of all those who loved their state. Once patriotism had been channelled into the rhetoric of state ideology and came to be expressed exclusively in the iconography of the state, the problem of Chinese nationalism resolved itself into a choice among state formations competing for the love and loyalty of the Chinese people. Conversely, once people had been offered a choice of regimes, then those who declined to love a particular state forfeited their right to be counted among those it represented; that is, to be counted among the 'Chinese people'.

When a nation is conceived primarily as a political community there is little to prevent political criteria from serving to define membership of the nation, or indeed from determining its constituent categories such as citizen, race or social class without reference to politics. The application of selective criteria for membership of the state should not surprise us: in democratic theory, politically-empowered citizens owe an obligation to the state in return for the rights and protections which it affords. Indeed, the transition from absolute rule to liberal democracy in the states of Europe was accompanied by the selective application of property rights and gender qualifications in determining rights of citizenship. When membership of the nation, however, is a derivative of membership of the state, there is no nation left to which the disempowered might appeal. The nation is exclusively the body of those empowered by the state itself.

State, Nation and Class

'Class' entered nationalist discourse as an alternative to 'citizen' and to 'race' in conceiving of the nation as a political community. And it was employed, like citizen and race, as an icon of state sovereignty and national unity. Communists employed the idea of class much as liberals used the ideal of the citizen, or the Nationalists used race, to assert the essential unity of the Chinese people in the face of primordial attachments to lineage and community, and in light of the need to relate the nation to the world. This last point is worth emphasizing. Nationalists and Communists, in particular, derived their different conceptions of the nation from distinctive historical and ethical conceptions of the world order within which the nation-state happened to find itself — in the one case a 'struggle for survival' among races, and in the other a struggle for supremacy among international class formations. The Communists and Nationalists both turned their respective assessments of the world order back upon the nation in an effort to reconstitute the nation as a full and equal member of the world community; that is, as a state.

ability of conscious, active men to shape events' was a radical departure for Li himself and marked the source of an original and indigenous strain of Marxism which was to develop under his tutelage in China. Chen Duxiu's rather different emphasis on the limitations imposed by 'objective' conditions also inspired followers among Chinese Marxists. See Meisner, *Li Ta-chao*, pp.21-6.

It is customary to go about analysing the relationship between Marxism and anti-colonial nationalism in one of two ways, the one rather more and the other rather less sympathetic to the Marxist project. Both take Lenin as their point of departure and neither shares the antipathy to nationalism found in the early Marxian canon. 'The great mass of proletarians are, by their very nature, free from national prejudices . . .' commented Engels in 1845, after a visit to the Festival of Nations in London. For Engels, as for Marx himself, substituting a proletarian state for a bourgeois state meant unmasking the fallacy of the nation, in effect demolishing national consciousness: 'Only the proletarians can destroy nationality, only the awakening proletariat can bring about fraternalism between the different nations'.³⁴ The 'Theses on the National and Colonial Questions' produced under Lenin's direction in the 1920s identified a more positive role for national consciousness.

The first line of approach to which I refer remains sympathetic to Lenin's purpose: it traces anti-colonial sentiments back through the deliberations of Lenin and the Communist International (Comintern) to show the instrumental role of Marxist socialism in emancipating colonial and semi-colonial states. The second — much less sympathetic to Lenin — also focuses on Communist Party ideology, organization and tactics but sees Marxism-Leninism as supplying a powerful organizational framework and a potent ideological formula that together tip the balance in favour of Marxist-Leninist parties competing against more naive nationalist movements in the struggle for state power. The two approaches are related to the extent that they focus, for better or worse, on the instrumental aspects of Marxism-Leninism in anti-colonial movements. Both also assume the nation of the post-colonial state to be self-evident and unproblematic: the nation is the national people on whose behalf the revolutionaries fight for state unity and sovereignty, not least among themselves.

Certainly China's Marxist-Leninists never abandoned the idea of a distinctively Chinese nation when they set out to create their new state. To the contrary, where Engels attacked the bourgeois state on the ground that there was no common good or nation which the state could rightly claim to represent, Chinese Leninists attacked the 'bourgeois', 'feudal' and 'bureaucratic capitalist' states (specifically the early Republican, warlord and Nationalist ones) because each failed to represent the Chinese nation *adequately*. Their attacks indirectly affirmed the existence of a Chinese nation on whose behalf they proposed to carry out their revolution. But the nation needed to be reconfigured in order to merit and to attain its own salvation; hence the content of the nation was under negotiation at every point in the state-building process. In this respect Marxism-Leninism was little different from other procedures for identifying the nation in nationalism: like liberal

³⁴ See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works 1845-48* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), vol.6, p.6. Ronaldo Munck highlights this ambivalence in *The Difficult Dialogue: Marxism and Nationalism* (London: Zed Books, 1986), p.6.

theory and racial nationalism, it offered useful insights for state-builders intent on giving content to their nation. If China's Marxist-Leninists are to be counted nationalist, then, it is not just in Lenin's sense of national strategists pursuing international proletarian revolution but in the sense of state-builders searching for a nation which they might represent adequately in the form of the nation-state.

The moment of arrival of the 'class nation' came over the period of the May Fourth Movement and Nationalist Revolution, from 1919 through to the late 1920s, when the idea of class intersected with the idea of the nation in three distinct and mutually reinforcing ways. The first, heavily indebted to the anarchists' early experiments in class-analysis of the international system, conceived of China as a national community possessing all of the characteristics (and deserving all of the sympathy) of the classic proletariat in Marxian social analysis. The patriarch of the Chinese Communist Party, Li Dazhao, located the domain of class struggle in the contemporary era in the field of international relations. The unit of class analysis was the nation itself: nations suffering imperialist oppression were labelled members of the international 'proletariat', and the oppressor nations were thought to make up a transnational 'bourgeoisie'. In this case, the idea of class served to establish China's place in the world as a distinctive class nation, on the model of the class nationalism identified by Abdullah Laroui in his typology of colonial nationalisms, within an evolving international class struggle.

But the idea of the class nation did not stop here. Class was married more intimately with the ideal of the nation when national revolutionaries tried to account for the marked degree of regional differences and local attachments among the people of China. The prospect of a nationally uniform mode of production giving shape to comparable social classes from one end of the country to the other offered new hope for a nation which appeared beset by highly localized cultural and social differentiation. With the aid of Marxism, regional variation in levels of economic development could be shown to be tending toward *historical* uniformity: when the forces of history were moving the entire nation inexorably and uniformly from one mode of production ('feudal') to another ('capitalist'), regional variation could be shown to signify no more than regionally differential rates of development along a uniformly national historical pattern.

This particular conception of national unity was first set out in arguments mounted against champions of provincial autonomy, in a debate over federalism in 1922. Communist Party Secretary-General Chen Duxiu showed as keen a determination as Sun Yat-sen to rule out the possibility that sentimental attachments to lineage and locality should be given institutional expression at the political level. To preserve the integrity of the state, Chen and Sun asserted the unity of the nation. Both resorted to essentialist characterizations of the Chinese nation — Sun as race, Chen as a configuration of revolutionary classes — in an attempt to deny that there were significant categories of difference dividing the country into distinctive

regions along cultural, social or ethnic boundaries. For example, while targeting warlords for forcibly dividing the country, Chen also challenged the legitimacy of all other emblems of cultural and socio-economic diversity which threatened to do the same. He mounted a range of arguments to explain why there would be little scope for introducing a federalist or regionally-differentiated political system in China even if there were no warlords at all. His case was built on an assumption of the convergence of the Chinese nation around *national* social classes.

Federalism, argued Chen Duxiu, was best suited to countries with regionally differentiated economies, languages, religions and cultures. This was not the case with China. China was one country housing a single 'Chinese people' (*zhonghua minzu*) within a uniform socio-economic system. As China's economy was subject to the universal laws of history, the nation's million-strong industrial proletariat supplied the historical fixative to bond their four hundred million compatriots into one. 'The economic situation of the people of China is uniformly and gradually moving from the stage of agriculture and handicraft industry to that of industrial production', pronounced Chen, in September 1922. 'There is little difference between north and south'.³⁵ The same social, or class, differences which divided the north also prevailed in the south; so, paradoxically, social division served to mark China's unity as a nation.

While Chen Duxiu could hardly deny that there were differences of custom, language and religious belief among the people of China, he was inclined to deny that there was a regional aspect to their variation. Cultural and religious distinctions were national in scope and hence offered little comfort to advocates of local self-government under a federal system:

Although there is some slight difference in pronunciation in the native language, the written script and structure of the language are identical. And although there are religious distinctions among Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity and Islam, in no case do these correspond with places of dwelling.³⁶

Chen could claim with confidence that there was little correspondence between religious belief and geography because Tibet, Xinjiang and Mongolia were not at issue among his partisan readers. His reference to the common Chinese script served a similar purpose in asserting the unity of the Han peoples despite immense regional variety in their spoken vernaculars and the recognized strength of their local attachments. In assuming that the people themselves were misled in their loyalties, Chen employed class in much the same way that Chiang Kai-shek was later to use the term 'race': as a signifier

³⁵ Chen Duxiu, 'Liansheng zizhi yu Zhongguo zhengxiang' [The Federal System and China's Political Situation], *Xiangdao zhoubao* [The Guide Weekly], vol.1 (13 September 1922), p.2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

of the unity of the national people which the people themselves could not yet fully 'comprehend'.

Chen's comrade, Cai Hesen, went a step further in arguing that political differences between north and south, or between liberal and mass democrats, could also be reduced to differences between social classes. Hence 'class warfare' (*jieji zhanzheng*) would ultimately supply a force for unity sufficient to overcome regional political differences as well as cultural and economic ones:

The domestic chaos and fighting of the last decade is not a struggle for territory between 'North' and the 'South', nor a struggle over 'Protecting the Constitution' or 'Breaking the Constitution', nor even a struggle between 'Unity' and 'Division'. It is a struggle between the old dominant feudal class and the newly arisen revolutionary class: a kind of class warfare.³⁷

Cai Hesen's comments on the class character of political disputes anticipated the third point of entry of class into revolutionary nationalism. The idea of class helped to distinguish true and false members of the nation by helping to identify allies and enemies of the revolutionary state itself.

Revolutionary nationalists did not set out to *make* class enemies at the outset of their national revolution. The Nationalists were inhibited from doing so by their ideology, and the Communists proposed to refrain from doing so at least until the completion of national reunification. For all concerned, the Nationalist Revolution of the 1920s was to be an 'all class' affair.³⁸ This did not mean that the revolution lacked a political target or that it failed to make tangible political enemies. Sun Yat-sen identified enemies among the remnant functionaries of the Qing and supporters of warlord administrations. There were even enemies within the ranks of the revolutionary party itself. Some Nationalists objected to the blanket condemnation of warlords for fear that it would alienate the party's warlord allies, and others feared that the militant tone of anti-imperialist rhetoric was bound to make life difficult for them in

³⁷ Cai Hesen, 'Wuli tongyi yu liansheng zizhi: junfa zhuanzheng yu junfa geju' [Military Reunification and Federalism: Warlord Dictatorship and Warlord Separatism], *Xiangdao zhoubao*, no.2 (20 September 1922), p.14.

³⁸ The Chinese Communist leader Chen Duxiu went so far as to suggest that an 'all class' revolution was the only kind of revolution possible in China at this time. Chen Duxiu, 'Zhongguo guomin geming yu shehui ge jieji' [China's National Revolution and its Various Social Classes], *Qianfeng* [The Vanguard], no.2 (1 December 1923). On the side of the Nationalists, needless to say, this was an axiom of the revolution. Sun Yat-sen believed that the 'entire country' would rise up and overwhelm the forces of militarism and imperialism and carry the Nationalists to power. See Sun Yat-sen, *Guofu quanji* [The Complete Works of the Father of the Country] (Taipei: Dangshi weiyuanhui, 1973), vol.2, p.598.

the foreign concession at home or in colonial societies abroad.³⁹ Many Nationalists also felt uneasy about admitting Communists into their party and were embarrassed by their party's close association with the Soviet Union. On the Communist side, disputes erupted within the Communist Party over the details of its cooperation with the Nationalists and over the high-handed attitude of the Third Communist International (Comintern) and its advisers in China. And, in Moscow, the rationale and conduct of the alliance was a source of controversy within the Soviet leadership and among the major institutions which claimed a legitimate interest in the matter, including the Comintern, Narkomindel and Profintern.⁴⁰ But political enemies, generally speaking, were not conceived in terms of social classes until the revolution got underway, for early misgivings and disputes among all parties to the revolution were arbitrated around a common agreement on the political goals of the revolution to 'overthrow warlords and imperialism'. These twin goals served as a common test for telling who were the friends and the enemies of state and nation alike.

Few made any connection between warlords and the social forces of 'feudalism' before the revolution got underway; warlords were enemies chiefly because they held guns and pointed them in the direction of the revolutionaries.⁴¹ Even the Comintern counted class status an inadequate basis

³⁹ See my 'The Irony of the Chinese Revolution: The Nationalists and Chinese Society, 1923-1927', in John Fitzgerald (ed.), *The Nationalists and Chinese Society, 1923-1937: A Symposium* (Melbourne: Melbourne University History Monographs, 1989), pp.13-43.

⁴⁰ See S. T. Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917-1926* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976); Conrad Brandt, *Stalin's Failure in China, 1924-1927* (New York: Norton & Co., 1966); Robert C. North, *Moscow and Chinese Communists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963); Alan S. Whiting, *Soviet Policies in China, 1917-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953).

⁴¹ Chinese nationalists and Comintern agents drew extensively on the writings of Marx and Lenin when they wrote of feudalism but they ultimately arrived at an understanding of the role of warlords in nationalist politics which came closer to the writings of German nationalists — in particular to Max Weber's critique of Junkers in the modern German state — than to any in the Marxian canon. Marx attributed a social base to feudalism and Lenin targeted the social base of feudal lords in national liberation struggles, but it was Weber who first singled out the great feudal lords as political enemies of the nation-state. Weber believed that in the face of international competition the principle of the nation assumed priority over all other values and hence that political elites which failed to conform with the nation-building enterprise surrendered their moral authority to govern. When he set out this principle in his inaugural lecture at Friburg in May 1895, Weber pronounced that the Junkers were unfit to govern because they employed Polish day-labourers in place of German ones. This he deemed a slight on the German labouring classes, sufficient at least to show that the Junkers lacked the kind of national consciousness Germany demanded of its leaders in an age of competing nation-states. If

for distinguishing friends and enemies in the Chinese revolution. Its 'Directives on the Application of the 1920 Agrarian Theses' set an important precedent for flexible interpretation of agrarian feudalism by noting that whether or not the landlord class should be singled out for struggle in the national phase of revolution depended upon the position landlords adopted toward imperialism, rather than the nature of their relations with the struggling peasant masses.⁴² Here the Comintern established the cardinal principle that political attitudes toward a national enemy offered a more reliable gauge for identifying friends and enemies in national revolution than class status *per se*. Another criterion for identifying friends and enemies was Lenin's remark on the ownership of large estates. In its 1922 'Theses on the Eastern Question' the Comintern identified the domestic enemy of national revolution as 'feudal' large landowners and confirmed Lenin's call for the expropriation of 'estates' — were considered closely related in practice, because 'alien imperialism' makes the 'feudal' elite an 'instrument of its rule'.⁴³ The Comintern explicitly identified the feudal class in native Chinese society as the 'tuchuns', or warlords, which were equated with the Junkers of the old German states and elevated to the status of a social class accordingly. Warlords came to be counted feudal on a number of different counts — for dividing the polity into regional satrapies and opposing the development of the bourgeoisie and of 'bourgeois democracy' — but if they represented anything other than themselves it was thought to be the alien force of foreign capital in its highest stage of imperialism.⁴⁴ Their presumed role in representing the greater landlord class came some way down the list of warlord crimes. It was enough that they seemed to be dividing the national cake and surrendering it, on a plate, to foreigners.

In the event, the maxim that warlords and imperialism were enemies of the nation was sufficiently flexible to accommodate domestic 'feudal' social forces among the enemies of the nation as well. Indeed, any institution or group of people reluctant to take up the invitation to attack feudalism and imperialism, or perhaps bold enough to challenge the right of the revolutionaries to define the friends and enemies of the nation on their behalf, could with good reason be counted an ancillary of feudal interests or a lackey of imperialism. As late as April 1924, Chen Duxiu distinguished radical from

Junker authority lacked an ethical foundation it was because the Junkers refused to recognize and to comply with the national interest and not, as Marx or Lenin would say, because they were the corrupt vestiges of a dying social order.

⁴² See Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International, 1919-1943, Documents* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1971), vol.1, pp.394-8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.382-93.

⁴⁴ Michael Luk, *The Origins of Chinese Bolshevism: An Ideology in the Making, 1920-1928* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.147.

conservative factions within the Nationalist Party by the simple expedient of identifying party members' attitudes to the twin political goals of the revolution. Chen announced that the class origins of his enemies were quite immaterial.⁴⁵ But this simple act of faith no longer sufficed after 1925. With the collapse of the May Thirtieth Movement in Shanghai, and in the ongoing struggle for local power in the revolutionaries' southern base in Guangdong, friends and enemies of the revolution declared themselves by their collective positions on the contest for state power between the revolutionaries (representing the nation) and the liberals, chambers of commerce, local elites and warlords who resisted them.⁴⁶ By virtue of their opposition to the revolutionaries these groups effectively excluded themselves from membership of the nation. Class struggle then entered China's national revolution at the invitation of the party-state, under Nationalist Party auspices, not as an instrument of social revolution but as a technique for reconfiguring the nation in a form consonant with the unity which the revolutionary state sought for itself.

Marxism, Nationalism and the Class Nation

Can nationalists turn upon their own 'people' without surrendering their claim to be nationalist? In referring to nationalism in China, we generally refer to its meaning at a particular point in its own development when nationalist thought identified the state with the Chinese 'race'. This is certainly the meaning of the nation conveyed to the West in China's protracted civil war. When Chiang Kai-shek went looking for a stick with which to beat the Communists, it was the ferocity of their campaigns against 'their own people' which most clearly marked them as national enemies:

It is only too clear now that Communists can never have any sense of loyalty to their own country; they are devoid of patriotism or national consciousness. In fact they have no love for their country but they will deliberately work against national interests. They feel no compunction even if . . . they should be called upon to *perpetrate genocide on their own people*.⁴⁷

In the 1930s, by Nationalist reckoning, fighting Communists was more patriotic than fighting Japanese troops on China's soil because the

⁴⁵ Chen Duxiu, 'Guomindang zuoyipai zhi zhen yiyi' [The True Significance of Left and Right Factions in the Nationalist Party], *Xiangdao zhoubao* [The Guide Weekly], no.62 (23 April 1924), pp.3-4.

⁴⁶ This argument is set out in greater detail in John Fitzgerald, 'The Misconceived Revolution: State and Society in China's Nationalist Revolution, 1923-1926', *Journal of Asian Studies* vol.49, no.2 (May 1990), pp.323-43.

⁴⁷ Emphasis added. Adapted from Chiang Kai-shek, *Soviet Russia in China* (revised edition) (New York: Farr, Strauss and Cudahy, 1968), pp 88-9.

Communists threatened far more than the territorial integrity of the country. They challenged the ego boundaries of the national self. The Nationalists thought of themselves as a movement for uniting a divided people, and believed that any attempt to exacerbate existing divisions within society or to turn one part against another was treasonous.⁴⁸ In the Communist Party of China, the Nationalists confronted not only a rival political movement but an alternative definition of the nation.

Neither definition could countenance the other. To the makers of Nationalist China any concession that yielded the fundamental integrity of the race (however fictional this idea) was not an alternative to national extinction but a *form* of national extinction. The rhetoric of the civil war which swept the Communists to power in the 1940s retained the essentialist style of thought characteristic of modern Chinese nationalism, although in this case elaborated around the idea of social class. On the twenty-eighth anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party in 1949, when Mao Zedong redefined the 'people' on behalf of the People's Republic of China, he raised once again the central issue of China's national revolution. 'Who are the people?', he asked. 'At the present stage in China, they are the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie'. These four classes were selected for inclusion on the national flag of the People's Republic in the form of four small stars orbiting the greater star of the People's state. The rest — 'the landlord class and the bureaucrat bourgeoisie, as well as the representatives of those social classes' — were excluded from the insignia of state and from the ranks of the 'people'.⁴⁹

The composition of the 'people', as Mao implied, was to change once China had moved beyond its 'present stage'. And so it did. The landlord class and the 'petty' and 'national' bourgeoisie were eliminated as social classes over the first decade of Communist Party rule, after which class struggle no longer characterized relations among actual social classes. Instead, it characterized relations between the state and the survivors of earlier class struggles (the 'bad class elements', as they were known), and came to be identified with conflicts among competing 'class ideologies' within the structure of the state itself. Subsequent political conflicts at the highest levels of party and state entailed terrible suffering for the dispossessed scions of the landlord and petty-bourgeois classes, who were held to account for the errors of their 'representatives' among Mao's political enemies. Nevertheless, they no longer constituted a social class in the sense of a social formation. Bad class elements were kept alive beyond the collapse of their class formations chiefly to provide a 'real' social referent for Mao Zedong's political enemies to represent, and to be taunted and killed as political struggle intensified

⁴⁸ Sun Yat-sen, *San Min*, pp.4-6.

⁴⁹ Mao Zedong, 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship', 30 June 1949, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1969), vol.4, pp.411-24, esp.417-18.

within the higher party and state apparatus. Bad class elements were hostage to the fortunes of arch unrepentant capitalist roaders.⁵⁰

Having given content to the nation, the category of class (like that of the nation) became an essentially contested concept within a discourse of state power. It was then shown to be as unstable as the category of the nation. It was not *sufficient* to be born a peasant or a worker to warrant inclusion among the 'people', nor was landlord or bourgeois class background a sufficient principle of exclusion. The only reliable criterion for inclusion among the People was class 'attitude', expressed in the form of support for Mao Zedong himself. In appropriating the right to name the 'people', to represent it and to speak on its behalf, Mao also reserved the right to identify each of its subsidiary categories. Class, like nation, came in the end to mean anything that its self-appointed representatives chose to make it.

Mao's approach to the category of social class was not quite as cavalier as it might appear. Indeed, it was the culmination of a tradition of state nationalism stretching back to the turn of the century in which state-builders reserved the right to identify who it was that made up the nation and who exercised that right in ways consistent with their claims to state sovereignty. Conservatives and reformers in the mid-nineteenth century, reformers and revolutionaries at the turn of the century, Nationalists and their Communist rivals in the early stages of China's national revolution all presumed that the nation had no name of its own, all assumed the right to give a name to their nation, and, in naming it, to represent it as a state. None conceded that there might already have been a nation in existence capable of representing itself. When the Communists drew their line beyond race and traditional high culture, and isolated class as the essential feature of the nation, they did not reach beyond the limits of nationalist thought itself. All they did was move the line a little further in the direction of the state.

The point at issue here is not the existence of social classes in early twentieth-century China, nor even the salience of class analysis in social revolution. It is, rather, the manner in which the idea of class took root in state-oriented nationalism. Class first entered the vocabulary of radical activists around the turn of the century along with all that was modern and cosmopolitan. Reference to a revolution of social classes was commonplace among anarchists who were not in the least concerned about the reunification of the state and who were only marginally interested in the attainment of

⁵⁰ The distinction between class struggle in the literal sense (against people of bad class background) and in the metaphorical sense (against people who followed the wrong political 'line') was tenuous at the best of times, but was nevertheless maintained in order to give 'line' struggle a significant social referent. In the Cultural Revolution this distinction became the axis of factional struggle within the Red Guard movement itself. See Jonathan Unger, *Education Under Mao: Class and Competition in Canton Schools, 1960-1980* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.122-33.

national 'wealth and power'.⁵¹ China's early champions of social revolution employed class analysis in the hope of identifying social forces which might eliminate the state entirely. It was the ethical community of the nation, not of social class, which required the clearest elaboration and closest justification in early revolutionary thought. Social classes were thought to exist in the natural order of things. The nation, on the other hand, appeared an irrational and artificial contrivance born of the international state system.⁵² Nevertheless, the anarchists' pioneering conception of the world community as an aggregation of social classes made possible a radical reconfiguration of the nation itself as a class community when the time was ripe.

Among nationalists, on the other hand, it is easy to overestimate the appeal of Marxist socialism. There was in fact an immense reluctance to embrace the idea of class division and class struggle within nationalist thought. Divisive social revolution was thought to accompany some other kind of revolution than the national one planned for China. So the first Nationalist to embrace Marxist theory, Hu Hanmin, was happy to apply historical materialism to the development of Confucian ethics but saw little merit in extending his analysis to the social, economic and political life of the country because 'historical materialism' was predicated on social violence.⁵³ Like his leader in the Nationalist Party, Sun Yat-sen, Hu maintained that the Principle of People's Livelihood offered an adequate substitute for historical materialism in the Chinese revolution because attention to the livelihood of the common people would pre-empt the development of class struggle.⁵⁴

Few national revolutionaries outside the Nationalist Party favoured the idea of class struggle either. The Nationalist Party's authority on Comintern thinking, Henk Sneevliet, had shown little inclination to exclude the Indonesian bourgeoisie from the nationalist program on an earlier assignment in the Dutch Indies, and Sneevliet does not appear to have raised the prospect

⁵¹ Martin Bernal, *Chinese Socialism to 1907* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Dirlik and Chan, *Schools into Fields and Factories*. Note especially Dirlik's chapter on ethics in *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*.

⁵² Even Zhang Binglin, one of the foremost nationalist theoreticians of the turn of the century, considered the nation arbitrary and accidental: 'Now, in this multitudinous universe, the earth is but a small grain of rice in a vast granary, yet today [we] who live on it have divided it up into territories, we protect what is ours and call it a "nation". Then we established institutions, divided [ourselves] into various classes, and called it "government"'. Nations and states were 'determined by happenstance' and had no rationale other than their historical emergence as categories for organising the affairs of men. Cited in Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism*, pp.51-2

⁵³ Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press), vol.3, pp.28-30.

⁵⁴ Sun Yat-sen, *San Min*, p.380 ff.

of targeting the Chinese bourgeoisie in his discussions with Sun Yat-sen.⁵⁵ Sneevliet was of course a partial and partisan source on Comintern thinking about the place of class struggle in national revolutionary movements. The more brazen Indian Comintern delegate, M. N. Roy, advocated class struggle against the Indian bourgeoisie. But in Moscow Roy made little headway against Lenin, and even within the Indian nationalist movement his impact was limited.⁵⁶ Nor were many Chinese Communists persuaded at the outset that class struggle against China's traders, industrialists or landlords had a significant part to play in a war of national liberation. When Li Dazhao transferred the domain of class struggle to the arena of international relations, with China playing the part of the proletariat, he was fully conscious that his formulaic adaptation of the materialist conception of history minimized the prospect of class struggle in China's own revolution. In fact, this was the whole point of the exercise. There was little incentive for either Nationalist or Communist Party theorists to relinquish the modern ideal of the unified nation or to abandon the inherited Confucian ideal of social harmony until both ideals had been rendered untenable *within nationalist thought itself*. In this respect, exaggerating the appeal of Marxism to nationalists only obscures the significance of what took place within nationalist thought over the twenty or thirty years leading to the establishment of the People's Republic.

Marxism-Leninism became a plausible option within nationalist thought only after class struggle ceased to present an obstacle to its acceptance. Hence the establishment of a rationale and a rhetorical framework for inserting class struggle into nationalism was the most significant development of China's national revolution. This took place, we noted, in three phases. In the May Fourth Movement, class struggle was analogous to the struggle among nations, and between wealthier and stronger states and the territories they sought to bring into their colonial empires. From 1922, class struggle against 'feudal' military forces was also conceived as a nation-building enterprise within China, promoting the historical evolution of a uniformly national mode of production. And from 1925 throughout the period of the civil war, the reluctance of certain powerful and well-organized groups in society to follow the directives of the revolutionaries singled them out for class struggle as well, again in the name of saving the state. In this case, advocacy of class struggle against the bourgeoisie and the landlord classes served the further function of destroying the only social formations that held any prospect of staging effective local resistance to an expanding party-state.

The institution of the party-state was crucial to this development. The Communist and Nationalist Parties saw themselves as institutions for 'representing' the national people until they had come to a realization of their own unity (as race or as class) through political struggle and political

⁵⁵ Tony Saich, *The Origins of the First United Front in China: The Role of Sneevliet (alias Maring)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991).

⁵⁶ See Seth, 'Marxism and the Question of Nationalism'.

education. Those who persisted in displaying indifference to imperialist influence or disregard for political partition under warlord rule, despite ample warning, betrayed in their behaviour that they belonged to the counter-revolutionary 'class'. The idea of class struggle then ceased to be an unpalatable option in nationalist thought and came to appear, instead, a palatable necessity.⁵⁷ If the people themselves were divided over the fundamental issue of who should rule them and how they should be ruled, then only some of them deserved to be included among the people of the nation. So Marxism made possible a radical re-imagining of the national self in terms of class: class offered a rational principle for exclusion from the nation of those social groups resisting the expansion of the revolutionary state.

Nevertheless, the appearance of class struggle in the revolution did not signal its departure from nationalism nor transform the revolution into a socialist enterprise. The dispute associated with class struggle took place within nationalist thought itself, testing the limits of an established consensus on the composition of the nation and forcing a massive rupture in nationalist thought between a continuing commitment to Sun Yat-sen's vision of the nation as 'race' and an alternative vision of the nation defined by class. The question at issue, in Chatterjee's terms, was how to essentialize the national self. Ideological differences which divided the Nationalists and Communists in the Chinese national revolution are then best characterized not as a struggle between Marxism-Leninism and nationalism, but as a struggle between two phases of nationalism, or more particularly between two highly competitive state-building parties over the content of the nation and the form of the state that would act to represent it.

Conclusion

A schematic analysis of the kind offered here runs the risk of ignoring all that is accidental in history. Winners appear to gain a moral victory; losers not only lose power, but seem to lose the plot as well. Yet the Chinese nation need not have been defined along the statist lines outlined above, nor need the identity of the nation have been linked with class in quite this fashion. There was, we noted, a strain of socialist thought in Chinese anarchism which was not preoccupied with questions of national sovereignty, wealth and power. So, too, there was a Chinese people long before nationalists began lamenting the failure of the people to cohere in quite the way they wanted. The nations of citizen, race and class may well have been inventions of the state designed to overcome differences dividing the people of China, but these differences have

⁵⁷ The slogans and posters advocating 'class struggle' in Guangzhou in the 1920s declared not that class struggle was glorious but that 'class struggle is inevitable'. See Edward Kenneth W. Rea (ed.), *Canton in Revolution: The Collected Papers of Earl Swisher, 1925-1928* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977), p.32.

all along been mediated by a common agreement among individuals and communities that they happen to belong together, after a fashion.

The many people who live in China have a long history of their own, preserved not in records of state but in immense repositories of cultural memory that is captured in story and song, festival and ritual, street news and, today, on television and film. Richard Madsen has recently called for the application of a new kind of political sociology more sensitive to models of community consciousness outside of the statist framework — in contests over written histories, in commemorative ceremonies, opera and literature, and in the immense storehouse of collective memory, to serve as a corrective to the state orientation of much political scholarship.⁵⁸ The reasons for doing so are more than academic. The relationship between state and nation is under negotiation in China today to an extent that defies all precedent.

It is not just that official configurations of the nation are under challenge. True, the national flags of the People's Republic of China and of the Republic of China on Taiwan no longer signify the nation and polities they represent. On Taiwan, the national flag and national anthem of the Republic still make explicit reference to the Nationalist Party at a time when the state is moving toward a multi-party system. The flag, with its Nationalist Party insignia of a blue sky and white sun on the canon, and the anthem referring to the nation as 'our party' (*wu dang*), both recall the origins of the state in the single-party Nationalist state from which Taiwan is gradually moving away on a raft of political reforms that are leaving both party and flag behind. On the mainland, the flag of the People's Republic betrays its origins in the state-orchestrated class struggles of the Communist revolution. With four small stars representing the 'revolutionary' social classes of the nation, all orbiting the greater star of the Communist state at the centre of the canon, the flag of the People's Republic signifies not only the victory of the classes which comprise the nation but also, by their omission, the defeat of the counter-revolutionary classes which never quite made it onto the flag. As early as the Cultural Revolution, when the 'classes' starred on the flag were encouraged to wage star-wars among themselves, a generation of school children was taught to honour the flag without being told what it was they were saluting.⁵⁹ More recently, the commitment to the politics of class struggle which once guided the selection of stars is at odds with the ethic of getting-rich-quick which underpins the economic reform program of Deng Xiaoping. The big star is still in the ascendant, but the flag's selective assemblage of social classes heightens the asymmetry between state and nation by reminding those who

⁵⁸ Richard Madsen, 'The Public Sphere, Civil Society and Moral Community: A Research Agenda for Contemporary China Studies', *Modern China*, vol.19, no.2 (April 1993), pp.183-98.

⁵⁹ W. J. F. Jenner, *The Tyranny of History: The Roots of China's Crisis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, 1992), p.66.

salute the flag (and know what they are saluting) that the Party's ideological foundations no longer match the direction in which the country is heading.

More importantly, where the state should turn to find its nation and what shape the nation will assume on the flag depends to a greater degree than ever before on the compliance of the people of China in forfeiting the right to name themselves. Indeed, it is not simply the shape of the flag that is at issue today but the fundamental premise that the state reserves the right to define the nation and to specify its relationship to the state. In the history of Chinese nationalism the state (or state-builders) have assumed this right without question. To the extent that the line between state and nation has been blurred, and that love of country has been indistinguishable from love of the state, China's intellectuals have tended to go along with it all. As Fang Lizhi recalled in 1989,

I remember in my younger days joining in on the criticism of our poor old teachers, who would always defend themselves by saying 'At least I'm patriotic; at least I love my country'. Our standard reply was 'But what country do you love? A communist country? or a Kuomintang country?' Of course what we were implying was that they weren't really patriotic at all. In this context, patriotism obviously does not mean loving your native place, your rivers, your soil, your cities; it means loving the state.⁶⁰

Fang Lizhi's ironic self-parody highlights a revolutionary development in contemporary China. Patriotic nationalism has taken root outside the state itself. In the political reform movements which followed immediately on the Cultural Revolution, reform was understood to mean restoring the ideological faith of a jaded community, or restoring the sheen of a tarnished party. More recently, however, this restorationist tendency has yielded to a wider recognition of the distinction between the Communist Party and the state, on the one hand, and between the state and the nation on the other.⁶¹ Distinctions of this kind make room for a conception of a nation and for a form of state quite different from any which have come before in China. This revolutionary development does not, paradoxically, require a political revolution: the revolutionary discourse of the 'nationless state' has little traction in a nation which is sufficiently confident to name itself, and in a state which does not presume to tell the people of China who they are.

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⁶⁰ Fang Lizhi, 'On Patriotism and Global Citizenship', speech of 25 February 1989, Beijing; transcribed by G. K. Sun, translated by James H. Williams, in George Hicks (ed.), *The Broken Mirror: China after Tiananmen* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1990), pp. xxi-xxv.

⁶¹ Merle Goldman, Perry Link and Su Wei, 'China's Intellectuals in the Deng Era: Loss of Identity with the State', in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim (eds), *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 125-53.