

MEETING REPORT

Open Access



The formation and development of the Chinese nation with multi-ethnic groups

Xiaotong Fei

Correspondence:

angeleus@sina.com

Declaration: This essay was based on the Tanner Lecture given by Prof. Xiaotong Fei (also known as Hsiao-tung Fei, 1910-2005) at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1988.

Department of Sociology, Peking University, Beijing, China

After my invitation to deliver the Tanner Lecture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss the question of the unified multi-ethnic Chinese nation, a topic that I have been exploring for many years. My current understanding of this structure is not fully developed, and so, this talk can only be a starting point for considering this question.

In order to avoid a lengthy explanation of some basic concepts, I will use the concept 'Chinese nation' (*zhonghuaminzu* 中华民族) to refer to the billions of people within the geographical territory of China. This includes more than 50 diverse ethnicities, within the single Chinese nation. They are all called 'ethnicities' (*minzu* 民族), but their levels are not the same. My use of the territory of China to delineate the scope of the Chinese nation is certainly not entirely appropriate, because 'state-nation' and 'ethnicity' are two different but related concepts. At the same time, from a macro-perspective one could argue that they are basically or roughly consistent in their scope.

As a nation-in-itself, the Chinese nation emerged in confrontations between China and Western powers in the last century. But as a national-entity-of-consciousness, it has been shaped by thousands of years of historical process. This essay will review the process of formation of the structure of the unified multi-ethnic Chinese nation. Its main aspects are formed by the contact, intermingling, linking, and integration of many dispersed ethnicities. At the same time, it is also a sort of unity with distinctions resulting from the division and extinction of those ethnicities. This may also be the process of formation of all of the world's nations. The formation of the multi-ethnic structure of the Chinese nation also has its particular characteristics: its emergence dates back to 3000 years ago, with the integration of several ethnicities in the middle region of the Yellow River. Beginning with the peoples known as the 'Huaxia', the gradual process of integration was like a rolling snowball, absorbing the surrounding ethnicities into a single core. After it had occupied the East Asian plains area, including the middle and lower regions of the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers, it began to be called the 'Han ethnicity' by other groups. The Han ethnicity continued to grow by assimilating elements of other ethnicities, and continued to penetrate into their territories, constituting a connected and cohesive network, laying the foundation for an indivisible unity resulting from the integration of diverse ethnicities within the territory, forming an ethnicity-in-itself with a shared ethnic consciousness, known as the Chinese nation.

This is a rich and varied historical text, with two coordinates in time and space. There are times when it is difficult to use words to describe it, so in terms of geography, it is unavoidable to neglect one or the other and face disorientations. And in terms of time, it is unavoidable to have crossovers between past and future and face sequential inversions. Let this paper be my bold attempt in this academic field.

The homeland of the Chinese people

Every nationality's survival and reproduction occur within a specific homeland. The Chinese homeland is located in the Eastern part of Asia, in the vast continent bordered on the West by the Pamir Plateau, in the East by the islands of the Pacific, in the North by a large desert, in the Southeast by an ocean, and in the Southwest by a mountain range. This continent surrounded by natural barriers, the internal structure of which is a complete system, forms a geographical unit. In the conceptualization of its ancient inhabitants, this region was where humans could live, and was the only known piece of land, so it was called 'the world'. They also believed that it was surrounded on all sides by the ocean, so it was called 'within the four seas'. While this understanding is outdated, it can be argued that this geographically self-contained land has always been the homeland of the Chinese nation.

Ethnic patterns seem to always reflect geographical and ecological structures. The Chinese ethnicity is no different. The region slopes with a high degree of inclination towards the east. The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau in the West, bordered on the East by the Hengduan Mountains, at an altitude of 4000 m above sea level, is known as the Roof of the World. The terrain drops to an altitude of 1000 to 2000 m above sea level at the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, The Loess Plateau, and the Inner Mongolia Plateau, between which lie the Tarim and Sichuan Basins. Further East are foothills below 1000 m, and plains below 200 m above sea level.

With these three significant altitude gradations from West to East, and a span of thirty degrees latitude between North and South, the temperature and humidity disparities naturally created different ecological environments, constituting both severe shackles and rich opportunities for human development. The Chinese ethnicity formed within this natural framework.

The origins of diversity

What were the earliest conditions of the peoples living in this territory? This question relates to the origin of the Chinese nation. All nations have a set of claims about their origins, and these claims are used to support feelings of national identity. As a result, there can be differences between these claims and historical facts. In the case of the origin of the Chinese nation, there have been lengthy debates over pluralism versus monism, and debates over theories of indigenous origin versus external migratory origin. Chinese archeology since the 1970s has opened up a more scientific understanding of the early history of the Chinese people.

The fossils found in the territory of China have established a complete sequence of the human evolutionary stages, from *Homo Erectus* (humanoid), to early *Homo sapiens* (ancient humans), and late *Homo sapiens* (modern humans). This suggests that this continent is one of the centers of human origin.

The human fossils from these periods also have a wide distribution—evidence of the earliest group, known as the Yuanmou people (about 1.7 million years ago), has been found in Yunnan. Other humanoid fossils have been found in Lantian County in Shaanxi, Zhoukoudian in Beijing, Yun County and Yunxi County in Hubei, and He County in Anhui. Fossils of ancient humans living 100,000 to 40,000 years ago have been found in Dali County in Shaanxi; Xujiayao, Gao County of Shanxi; Jinniu Mountain, Yingkou in Liaoning; Changyang County in Hubei; Chao County in Anhui; Maba, Qujiang County in Guangdong, among others. Fossils of modern humans living 40,000 to 10,000 years ago have been discovered in a mountaintop cave in Zhoukoudian in Beijing; Zhiyu, Shuo County in Shanxi; Wushenqi in Inner Mongolia; Jianping County in Liaoning; Antu County, Yanbian in Jilin; Harbin City in Heilongjiang; Liujiang County in Guangxi; Xingyi County in Guizhou; Lijiang County in Yunnan; Left Town, Tainan County in Taiwan. My purpose in enumerating this list is to illustrate that there is fossil evidence of human activity dating back to the earliest days of human civilization, spanning North from Heilongjiang, Southwest to Yunnan, and East to Taiwan. It is difficult to imagine that in that primitive age, people so dispersed in all directions shared the same origin, and it is certain that these long-separated populations had to develop their own unique cultures to accommodate such diverse natural environments. This physical evidence contradicts the theories of unitary or external migratory origins of the Chinese people, and supports the theories of plural and indigenous origins.

Even if the argument above is not convincing enough, archeological evidence strongly indicates that during the Neolithic Age, the territory of China was home to a variety of local cultural regions. If we believe that peoples who share an ethnicity must have a certain degree of cultural consistency, then we can presume that as early as 6000 BCE, there existed many different regional groups within the current territory of China. The different cultural regions during the Neolithic Period can serve as a starting point for us to begin to understand the structure of the unified multi-ethnic Chinese nation.

Integration and convergence of diverse Neolithic cultures

In recent years, more than 7000 Neolithic archeological sites, dating from the period between 6000 and 2000 BCE, have been found in the provinces and autonomous regions of China. The archeological community largely agrees on the rough outline of the content, evolution, integration, and convergence of different cultural regions evidenced by these findings, although there are still many topics that remain controversial. I cannot elaborate on all of this research here, but I can describe some relevant materials from the Central Plains region.

Two Neolithic cultural regions lie in the mid- and lower-Yellow River, one being located in the west, the other in the east:

The Neolithic cultures of the mid-Yellow River region follow this sequence: Early-Yangshao culture (6000–5400 BCE), Yangshao culture (5000–3000 BCE), and Henan Longshan culture (2900–2000 BCE). Following the Henan Longshan culture was probably the Xia culture. Because the Yangshao culture is famous for its painted pottery, it has been called the ‘painted pottery culture.’ The distribution of the Yangshao culture was centered around the Wei, Fen, and Luo tributaries of the Yellow River in the Central Plains region; its Northern boundary was the Great Wall, Southern boundary was the Northwest of Hubei, to the East in Eastern Henan, and to the West

in the Gansu and Qinghai border areas. But by the time of the rise of the Henan Longshan culture, its influence in the mid-Yellow River region had declined.

The lower-Yellow River region had a separate sequence of cultural development: Qinglangang culture (5400- 4000 BCE), Dawenkou culture (4300- 2500 BCE), Shandong Longshan culture (2500-2000 BCE), and the Yue Shi culture (1900-1500 BCE). The Yue Shi culture was likely preceded by the Shang culture. The Longshan culture is known for its shiny black pottery, so it has been called the 'black pottery culture'.

When the Yangshao culture of the mid-Yellow River suddenly declined around 3000 BCE, the culture of the lower-Yellow River began a Westward expansion. Thus, the Henan Longshan culture preceded the Yangshao culture in the region. Although archeologists believe that there were regional differences between the Henan and Shandong Longshan cultures, however it is obvious that the culture in the mid-Yellow River region was converged and integrated by the culture in the lower-Yellow River region.

The middle and lower regions of the Yangtze River featured the same two separate cultural regions during the Neolithic Age. The cultural region of the lower-Yangtze centered around the Taihu Plains, south to Hangzhou Bay, and West to the Jiangsu and Anhui border areas. The sequence of cultural development is generally described as: Hemudu culture (5000-4400 BCE), Majiabing and Songze cultures (4300-3300 BCE), and Liangzhu culture (3300-2200 BCE). The Liangzhu and Henan Longshan cultures existed during the same period, and the former's cultural characteristics were closely linked to the latter's.

The Neolithic cultures of the mid-Yangtze River were centered around the Jiangnan Plains, the Dongting Lake Plain to the South, Three Gorges to the West, and Southern Henan to the North. There are differing views as to the sequence of cultural development, however the general understanding is: Daxi culture (4400-3300 BCE), Qujialing culture (3000-2000 BCE), and Qinglongquan culture (2400 BCE)—because of the influence of the Longshan culture of the Central Plains, it is also known as the Hubei Longshan culture. Both the native cultures of the mid- and lower-Yangtze regions, were affected in their later development by the infiltration of the lower-Yellow River Longshan culture, thus they were at a disadvantage.

The Northern cultural region of Yanliao, as well as the upper-Yellow River cultural region, and the Southern Chinese cultural region during the Neolithic Age will be explored in a later discussion.

According to archeological findings, the similar ecological conditions of the Central Plains between the mid and lower reaches of the two rivers during the Neolithic era described above, explain the dawn of Chinese civilization, in the 3000 years between 5000 and 2000 BCE, when the ancestors of the Chinese nation were still scattered in various regions. In these separate regions, they established their own unique cultures, and from this we can see the starting point of the structure of the unified multi-ethnic Chinese nation.

In the midst of this multiple structuring, emerged a system of competition, in which more advanced cultures were absorbed by less advanced cultures while maintaining their own characteristics during contact. For example, eventually the Yangshao culture in the mid-Yellow River region began to infiltrate into the upper-Yellow River cultural region in the West. However, when the Yangshao culture came in contact with the

superior Shandong Longshan culture of the lower-Yellow River, there emerged its successor, the Henan Longshan culture. Archeologists add the regional names in front of the Longshan culture to indicate that they still emerged from the native cultures, and describe the real process of intercultural exchange among different groups. As a result, a single cultural structure came out of a multiplicity.

Emergence of a cohesive Core of the Han ethnicity

China's earliest confirmed historical records are the Shang Dynasty Oracles, which according to legend were compiled by Confucius in the *Book of History (Shangshu 尚书)*. Early history books organize ancient history into the system of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors. Some of these written historical materials can be confirmed by archeological data, so that we have a fairly reliable knowledge of the period between the late-Neolithic Age to the Bronze Age, especially since the excavation of the Xia Dynasty ruins of Wangchenggang in the early 1980's, which are generally believed to be the 'Yangcheng' sites of the early Xia Dynasty. The history of Xia Dynasty is no longer a legend. The history of Shang Dynasty is evidenced by oracle bone inscriptions, the history of Zhou Dynasty by bronze inscriptions, and written records for later periods are available for examination. The Huaxia group, the predecessor to the Han ethnicity, underwent the historical process from diversity to unity exactly during the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties.

Cultural relics discovered at the 'Yangcheng' archeological sites in Henan show that Xia Dynasty was the Bronze Age successor to the Neolithic Henan Longshan culture. Archeological relics from the mid- and lower-Yellow River also demonstrate early development of agriculture in these regions. This evidence can be linked with the legend of Yu, a ruler of the Xia Dynasty, about taming the flood (during the mid- and late-Henan Longshan culture). It reflects the level of development about the forces of production for the region's early inhabitants. We also remember that the Henan Longshan culture, based on the Yangshao culture, emerged from the absorption of the Shandong Longshan culture, so it can be said that the culture of Huaxia began with the combination of different cultures from the mid- and lower-Yellow River regions.

Legendary history suggests that before Yu, there were also Yao, Shun, and the Yellow Emperor, the mythological ancestors of the Chinese nation. Most of the legends are about their conquests of the surrounding ethnic minorities known as the Man, Yi, Rong and Di barbarians. The Yellow Emperor had defeated Chiyou and the Yan Emperor, in what is now Hubei Province. According to the *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji 史记)*, Shun exiled the tribes that opposed him to the lands beyond civilization in order to change the latter's customs. This expulsion led the expansion of the peoples and culture of the Central Plains. During Yu's time, according to the *Commentary of Zhuo on the Spring and Autumn Annals (Zuo Zhuan 左传)*, "Yu summoned a meeting of dukes in the Tu Mountains, accepting valuable tributes from a myriad of kingdoms." *The Tribute of Yu* refers to the region at this time as 'Nine Kingdoms', which generally includes the mid- and lower-Yellow River and the lower-Yangtze regions, establishing the core of the growing Huaxia ethnicity.

The successors of the Xia were the Shang, the Shang, originally were the nomadic Yi peoples in the East. They later migrated to Mount Tai, and then West to the Eastern part of Henan. They developed agriculture and tilled the land with animals. The

combination of agriculture and animal husbandry strengthened the economy. Although initially a part of the Xia, they later garnered enough power to rule the Nine States, establishing the Shang Dynasty, and splitting the kingdom into Central, North, South, East, and West regions. The *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 诗经) states in the chapter of *Ode to Shang* (*Shangsong* 商颂): “the territory of Shang covers thousands of miles, its peoples live even by the Four Seas.” (邦畿千里, 维民所止, 肇域彼四海). The Shang territory included parts of modern-day Henan, Shandong, Hebei, Liaoning, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Anhui, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang, and possibly Jiangxi, Hunan, and Inner Mongolia.

The successors to the Shang were the Zhou, who came from the West. Legend says that the founder of this dynasty was Jiang Yuan, and some think that the Zhou was exactly part of the Rong in the West, i.e. the Qiang. Initially active in the upper-Wei River, it was conferred the name Zhou by the Shang. The Zhou inherited the territory of the Shang, and through their own force extended this territory to the middle reaches of the Yangtze River. The *Book of Songs* states in the chapter of the *Northern Mountains*: “All the lands in the world are that of the Zhou, all the peoples in the world are the subjects of the Zhou.” They established the patriarchal clan system, through which feudal clans controlled their particular territories. They also established the nine squares’ system, transforming agriculture and increasing productivity. The Western Zhou Dynasty maintained loose unified control for about three hundred years, but was later annexed into the Eastern Zhou Dynasty during the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods. During this time of unification, each regional culture retained their cultural characteristics. Up until the Warring States period, as Xunzi described: “the people who live in the Chu Kingdom are the Chu, in the Yue Kingdom are the Yue.” Here Xia refers to the core of the Central Plains.

When people arrived from anywhere and settled in the Yue Kingdom, they became the Yue and when they arrived in the Chu Kingdom, they became the Chu. There were obvious differences among Chu, Yue and Xia.

Undeniably, the flow of people, cultural exchange, and inter-state rivalries during the 500 years of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods resulted in a cultural peak in Chinese history. These 500 years were also an incubation period for the Han ethnicity as an entity, lasting until the Qin’s Unification of the Six States. The designation of ‘Han’ as an ethnicity came about from the contact of the Han Dynasty and successor peoples of the Central Plains, with the surrounding peoples. The general rule in naming an ethnicity comes with the transition from ‘they are called,’ to ‘we are called.’ People will not consciously agree that they live in a common community if they have no contact with the outside world. An ethnicity is not just a community of people with a common way of life; they need to have contact with and recognize those outside of their ethnicity before they can recognize themselves as having a shared ethnic identity and ethnic consciousness. There is a process of transition from existing as a community, to living consciously as a community. The Qin or Han peoples think that their being Qin or Han peoples is the result of other peoples calling them Qin or Han. It must be noted that in order for an ethnicity to be named, it must first exist as an ethnicity, and does not become an ethnicity until it has been named.

The designation of the Han ethnicity could not have occurred earlier than the Han Dynasty, but its formation must have occurred earlier than the Han Dynasty. Some argue that the Han peoples have been designated an ethnicity since the beginning of

the Northern and Southern Dynasties. This may be consistent with the facts, because after the Wei and Jin Dynasties, it was the 16 states splitting period during which the peoples speaking Northern languages began to infiltrate into the Central Plains, which was also a time of significant contact and mixture between the Han and non-Han peoples. 'Han peoples' also became the popular way to refer to the peoples originally from the Central Plains. At the time, in the view of people from outside of the Central Plains, natives of the Central Plains were part of an ethnic group to be referred to by the same name, demonstrating that at this time the Han had already formed a distinctive ethnicity. Beginning from the Huaxia peoples, this was the initial incubation period to which the 2000 years' process of formation of the Han ethnicity can be traced.

The formation of the Han ethnicity is an important stage in the development of the Chinese nation and produced a cohesive core of the unified multi-ethnic structure.

Regional integration

The end of the local separatist movements of the Warring States period by Qinshihuang was an epoch-making event, as it established the unified multi-ethnic structure that has defined mainstream Chinese history. Of course, the scope of this unification during the Qin Dynasty was limited to the mid- and lower-Yangtze and Yellow River agricultural regions of the Central Plains, moreover, the structure of this unification occurred over a long period of time. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, each region developed a local economy, infrastructure, and trade. However, in their struggles for dominance and hegemony, the kingdoms of the Warring States period had already basically integrated the Central Plains area into a whole. Building upon this foundation, Qinshihuang made significant accomplishments: transportation integration, standardization of the writing system, established a system of counties and prefectures, standard systems of weights and measures, and set standardized institutional norms for economic, political, and cultural institutions.

The integration of transportation infrastructures and the standardization of the writing system were also necessary for economic unification. The traditional system of block-characters used visual symbols to separate language and text. Standardization of the writing system involved adopting criterion among the common symbols all kingdoms used; it served to unify the system of information and created a shared written language for use across the multi-lingual kingdom. This informational tool is still vital today. The abolition of feudalism, establishment of the system of counties and prefectures, and establishment of a centralized system of government lasted until now for more than 2000 years. I won't say any more about the unification of the Central Plains, we only need point out that this was but one more step towards the creation of the unified multi-ethnic Chinese nation. The first step was the formation of the Huaxia group, the second step was the formation of the Han ethnicity; it could be said that the core of the Han ethnicity grew from the core of the Huaxia.

I say that the Qin unification was just one step in the formation of the Chinese nation, because at the time the territory of unification was only within the Central Plains region. This region represented only one small part of the living territory of the Chinese nation, the lowest altitude of the three terrains. Regions surrounding the Central Plains still had many different groups that would gradually become incorporated further towards unification. Let me first discuss the situation in the North.

Up to now, the archeology of China has concentrated on the Central Plains region, so our knowledge of the ancient history of the surrounding areas is still relatively limited. Professor Chen Liankai has put forward an argument worthy of attention, a perspective reiterated by my colleague Professor GuBao after several decades of fieldwork in the Northwest. They both believe that at the same time as the unification of the Central Plains during the Qin and Han periods, the Northern nomadic areas were also unified under the rule of the Huns. They have also suggested that the unification of the North and South was necessary before the Chinese nation could be considered a complete unified nation. I agree with this view.

The unification of the Northern and Southern regions respectively has its ecological foundations. First of all, the Central Plains in the region between the mid- and lower-Yangtze and Yellow Rivers had an agricultural culture since the Neolithic Age. Archeological sites from the Neolithic mid- and lower-Yellow River show evidence of millet farming, while the mid- and lower-Yangtze show evidence of rice farming. The apparent emphasis on water conservancy by the rulers since the Xia Dynasty demonstrates the importance of irrigation to the agriculture. The small-scale peasant economy has been the fundamental way of life for the Han ethnicity up till now, and the Han have not yet rid themselves of their legendary ancestor Shen Nong's shadow.

This region of arable land is bordered on the North by the Mongolian Plateau and Gobi Desert, and in the West by the Loess and Qinghai-Tibet Plateaus. Other than a small portion of loess and a few basins, these regions are not suitable for farming, however, they are appropriate for pastoral nomadism. The influence of natural conditions on agriculture and nomadism produced respectively different cultures, which accounts for the unification of the Central Plains and the North respectively.

The geographical division between the agricultural and nomadic regions generally originates from the beginning of construction of the still-existing Great Wall during the Warring States period. During the Qin-Han period, the reconstruction of this wall was used by the agricultural peoples as a primary line of defense against nomadic invaders. Farmers were on the defensive, and nomads on the offensive, which also determined the differences between the two groups' economies. Farmers could not leave the land, especially after the development of irrigation agriculture—the construction of irrigation infrastructure further tied farmers to their land. With the growth of population, the peasants opened up wasteland and expanded their land around the original home. They clung so tightly to their homeland that they only moved in instances of natural disaster.

Nomadism was the opposite. In the nomadic economy, animals live on grass, which grows naturally from the ground. The animals survive by moving around in search of new grass, and the nomadic herdsmen survive on the skins, wool, meat, milk, and other products from the animals. So, they move on the grasslands with their herds, or so called 'living by the grass.' Within the nomad economy, there is, of course, a certain regularity of movement with their herds; however, in general nomads cannot settle for too long in one place, and must relocate around the grasslands seasonally. Nomadic herdsmen also use horses, which allows them to relocate relatively rapidly and easily. As soon as they encounter food scarcity for

the herds, nomads in the Northern grasslands will mobilize and move southwards to the agricultural areas. When these two groups' economies and populations developed to a certain point, conflict inevitably arose, and the nomadic herdsmen became a serious threat to the peoples living in agricultural regions. Small-scale farmers were unable to resist this threat on their own, and so had no choice but to seek out alternative defensive means, and mobilize themselves to form collective forces to build up their defenses. This was a central factor in the formation of a centralized political system, and the construction of the Great Wall is evidence of this historical process.

The nomadic economy also needed to develop similar institutions to mediate inter-group conflicts over pasturage, as well as organize armed forces for defensive purposes or to seize material resources, property, and population. We know very little about the early history of the peoples of the Northern Steppe. From relevant materials on the Huns in the Han Dynasty historical records, we know that at the time they were already a powerful force in the North, and were already in possession of the territories beyond the Great Wall to the East to the Greater Hinggan Mountains, and to the West to the Qilan Mountains and the vast area around Tianshan. It is here that we can refer to the unity of the North. By the beginning of the Han Dynasty, the situation of "the great Han to the South, the strong Hu to the North" was already well established.

The real course of history can, of course, not be this simple. Since the 1930's, archeologists have known about the Neolithic Red Mountain culture outside the Great Wall in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia (Zhao Wuda Area). The predecessors in this area had already developed settled agriculture, as well as an economy relying on herding, fishing and hunting. In recent years, excavations have unearthed an altar and a goddess temple built about 5000 years ago, as well as jade artifacts from the same family as the ones of the Shang period. The discovery of bronze artifacts in the Northeast makes us further realize our lack of understanding of the early cultures in this region. In fact, it is these Northeast Plains, especially in the contact zone between the Greater Hinggan and Yanshan Mountains, that gave birth to many of the peoples who would later take over the Central Plains areas. I will go further into this below.

Despite a long history of supposedly continuous looting and warfare, the relations between the peoples of the North and Central plains was not always antagonistic. Conflict was present; however, a more important but often ignored factor were the relations of mutual dependency, through regularized exchanges and transactions.

The notion that nomadic herdsmen survived on animal husbandry alone is incomplete. Nomads did not subsist on meat alone, nor did they wear only the wool of their animals. Because they lived in a mobile economy, and they could not settle in one place, they needed to procure supplies such as grain, textiles, metal tools, tea, wine, beverages, and everything else that they could not produce in relatively small oasis-based farms and handicraft operations, from the agricultural regions. One channel for procuring resources was through the gifts from the governments of the Central Plains, another channel was through small-scale trade.

Trade also went both ways. Farmers required livestock for agricultural labor and transportation, and the army needed horses, neither of which could be produced in the agricultural areas. At the same time, farmers also needed beef and mutton for food, and raw materials like fur. For their part, farmers supplied important items like silk and

tea to the nomads. As a result, the trade between nomads and farmers later became known as “horse-silk market” or “tea-horse trade.” Many products originating in the Central Plains, including currency, have been found in Northern nomad tombs from the late-Warring States period and the Han Dynasty.

As a result of increasing interaction and interdependence, the Hun nomads bordering the agricultural areas finally lived among the Han farmers during the first century AD. They gradually moved into a period of a semi-agricultural and semi-pastoral economy. During the middle of the first century BCE, under great pressure from Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, these Hun nomads were split into the Northern and Southern branches. Afterwards, the Southern Huns did not migrate with the Northern Huns to Central Asia, but chose instead to stay in what is now Inner Mongolia. Gradually, they crossed the Great Wall and mixed with the neighboring Han.

The struggles between the farming and nomadic groups led to the construction of the Great Wall. It separated the land between the Warring States and the Qin dynasty. It is a visceral sign that in the early days the farmers bore the brunt of nomadic aggression. However, after the growth of the unified agricultural areas, the Han Dynasty emperors began to take on a counter-offensive strategy to the nomad's attacks. This change in strategy contributed to the massive westward expansion of the Han ethnicity, during which 280,000 people (mainly Han ethnicity) immigrated to Western Gansu, establishing the four counties of Hexi: Dunhuang, Jiuquan, Wu Qi, and Zhangye.

The four counties of Hexi occupy the North-South corridor between the Loess Plateau and Tianshan Mountains. The plain areas of this region receive very little precipitation, while the mountainous areas receive more. The snow melt from the mountains is sufficient to supply the farmlands below. This provided the economic basis for the Han ethnicity to reclaim wasteland for farming. This region was originally pasture land for the Wusun and Yueshi, and was later expropriated and occupied by the Huns. Together with the Qiang, the Huns besieged the Han to the West. Emperor Wu forced out the Huns in 122 BCE, and sent Han people to settle in the four counties, forming a gap in the encirclement, instituting the so-called “isolation of the Qiang and Huns”. This corridor also opened up a channel of further Western expansion of the Han Dynasty. Using this corridor, the Han allied with the small agricultural kingdoms in the basins south of the Tianshan Mountains, which were attacked and plundered by the Huns, and the Wusun who had been exiled by the Huns to Central Asia. This alliance resulted in the anti-encirclement, and ultimately the defeat of the Huns.

From the Mongolian Plateau and then the North Tianshan Road, extending to Central Asia, is a prairie which, according to the nomads, allows for unimpeded galloping, where animals can roam freely as they please. The nomadic way of combat, in which if you stay I go, if I stay you go, resulted in a people that were at times consolidated, and at times scattered. Whichever tribe was strongest would rule the other tribes, and lent its name to the nomads of this huge grassland. As a result, history books enumerate a sequence of powerful ethnic names in this Northern prairie: after the Huns there were the Xianbei, Rouran, Turks, Tiele, Quarluqs, Uyghurs, and many others. They sometimes occupied the entire grasslands, sometimes only parts of it. In the end, the Mongolians pushed their forces through to Western Asia.

Of the nations that came to rule these grasslands, many still have descendants in the region. However, most of them have combined with other ethnicities, intermingling and intermixing, creating an extremely complex historical process that we will not elaborate upon here. Generally speaking, there are five Turkic-speaking ethnic minorities in Xinjiang: the Uyghur, Kazakh, Uzbek, Tatar, and Kyrgyz. They are all descendants of the early residents of the grasslands.

The large-scale mixing and integration of the ethnicities in the Central Plains

After the formation of the Han ethnicity into a cohesive core, their people began to absorb the surrounding ethnic groups. In the final years of the Western Jin Dynasty, after the Han and Wei Dynasties, the so-called 'Sixteen States' appeared in the Yellow River and Basu Basin regions. Actually, there were more than 20 discrete local governments, mostly established by non-Han peoples. This period of roughly half a century (304–339) was the most obvious time of ethnic integration. The legacy of the Han ethnicity's transition from multiplicity to unity began during the Han Dynasty. The 'allegiance' with the Huns was one aspect of this accomplishment.

Among these local regimes, the Huns had established three; the Di, four; the Jie, one; the Xianbei, seven; the Qiang, one; and the Han, three. They occupied parts of modern-day Shaanxi, Shanxi, Hebei, Henan, Gansu, Ningxia, Sichuan, Shandong, Jiangsu, Anhui, Liaoning, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, and other provinces. Effectively, they occupied the entire Central Plains region.

The non-Han peoples in the North and West who had established local regimes in the areas described above consisted in the largest population of non-Han peoples in the region. Due to their cohabitation without integration, during this period 'Han' was the popular term used to refer to them. Because of the low political status of the Han, 'Han' was also used as an insult. But of the non-Han peoples who entered the Northern regions, as soon as they traded nomadic herding for agriculture, the strength of the economy would ultimately play a role in increasing their social status. There are records of 'the northern barbarians taking the Han name' around this time. By the time of the Northern Wei Dynasty, which unified the Northern regions, the system of complex surnames had been replaced by the single surname system, which was meant to compel the northerners to take Han surnames. Studies of official statistics in the *Book of Wei* show that among the 123 northern non-Han surnames, 60 were already absent in the official records. Inter-marriage between ethnic groups was quite common, even among the upper echelons of society. The political status of the non-Han was also not durable in a social climate in such flux, and as a result they were absorbed into the Han ethnicity. The growth of the Han ethnicity was not entirely due to natural population growth; the more important factor was the absorption of the non-Han ethnic groups that relocated to the agricultural areas, creating a snowball effect.

After the split of the Southern and Northern dynasties, the expanded Central Plains region unified again during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. The ruling class of the Tang Dynasty included many of mixed-ethnicity. At the time of its founding, the Han-icized Xianbei nobility played a pivotal supportive role, so they always had an important position within the resulting ruling class. Studies show that of the 369 ministers of the Tang Dynasty, 36 were of northern tribal origin, accounting for one tenth of the total.

The *Book of Tang* also holds a special provision for *biographies of those Northern generals*. The Shatuo people were also quite dominant during the Tang and Song Dynasties. Among the Five Dynasties after the Tang, that is the late-Tang, late-Jin, and late-Jiang were all established by the Shatuo, and Zhuang Zong, who while famous for reviving the Tang Dynasty, was a Shatuo. So although the Tang Dynasty was nominally under Han rule, in reality it was under the rule of many ethnic groups. During the 500 years between the Tang and Song Dynasties, the Central Plains region was a melting pot, with the Han at its core. Many non-Han were integrated by the local Han people, and became Han themselves. Of course the process of integration was very complicated, but the result was that many surnames that existed in the history books, like Xianbei, Di, Jie, and others disappeared in real life.

The Tang Dynasty was a cultural peak for the Chinese nation; its defining characteristics were openness and innovation. This is intimately related to the Tang's great ethnic diversity.

The ethnicities of the north continued to incorporate new blood with the Han

If we argue that the Northern Song Dynasty overcame the split of the Five Dynasties, and the unification of the Central Plains was restored, then its power was certainly weak. In 916 AD, a strong people arose in the North called the Khitan, in what is today Balinzuqi in Inner Mongolia. They established a kingdom called Liao. Its territory extended from the mouth of the Heilongjiang River, to the middle of modern-day Mongolia. Its Southern region extended from modern-day Tianjin, across Hebei's Baxian County, to Yanmenguan in Shanxi, sharing a border with the Northern Song Dynasty. They ruled for 210 years before being defeated by another Northern tribe, the Jurchen. The Jurchen originated in the Northeast, and in the year 1115 they established a kingdom called Jin. In 1125, they defeated the Liao, and continued on to defeat the Northern Song, successively establishing capitals in modern-day Beijing and Kaifeng. Their territory included the Liao's native land, and expanded westward to Shaanxi, Gasu, and the Western Xia border, and southward to the Qinling Mountains and the Huaihe River to the border of the Southern Song. The Northern Song had only 300 years of history. This period of mixing of the different ethnic groups in the Northern Central Plains provided a process of assimilation and integration, and certainly contributed to the Han ethnicity's expansion of power southwards. But that is a story for another time.

Here, we should talk a bit about the Songliao Plains, which lie in the East of the Greater Xing'an Mountains. The Greater Xing'an Mountains at that time played as a barrier between the Songliao Plains and the vast grasslands, and this vast forest may have blocked the further expansion eastwards of the nomadic tribes. It appears that some nomadic tribes can trace their origins to the hunting tribes in this forest.

Recently, I went to the Greater Xing'an Forest region to conduct field research. Ten kilometers northwest of the town of Alihe, Hulunbeier League, in a forest I saw a cave called Gaxian Cave. Inside the cave, there are stone carvings dating back to 443 AD, made by Emperor Taiwu of the Northern Wei Dynasty in memory of his ancestors. This is evidence that Xianbei lived in the Greater Xing'an Forest region. The Xianbei later moved from the mountainous Southwest to the Hulunchi Grasslands, and

continued their migration Southwest to the region between Yinshan and the river bend. Here they formed the TuobaXianbei, some of whom entered Qinghai, while the majority were active during the beginning of the fourth century in modern-day Inner Mongolia and the Datong area in Shanxi. In 386 AD, they established the Wei kingdom, and in 439 AD they unified the Northern areas of the Central Plains.

The Khitan peoples who established the kingdom of Liao were originally active among the nomadic tribes of the upper-Liao River. Having surrendered to the Tang, in 916 AD they established the Liao kingdom. Prior to and after the establishment of the kingdom, large numbers of Han peoples had already migrated into the area, and had developed agriculture and handicrafts industries. However, after being defeated by the Jin, the Khitan peoples integrated with the Han and Jurchen.

The Jurchen tribe that established the Jin kingdom also originated from the Songliao Plains. They travelled the same road as the Khitan, first going from weak to strong, and then from strength to death. After occupying the northern part of the Central Plains, they named the inhabitants Han peoples, Yan peoples, Southerners, and others in order not to be referred to as 'Jurchen'. However, later on many Jurchen started to use Han surnames. There are 31 such surnames recorded in the *History of Jin*, and this was certainly not the result of imperial compulsion, but rather it arose naturally from the people. Of course, using Han surnames certainly does not imply that they had completely become Han, but only suggests that they no longer resisted Han-icization.

Despite their political superiority in the northern part of the Central Plains, neither the Khitan nor the Jurchen were able to unify China. The regime that was able to incorporate all of the territory of China under a single regime was the Mongol-established Yuan Dynasty. Later on, the descendants of the Jurchen, the Manchus, established the Qing Dynasty. The Yuan Dynasty ruled for ninety-six years (1271–1365 AD), and the Qing Dynasty ruled for nearly two hundred sixty years (1644–1911 AD). The Mongols and Manchus of course were non-Han, and in the present they still have a population of over one million among ethnic minorities. While they were in power, their populations grew; however, after their rule, most Mongols and Manchus integrated with the Han.

The peoples under the rule of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty were split into four groups: Mongols, Semu, Han, and Southerners. During this period, the Jurchen, Khitan, and Koreans were all included under the 'Han,' and received the same treatment as Han. According to the *History of Yuan*, Jurchen and Khitan are the same as Han. If there are Jurchen and Khitan in the northwest who would not agree to use the Han language, they would be considered to be the same as Mongolian; the Jurchen (who had chosen the name Khitan) who grew up in the Han areas, were the same as Han. (Biography of Emperor Kublai Khan, *Shizujishi* 世祖记十). It seems that either there were distinctions between the Jurchen and the Khitan, or they were integrated with the Han, or integrated with the Mongols. During the Yuan Dynasty, the Han were divided into two groups: the Han people, and the Southerners, demarcated by the border between Song and Jin. All of the Han living in the territory originally belonging to the Jin, later conquered by the Mongols, were still called Han. Those who were living in the Mongols-conquered territory of the Southern Song, were called either Southerners, Song peoples, new peoples, or barbarians. It also appears that this included the non-Han living South of the

Yangtze River. This further strengthened the integration of these non-Han peoples with the Han.

After the Mongols, a Han-dominated regime came to power, called the Ming. They initially ordered the restoration of 'Tang Dynasty Dress,' and banned the clothing, languages, and surnames of the Northern tribes. But using administrative orders to try and change ethnic customs, habits, and languages is futile. In a 1442 AD memorial found in the *Ming Records*, there is reference to the popularity of Tatar dresses at the time, over Tang dresses. However, popular exchanges are proved to be useful. In his *Rizhilu*, on the topic of ethnic mixing at the time, GuYanwu of the late-Ming and early-Qing wrote: "In Han's genealogy, surnames used to mix with that of the barbarians. Nobles nowadays sighed, 'the barbarians followed Han's language and forgot their own origins.'" He went on to write, "Most of this generation of the Shandong clans find their origins in the Jin and Yuan." This indicates that in the upper-classes of the time, intermarriage was already common, and many were already Han-icized.

A concrete example of the integration of the Mongols with the Han can be found in Mr. Liang Shuming's recently published *Questions and Answers* (p.2). He writes, "My ancestors were originally in the same clan as the Yuan emperors, sharing the surname "Esentemur"(也先帖木儿), and were of the Mongol ethnicity. After the fall of the Yuan, the last emperor of the Dynasty and the rest of the royal family fled to the north to what is now Mongolia. However, our family did not take this path, but chose to stay in Ruyang, Henan, and took the Han surname Liang...on the topic of divine lineage, in the 500 years between the end of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, not only did others not know of our Mongolian heritage, but even our own family members would not have known if they did not have written genealogical records. But over hundreds of years of intermarriage with Han people, and continuous intermixing of blood, there was a natural emergence of a temperament somewhere in the middle." Before reading this passage, I had not known Mr. Liang's ancestors were Mongolian. He certainly had never registered as Mongolian and he seemed comfortable with being recognized and self-identifying as Han. But it is interesting that he views the 500-year-old origin of lineage and his 'middle temperament' to come from the same source. You can see that ethnic consciousness runs deep. After the liberation, there were many who had originally been registered as Han ethnicity, changed their registration to Mongolian.

It was noting that the Mongolians first unified the North, and only later did they push westward into Central Asia, then returned to conquer Gansu, and expanded down the Yangtze River, into Sichuan and Yunnan. During these wars, another important ethnic minority was added to the Chinese nation: the Hui. In the 1983 census, their population stood at 7.22 million, second only to the Zhuang minority among China's ethnic minorities, and the group that is most widely distributed. They live mainly in Ningxia and Gansu, however they are also in Shanghai, Henan, Shandong, Yunnan, and other provinces—indeed, most large cities have a Hui neighborhood of varying size.

Around the middle of the seventh century, a large number of Muslim merchants from Arabia and Persia settled in the coastal commercial ports of Guangzhou, Quanzhou, Hangzhou, and Yangzhou, they were at the time called "foreign visitors". After the Mongols' conquest of Central Asia in the early thirteenth century, a large number of merchants and craftsmen signed on to conduct military logistical expeditions. Known at the time as the 'Horseback Red Army,' they returned to conquer the

Southern Song Dynasty, Han peoples began to call them the 'Hui Army.' It was in the exchanges of foreign visitors and the Hui Army that most intermarriages between the Han and the Hui occurred, forming a group that included all of the Muslims of the Central Plains. In addition to the Central Asian merchants and craftsmen who settled in the large cities with the Mongolian army, a large number of Central Asians settled in various other regions, mainly in Gansu and Yunnan. In accordance with the principle of "mount horses in preparation for combat and dismount to open up wasteland", they settled down. During the Yuan Dynasty, they were given higher social and political status than the Han people. During the Ming Dynasty, they retained relatively high status in the government and military. In fact, in regions with particularly large Hui populations like Gansu, Qinghai, and Ningxia, there was a saying that "for every three Han, there are seven Hui." There were also large numbers of Hui in Dali, in the Yunnan region. However, as a result of the Qing Dynasty's ethnic vendetta, the Hui population in the Northwest and Yunnan was greatly reduced.

Because this ethnic group had a strong commercial tradition, and participated in much commercial activity along the Silk Road during the early Tang Dynasty, foreign visitors occupied an important status. After the formation of the Hui ethnicity, the reliance on the 'Tea-Horse Trade' on the Loess Plateau region bordering Mongolia in the North, and the Qinghai-Tibetan nomadic region in the West, that is the upper corridor of the Yellow River in Gansu, Qinghai, and Ningxia, was especially beneficial for the development of Hui ethnic pride, especially for their expertise in commerce. As a result, the largest populations of Hui today are still in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, and Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu.

Nowadays, the Hui use the common Han language. It is difficult to determine when and how the Muslim populations arriving by sea and from Central Asia lost their language. Some people think that because women were scarce among the merchant and soldier populations that they intermarried with local women. As a result, mothers taught their language to their children which led to the linguistic change. In order to conduct trade, merchants also had to master the local language, which may be another reason. Moreover, Hui generally lived in small, dispersed settlements, and in close proximity to Han settlements. As a result, the convergence of language and every aspect of lifestyle was a natural sociological conclusion. However, they adhered to their Islamic faith, and thus were able to maintain and strengthen their ethnic consciousness in the vast ocean of the Han ethnicity. In general, their habit was that after a Hui man married a Han woman, she had to convert to Islam. Hui women, however, could not be married to Han men, unless the men converted to Islam *and* become a member of the Hui.

The Manchus of the Qing Dynasty did not transgress the old road of the Northern tribes entering the Central Plains. This is the history of our recent memory, so we need not say more. Before the liberation, I had not heard that the linguist Luo Changpei and the writer Lao She were Manchurian. They both became open about their ethnic origins only after the liberation. Of course, we Han coexisted with them without ever sensing any sort of difference between us. Prior to revealing their ethnic origins, they knew that they were Manchurian. This again demonstrates that the multi-ethnic component of the unified nation is stubbornly persistent.

During the course of history, the non-Han tribes of the North repeatedly conducted large-scale invasions of the agricultural areas of the Central Plains, and continuously infused new blood into the Han ethnicity, bolstering up the strength of the Han, while at the same time providing more contributing factors to the multi-ethnic makeup of the Chinese nation. In this essay, I can only provide the simplified narrative described above, and point out that it is only an outline.

Han contributions to other ethnic groups

In ancient China, other than the Yueshi, Wusun, Huns, Turks, and other groups that migrated abroad, the vast majority of the peoples making up the Chinese nation had lived in the national territory for a long time, and their exchanges and integration were regular. In the above section, I discussed how the Han ethnicity integrated many different ethnic groups during different periods. In this section, I would like to select some instances in which Han peoples were integrated into other ethnic groups.

There were two types of situations in which Han peoples were integrated into other groups; one situation was by force, for example those made captives of the Huns, Qiang, and Turks, or those forcibly resettled to the border regions by the rulers of the Central Plains, such as soldiers, poor people, and criminals; the second situation was voluntary relocation as a result of natural disasters. The numbers of settlers in both groups were quite large. Some estimate that the Huns took around 300,000 slaves, accounting for around one-seventh to one-fifth of the Huns total population (*Selected Works of Hun History*, p.12). Others have estimated that the Huns took more than 500,000 slaves, accounting for one-third of the entire Hun population (*Ibid.*, p.10). These slaves were mainly Han, but also included Western tribes, Dingling, and other ethnicities. In the first three years of the Eastern Han Dynasty(109 AD), the Huns in the South bought more than 10,000 Han and Qiang slaves(*Book of the Later Han. Biography of the Huns in the Shang Dynasty*).

During the Western Han Dynasty, Hou Ying noted ten reasons to oppose the defense of the frontier and destroy the Great Wall, of which number seven reads: “many of the soldiers and slaves had hardships and planned to flee...sometimes they succeeded.” You can see that at the time, some Han people voluntarily fled to the nomadic regions in order to escape slavery. In the later years of the Eastern Han Dynasty, more than 100,000 Han voluntarily fled to the Wu Yuan region. After the fall of the Western Jin Dynasty, the Central Plains were again in turmoil, and many Han people fled to Liaoxi, Hexi, the Western and Southern regions. According to the *Biography of MuRongwei* from the *Book of Jin.*, “Two capitals were overtaken and the situation was very turbulent.As an official, Mu Rongwei was honest and upright, listening to people’s criticisms with an open mind. Some intellectuals and ordinary people brought their families to MuRongwei and were willing to be under his control. Mu Rongwei set up some prefectures to organize the newcomers. People from Jizhou were grouped together in what was called the Jiyang Prefecture, people from Yuzhou into a Zhou Prefecture, people from Qingzhou into a Yinqiu Prefecture and people from Binzhou into a Tang Guo Prefecture.”. You can imagine the numbers of displaced peoples.

Many Han peoples who migrated to other ethnic regions intermarried with the local peoples, and in order to adapt to the local way of life and natural environment, also changed their lifestyles, customs and habits. After several generations, they had

integrated with the local peoples. For example, in 390 AD, the Qu's Gaochang State, based in the Turpan Basin and adjacent areas, was originally a Han-dominated state. These were the descendants of the Han and Wei garrisons, as well as Jin Dynasty peoples, who had fled to the area. It was said in the *Biography of Gaochang* from the *Book of Wei*, "The people in Gaochang State were the descendants of the Hans from the Han-Wei Dynasty, who left the Hans in the Jin Dynasty because of the disturbed situation at that time" (彼之氓庶, 是没魏遗黎, 自晋化不纲, 困难播越, 世积已久). At that time, the influence of the Northern tribes on the people of the Gaochang was already very deep. In the *History of the North*, *History of Xiyue*, and the *History of Gao Changit* was stated: "Men dressed like the Hus, the women had their hair worn in a bun or coil. The tradition and customs were similar to the Hua Xia. The language used was similar to the Hans and they also used the Hus' language as well. Although they studied Mao Shi, Lun Yu, and Xiao Jin, they did so in the Hu language." Qu's Gaochang State lasted for 141 years, passing successively under the influence of the Northern tribes, including the Avars, Dinglings, and Turks. In 640 AD, as a result of the Tang Dynasty conquest, the Western States were established. In 866 AD, the Uyghurs occupied the Western States, establishing long-term control over the region. The descendants of local Han peoples integrated with the Uyghurs. At the same time, speakers of Karasahr-Kucha language (Tocharian language), Khotan language, and other groups using Indo-European languages and living in the oases of the southern Tianshan Mountains, were also integrated with the Uyghurs.

Another example: during the Warring States period, thousands of peasants led by Zhuang Chu of the Chu Kingdom migrated to the Dianchi, Yunnan region, in which he called himself the King of Dian. Since then, during the Han and Jin Dynasties many Han peoples were dispatched to Yunnan. However, most of the Han who moved to Yunnan before the Ming Dynasty integrated with the local peoples. The Han who moved to the Erhai Lake of the Dali region became an important part of the Bai ethnicity.

In the past, we have not sufficiently studied the history of interpenetration and integration of different ethnicities, and we especially haven't paid enough serious attention to the integration of the Han with other ethnic groups. As a result, it is very easy to get the biased impression that the Han ethnicity is more complex than other ethnicities. In fact, people from every ethnicity are constantly being absorbed by other groups, while at the same time their ethnic group is absorbing people from other ethnicities. There are some who think that ethnic groups with more highly developed economies and cultures will inevitably integrate groups with lower economic and cultural development. But this is a biased view, because history has demonstrated that the economically and culturally advanced Han were integrated into surrounding ethnic groups with lower levels of development. The process of inter-ethnic penetration and integration should be analyzed based on concrete evidence. I included this section in order to point out that when considering the formation and development of the Han ethnicity through the process of absorbing a large number of other ethnic groups, we should not forget that the Han never stopped exporting new blood to other ethnic groups. Speaking from a biological, or so-called "descent" basis, it could be said that the utility of this frequent intermixing and intermingling in the formation of the unified Chinese nationality demonstrates that no nation can be said to be of 'pure descent.'

The southern expansion of the Han ethnicity

As early as the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods, the Huaxia predecessors of the Han had already extended their influence in the East to the sea, South to the mid- and lower-Yangtze River, and West to the Loess Plateau. This core of expansion used two different strategies towards the surrounding groups, known at the time as the Man, Yi, Rong and Di barbarians: the first strategy was to encompass, or “make Yi like Xia”; the second strategy was to push them out to even more distant territories. This is illustrated by the split between the Northern and Southern Huns, where the Northern Huns were pushed out, and the Southern Huns incorporated. The Northern Huns pressed out to the large grasslands in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, expanding the territory of the Chinese nation. Not many other ethnic groups were able to do so. It is likely that early residents of the Shandong Peninsula, the ‘Eastern Yi’, crossed the sea, or migrated by land into the present-day Korean Peninsula and Japan. But the vast majority of non-Han who did not integrate, and only had the option to migrate to regions where the Han did not want to live, primarily the un-arable land in the grasslands and mountainous regions. There are some that have persisted into the present, and have retained their cultural characteristics within the unified Chinese nation, contributing to the multi-ethnic make up of the nation.

If one wanted to conduct a full historical review of this process, it could be traced back to the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors of the legendary era. The Yellow Emperor, considered by the Han to be their ancestor, once declared war against the Yan Emperor and Chiyou on the north bank of the Yellow River. The Yan Emperor was later added to the pantheon of Han ancestors, and it is generally believed that the Chinese nation is “the descendants of the Yan and Yellow Emperors.” In legends, Chiyou has always been relegated to the “outsiders” group. However, there are some who have related the so-called “Three Miao” that he historically led, with the contemporary Miao ethnicity. This is of course speculation, but after the time of Chiyou, there was a section that was left outside of the Han ethnicity that may support this.

As described above, from the archeological materials, we know that in the Neolithic era, the East and West sides of both mid- and lower-reaches of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers were different cultural areas. Beginning with the Qingliangang-Dawenkou culture (5300–2400 BCE) of the south-central plains of Shandong, there was a history of almost three thousand years of a well-developed agricultural culture, which people have connected with the Eastern Yi of the history books. Undoubtedly, many different clans were incorporated within the Eastern Yi. The Eastern Yi were the ancestors of the Shang Dynasty, and when they were defeated by the Zhou people from the west (who were the successors to the Qiang), one section integrated with the Huaxia group along with the Zhou people, and another section were expelled or fled. It is this section that, as discussed above, may have crossed the sea or land to the Korean peninsula and islands of Japan, but most of them went south.

My hypothesis here is based on my analysis of the Korean people in the 1930’s. In my master’s thesis, I noticed that in the physical data, many subjects shared the same type B with Jiangsu coastal residents, mainly the round head and short body type. This physical measurement profile is also found in the Dayaoshan Yao people of Guangxi. If the analysis of this data is credible, it is easy to put forward the idea of a shared history among the peoples from these three areas. Because my phenotypic analysis research

work has been interrupted for so long, and materials have been lost, the above points can only be made from memory.

My inference was supported by one of my teachers, Professor Pan Guangdan. According to written historical data and field observation in the Fanmin area of Fujian, he put forward the argument that I will describe briefly from memory as follows:

We can discern a path of migration from an examination of the place and ethnic group names Xu, Shu, Fan, etc. It is very possible that during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the Eastern Yi had a clan in the southwest with the name Xulived between the Yellow River and the Huai River, and they left a legacy that persists today with the place-name Xuzhou.

According to *Research on Archeological Discoveries in New China* (p. 317), the Xu State in the Western Zhou Dynasty was a relatively strong state, and it survived in the Spring and Autumn period, but was destroyed by the Chu in 512 BCE. In recent years, a series of Xu State bronze artifacts dating back to the mid Spring and Autumn period have been unearthed in the northwest of Jiangsu. This is likely not accidental, but perhaps is related to the migration of the Xu people. Literature from this period discusses residents of this area known as Shu. Mr. Pan thinks that Fan and Xu are homonyms, and the Xu and Shu peoples may have been ancestors of the Fan peoples. He also points to the legend of Panhu in Yao Fan, which he links to the records of the XuyanKing, and he thinks that the story of traversing the mountains has a historical basis, that was later turned into myth. The group of people who later migrated to the Yangtze River basin, and entered the Nanling Mountains, may be the modern-day Yao peoples. The group of people who migrated East from the Nanling Mountains, and integrated with the Han groups in the mountainous regions of Jiangxi, Fujian, and Zhejiang, may be the modern-day Fan peoples. Another group who settled in the Dongting Lake area, and later migrated to the mountainous regions of Jiangxi and Guizhou may be the modern-day Miao peoples. Mr. Pan has in this way connected the Miao and the Yao ethnicities, because their languages belong to the same system, called the Miao-Yao language family. This indicates they maybe differentiated out of the same source.

If the Eastern Yi in the west underwent two thousand years of migration, and still left some descendants into the present, retaining some of their ethnic characteristics and becoming Yao, Miao, and Fan, then what happened to the Eastern Yi in the east? This section can clearly be linked from the Qingliangang culture in the North of the Yangtze River, to the Hemudu-Liangzhu culture of the mid- and lower-Yangtze regions. This was also the region in which the Wu and Yue peoples were active during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. During the Three Kingdoms period, the biggest headache for the ruler of the region was often these Yue people scattered throughout the mountains. This cannot help but remind me that the series of Neolithic cultures are the foundations of the Wu and Yue culture.

Archeological data from southern Zhejiang province down to the coast of Guangdong is incomplete. However, the discovery of the Shixia culture in Guangdong made it possible for archeologists to come to the conclusion that, along with the indigenous cultures of the Ganjiang River basin, mid- and lower-Yangtze River, and even as far as the coastal area of Shandong, had continuous direct and indirect interaction. Moreover,

later in time, farther and wider the connections were made, such that they determined that this entire coastal area had always been closely connected (ibid., p.166). These clues lead me to believe that this was not just the result of intercourse, but rather that there must be some shared origins. In other words, from Shandong to Guangdong, ancient Yue or Cantonese peoples must have been active along the entire coastline. During the Three Kingdoms period, the Shan Yue were in the Wu Kingdom, the Ou Yue were in Southern Zhejiang, and in Fujian there were the Min Yue. During the Han Dynasty, the Nan Yue Kingdom was established, and in Western Guangxi there were also the Luo Yue. All of these groups were called Yue peoples, so we can consider them to belong within same system of people.

Many ethnologists have linked the ancient Yue people to the Zhuang and Dong ethnic groups that are now scattered in the southwestern provinces and Southeast Asia, for example, the Zhuang of Guangxi, the Buyi, Dong, Shui of Wuzhou, and the Dai of Yunnan. If this historical connection is credible, then they can be linked to the history of all of the coastal Yue peoples. Now the coastal Yue peoples have already been integrated into the Han ethnicity, though the Yue system of people still maintains a small corner in the southwest. They live mainly in the basins within the mountains and engage in agriculture, while the Miao, Yao, and other ethnic minorities live within the mountains. Their distribution is quite broad, and populations are large, so we do not have concrete data.

This is the situation in the lower-Yangtze River, coastal regions, and immediately outside the southwest border. Let us now consider the situation in the mid-Yangtze River region.

The Neolithic Daxi-Qujialing-Qinglongquan cultures of the Jiangnan Plains, from the perspective of territory, all became part of the Chu culture. The Chu culture of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods maintained a strong local character. *The Songs of Chu*, by the famous poet Qu Yuan, claimed to, "Write in Chu words, speak in Chu language, record Chu places and name Chu items" (书楚语,作楚声,记楚地,名楚物). In the eyes of the people of the Central Plains, the Chu were still the barbarians from the South, and even five generations after the establishment of the Chu Kingdom, its ruler Sun Xiongqu said, "I am also a barbarian, and I am not quite with China." There were many small kingdoms under the rule of the Chu State, and some have calculated as many as 60 or more. In other words, along with the Huaxia of the Central Plains, they were part of the kaleidoscope of the unified multi-ethnic nation. Their territory was vast, in *Push to the South*, there is a passage that states: "The territory of the former Chu people extends south to the Yuan Xiang, north around the Ying Si, west including Bashu, east wrapping around Tan Pi, with Yingruas its ditch, and the Jiangnan as its pool...splitting the world." The Chu also sent people west to Yunnan, where they settled in the Dianchi region.

The Chu were a society with highly developed agriculture and culture. However, after the Qin overthrew the Chu, conflicts between the Chu and the Han persisted. Surrounded on four sides and with no hope of seeing his elders in the south of the Yangtze River, Xiang Yu committed suicide. The process of merging of the Chu and the Han was also very long.

Early in the Qin Dynasty, the Han peoples had already entered the Pearl River Valley through the Vietnam Ridge; the Qin Canal in Guilin, Guangxi, provides evidence of this

movement. However, during the spread of Han culture crossing into Guangdong during the Han Dynasty, the rule of the Nanyue King was still strong. If the region south of the Nanling Mountains was to become a Han settlement-dominated region, they would still need to wait nearly a thousand more years. We can see the historical stratification of this area from the structure of the peoples of Hainan Island. The earliest residents of the island, the Li peoples, had a language that was a self-contained branch in the Zhuang-Dong language family, indicating that it had branched off early from the other groups within this language family. From this, it can be speculated that among those living on the coast or in the Yue peoples' territory, a section of the coastal population migrated to the island. Following the Li people's migration, another group within the Zhuang-Dong language family called the Lingao settled on the northern part of the island. They spoke the same language as the Zhuang peoples, and in the present consider themselves Han. Later on in the Ming Dynasty, another Yao-speaking group called the Miao migrated in, and continued to call themselves Miao up into the present. In line with my earlier speculations, among the Yao peoples they are the group that moved the farthest south. After the Song and Yuan Dynasties, many Han peoples moved in, primarily in the regions within the enclosed sea.

The flow of China's western ethnicities

Let us return to the western part of the Chinese territory, where ethnic minorities still reside to this day, including the Loess Plateau, the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, together with Xinjiang to the north and south of the Tianshan Mountains. There is less archeological materials available for this vast area than for the Central Plains and coastal regions, so its ancient history is less clear. However, we know that the earliest fossilized *Homo Erectus* remains found in China were found in the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau (Yuanmou County, Yunnan). Together with the remains of the Paleolithic and Neolithic sites mentioned above, we can conclude that these areas have been inhabited by humanoids since very early on.

From the historical records in literature, the early peoples living in the west of Central Plains were called the Rong. The area closer to the Central Plains, i.e. the corridor of the upper-Yellow River in Gansu and Ningxia was in the middle of the agricultural and nomadic regions. The early residents of this area were known as the Qiang, which means "shepherd". Qiang may be the name that the Central Plains residents called the western nomads. There were also many different names among these hundreds of tribes, that were jointly referred to the Qiang and Di in ancient records. Whether or not they share the same origin is difficult to determine, perhaps their languages belong to the same family. The *Book of Han* says that they were "from the Three Miao," that is, those tribes that were dispelled by the Yellow Emperor to the Northwest from the North. There are written languages of the Qiang in the Shang Dynasty oracles, who at the time were active in the modern-day Gansu and Shaanxi area. The Qiang and Zhou tribes had kinship relationships, so the Zhou people considered themselves descendants of Jiang Yuan. In the Zhou Dynasty, the Qiang peoples occupied an important position in the ruling group, and later became an important part of the Chinese nation.

From the perspective of history, as a group that maintained an ethnic identity, the Qiang peoples and the Central Plains always maintained close relations, and were a

powerful group among the Yi-Xia in the Gansu and Shaanxi regions. From 1003 to 1227 AD, they established the Western Xia Kingdom, which at its zenith included Ningxia, northern Shaanxi and parts of Gansu, Qinghai, and Inner Mongolia, and became one of the three local regimes, including the Liao and Jin kingdoms, which stood against the Song Dynasty. They were engaged in both agriculture and animal husbandry, and had their own writing system similar to the Han. Since the defeat of the Western Xia regime by the Mongols, the whereabouts of the Qiang peoples do not often appear in Chinese historical data. It is possible that the majority integrated with local Han peoples and other ethnic groups. In the present, there are about one million people who self-identify as Qiang. In the 1964 census, there were only about 500,000 individuals, mainly living in northern Sichuan where there is a Qiang autonomous prefecture.

The role played by the Qiang peoples in the formation of the Chinese nation seems to be the opposite of that of the Han. The Han were mainly on the receiving end, and grew their population, while the Qiang mainly supplied, and contributed to the strength of other ethnic groups. Many ethnic groups, including the Han, were recipient of Qiang blood.

Let me begin from the Tibetans in the west. According to Han-language historical records, during the Han Dynasties the Tibetans belonged to the western Qiang people. Tibet had "Fa Qiang," pronounced "bod" in its ancient language, which the Tibetans now call themselves. The Fa Qiang were one of many tribes on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau at the time; they had significant intercourse with the Gansu Qiang tribe. The Tibetan language family has three language branches, namely, Tibetan, Garong, and Monba. Some linguists include the Qiang, Pumi, and Lhoba languages within the Tibetan language family, and some classify the Garong language as a branch in the Wu language family. One has said that the Western Xia language is in reality part of the JiaRong language, namely the Qiang language. This demonstrates that there is a close relationship between the Tibetan language and the Qiang language. The Jiarong language is mainly distributed in the Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, and those who speak Garong are considered to be Tibetan ethnicity.

The Tibetan language itself is divided into three very distinct dialects: the Weizang dialect is distributed in most parts of the Tibetan Autonomous Region; the Kham dialect is mainly distributed in such Tibetan autonomous prefectures as Ganzi of Sichuan, Diqing of Yunnan, Yushu of Qinghai; and the Amdo dialect is distributed in some autonomous prefectures in southern Gansu and Qinghai. The complexity of the Tibetan language reflects the diversity within the Tibetan ethnic group. Even if the Qiang were not the main source of the Tibetan peoples, the important role played by the Qiang in the process of Tibetan formation is substantial.

Throughout history, the Tibetans were a very strong ethnic group. They not only unified the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, but also the Pamir Plateau in the north, southern Xinjiang, in the east to the Tang Dynasty capital in Chang-an and the Chengdu Basin in Sichuan, and in the south to northern Yunnan and what was then the Nanzhao Kingdom. In their zenith, all of the local groups were brought under their control. These people were called the Tibetans too. Today, in the area around Aba, there is a group called Baima Tibetans; however, they do not speak a Tibetan language and do not believe in Lamaism. Before liberation, they were called 'Black Fan peoples,' and

some scholars believe they are the descendants of the ancient Di peoples. In the Liujiang River corridor, there have also been discovered a group of Tibetan peoples who speak Tibetan outside, but at home speak a different language. These are obvious examples of mixing together but not being integrated.

If languages can give us some clues about historical relationships, the close relationship between the Han and Tibetan languages also supports the hypothesis that the Qiang people mentioned above are the link between the Han and Tibetans. From this clue we can take another step forward, and look at the close relations between the Tibetan and Yi languages, which has led many scholars to believe that the source of the Yi people was also the Qiang. The entry for the Yi in Hu Qingjun's *Encyclopedia of China* reads thusly: "About four to five thousand years ago, from very early on the southern branch of the Qiang people integrated with indigenous tribes like the Bo, creating a different branch of the Qiang...in the beginning of the fourth century AD, after the Qiang leader Wuyiyuanjian expanded in Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai, along the river to the Minshan in the east, and the Jinsha River, there developed the Wudu, Guanghan and Yue branches of Qiang...this is the later development of the Qiang heading south."

In 1982, the Yi ethnicity counted 5.45 million people. If one includes all of the groups speaking Yi family languages, including Hani, Naxi, Lisu, Lahu, Keno, and other groups, that number rises to 7.55 million people. Among the ethnic minorities, they are second only to the Zhuang, and are more numerous than the Hui. In the valleys of the Hengduan Mountains in which the Yi live exist innumerable small areas blocked by the mountains, within which traffic is inconvenient. The many small groups, which were in fact all members of the same ethnic group, each with their own names, were regarded by others as of a different ethnic unit. In the present, the peoples speaking the Yi language are now considered to belong to five ethnic groups with different names. Within the scope of the Yi peoples, there are also different names such as the Nusuo, Nasu, Lo Wu, Misopo, Sani, and Asi.

When the Mongolian army conquered the Southern Song Dynasty and created Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, most of the different groups within the Yi language family banded together in resistance under the same name: the Luo Luo. This name continued to be used until the liberation; however, because it came to be used as a form of discrimination and disgrace, it was abolished in favor of the use of the name Yi.

Over time, the Yi ethnicity has long held regional power in the area of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. During the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, the central government utilized local ministers of Yi ethnicity, as a means of indirect rule. The Qing Dynasty shifted their policy to the bureaucratization of native officers and implemented direct rule, some of the more inconvenient areas for travel became more accessible, resulting in the large in-migration of Han migrants. In 1746, it was noted that regions like Dongchuan and Wumeng, "Han peoples and natives live side by side... no different from the inland situation"(汉土民夷,比屋而居.....与内地气象无异).

The social development of the Yi was very uneven. Even on the eve of liberation, in towns and cities the interaction between those who considered themselves the upper-echelons of Yi society and the Han appeared as though there were no differences, and they also held much political and economic power. However, in the more remote mountainous areas like Liangshan, Sichuan, the tribes maintained

their own systems of slavery and became relatively independent 'small kingdoms,' free from the control of extraterritorial powers.

From an objective point of view, there are actually six ethnic groups on the Yunnan-Guizhou plateau. First, along the south and southwest borders are mainly groups within the Zhuang-Dong linguistic family, primarily the Dai. It is difficult to say whether these groups are indigenous to the region, or have migrated to this mountainous area more recently from the eastern coastal areas. Second, are the groups originating from the north within the Yi linguistic family. The third is the long-term indigenous groups in the region. According to archeological data, this is the birthplace of humanity, so it is difficult to believe that there are no remaining descendants. However, according to existing knowledge, we still cannot clearly determine their relationship with contemporary groups. Most have likely been eliminated, or assimilated with foreign migrants. Some think that the modern-day Gelao and Mulao scattered around Guizhou, Guanxi area, formerly referred to as the descendants of the Liao, may have been early residents of this region. The fourth is the result of early migration during the Spring and Autumn and Warring State periods from the Central Plains. The earliest that can be seen in history is the army of Zhuang Qiao of the Chu Kingdom, entering the Dianchi area. By the Han Dynasty, transportation between Sichuan and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau had already opened up. The author of *The Scribe's Records*, Sima Qian, had been to Yunnan, and the gold seal of the Han Dynasty has been found near Dianchi. In the Ming Dynasty and beyond, there is a history of mass Han migration to Yunnan and Guizhou. The fifth is the result of ethnic mixing of the above groups. The Bai minority may be one of these. The sixth are those groups whose language family crosses the border with Southeast Asia, for example, the Wa, Dehan, and Blang peoples. It is very likely that they migrated from across the border.

In order to give a more complete picture of the Southwest, I need to first give some information on the Sichuan Basin, located between the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the Yellow Plateau, and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. This basin was suitable for agriculture, and since very early on there were Shu and Ba peoples living there. According to current historical knowledge, the character for 'Shu' was already present in the early Shang Dynasty oracles, which was the ancient kingdom of the Sichuan Basin. The Shu participated in the Zhou's uprising against the Shang during the Shang Dynasty. The Shuo peoples were primarily active in western Sichuan. They established a local government, but were later conquered by the Qin. It is said that later on there was a lot of migratory movements into the Shu prefecture, and the Shu peoples integrated with the Han.

There are no written records of the origin of the Ba peoples. Legends say that they were descendants of Linjun, originating in the "Wuluozhongli Mountains." Some say that according to textual research, this was within the Hubei territory. They were mainly active in eastern Sichuan, southern Shaanxi, Hubei, and Western Hunan. At the beginning of the western Zhou, they established the Ba Kingdom in the area of the Hanjiang River. After being conquered by the Qin, the Ba peoples as a discrete ethnic group were also eliminated. In the 1950's, Professor Pan Guangdan investigated the Tujia group in the western Hunan, and determined that they were the descendants of the Ba. At the beginning of the People's Republic of China, the Tujia were not listed as an ethnic minority, because they were

considered part of the Han. In lifestyle and language, they are very close with the Han. But since they became recognized as a distinct ethnicity, many who had previously self-identified as Han in the Hunan, Hubei, and related borderlands, applied to change their ethnic identity to Tujia. According to the 1964 census, 520,000 people self-identified as Tujia; in 1982, that number rose to 2,800,000. Within those 18 years, their numbers had grown 500%. This demonstrates that many non-Han peoples who have long been absorbed into the Han ethnicity, still have traces of classification distinctions in their consciousness.

Some characteristics of the unified multi-ethnic Chinese nation

Above, I have roughly sketched the arena in which the process of formation of the structure of the unified multi-ethnic Chinese nation took place. The Chinese nation became a self-conscious national entity during the past century, while confronting itself with Western powers; however, as a nation-in-itself, it was gradually formed through the above-described historical process. On this, I can describe some important characteristics that can be discerned in this structure:

1. There exists a cohesive core of the unified multi-ethnic Chinese nation. It finds its predecessors the Huaxia group at the dawn of civilization, during the Neolithic and Bronze ages, in the middle reaches of the Yellow River. During the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, it absorbed new elements in the East and West. Through the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods it continued the process of integration, until the Qin unified the plateau between the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers. The Han continued the work of the Qin, and from a diverse foundation they unified themselves into the Han ethnicity. It is generally believed that the name of the Han only became popular after the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Over the course of more than 2000 years, and expansion in three directions, they integrated peoples of numerous other ethnic groups. In the present, their population is more than 934 million (as of 1982), occupying 93% of the total population of the Chinese nation. The combined population of the other 55 ethnic minorities is 6.72 million, occupying 7% of the total population.

The Han peoples generally live in agricultural areas. It could be said that, aside from the northwest and southwest, the Han inhabit all areas suitable for agriculture in the plains. At the same time, Han settlers have long been present in all of the regions in the ethnic minority areas that are accessible by transportation and are business strongholds. In this way, the Han infiltrated the ethnic minority areas, forming a network of dots and lines, which is dense in the east and sparse in the west. This network is indeed the skeleton of the structure of the unified multi-ethnic nation.

2. At the same time, it is worth noting that the ethnic minority areas account for more than half of the country's territory. They are primarily plateaus, mountains, and grasslands. As a result, a great many ethnic minorities engaged in animal husbandry, while the Han peoples engaged primarily in agriculture, forming a different type of economy. China's five major pastoral areas are in ethnic minority regions, and all of the peoples engaged in nomadic herding are ethnic minorities.

Our so-called 'ethnic minority areas' refers to those regions inhabited by ethnic minorities, but that does not exclude Han residents, who may constitute the majority of the regional population. There are 8 provinces in which ethnic minorities occupy more than 10% of the local population: Inner Mongolia (15.5%), Guizhou (26.0%), Yunnan (31.7%), Ningxia (31.9%), Guangxi (38.3%), Qinghai (39.4%), Xinjiang (39.0%), and Tibet (95.1%). Among these, the ethnic minority population is more than half of the total population in only two ethnic minority autonomous regions. Of these areas, there are some in which Han settlements and minority settlements have a mosaic-like dispersion, there are some in which the Han reside in the valleys while the minorities reside in the mountains; there are some in which the Han reside in towns while the minorities reside in villages; within ethnic minority villages, there are often Han residents intermixed with the rest of the population. Therefore, at the county level, aside from Tibet and Xinjiang, finding a pure ethnic minority community is very difficult. Even at the township level, you can rarely find such communities. In this type of situation of close cohabitation, Han peoples have also been absorbed by local ethnic groups. However, the Han rely primarily on those who deeply penetrate the ethnic minority areas, exerting their ability to form cohesion, consolidating all of the ethnicities into a unity.

3. From the perspective of language, only select ethnic groups, for example the Hui, have made the common Han language their own. It could be said that all of the ethnic minorities have their own language. There are some minorities, for example the Manchus, in which there are very few who still use their native language in their daily lives. The number of people who recognize Manchu written language is even less. They all use the common Han language to express their ideas, and the distinguished linguist Luo Changpei and the writer Lao She mentioned above are examples. Some minorities claim to have their own language, but research indicates that they widely use Han dialects, for example the She minority. There are 10 ethnicities that have their own writing system, but only a few are widely used such as Tibetan, Mongolian, Uyghur, Korean and others. There are some with a distinct writing system, but very few people are familiar with it. Most of the ethnic minorities that have been in contact with the Han, have learned the common Han language. In the early 1950's, when I went to Guangxi and Guizhou to interview ethnic minorities, most of the men in the area could use the local variation of the common Han language to communicate with me. However, they tended to use their own language when communicating with one another. In the 1980's, when I went to Inner Mongolia to conduct interviews, I encountered some Mongolians who were unable to use the common Han language, as well as some who were only able to use common Han and not Mongolian. There are also many intermediary ways that ethnic minorities communicate with other minorities. There are some who use common Han to communicate, there are some who use their own languages to communicate, there are some who use the other's language to communicate, and there are some who use a local common dialect to communicate. There is insufficient research on this specific matter. But in general, the Han language has gradually become the common language. After liberation, the policy of the people's government was to give the right to each minority to use their own spoken and written languages, which was inscribed in the Constitution.

4. The specific conditions leading to the integration of an ethnicity are complex. It appears as though it resonates primarily with the needs of society and the economy. We also cannot overlook the importance of political reasons. Indeed, a few decades ago, the Republic of China forced the Miao in Guizhou to modify their hairstyles. However, the effects of this kind of direct political intervention are not durable, because this type of political institutional discrimination and oppression will incite strong resistance of the people and greater ethnic consciousness, creating more distance within the nation. Historically, all dynasties, including local governments, had a set of conceptions and policies in place to deal with inter-ethnic relations. Although there were some rulers of ethnic minority origins, such as the Xianbei of the Northern Wei, who after infiltrating Han regions used rewards and sometimes administrative means in order to assimilate their own peoples with the Han while most rulers of minority origin sought to suppress the status of the Han and maintain their own ethnic characteristics. The results were contrary to their expectations. Political advantages do not necessarily correlate with social and economic advantages. The Manchus are the most recent clear example of this.

Historically, China has been politically unified two-thirds of the time since the Qin Dynasty, and has been fragmented one-third of that time. However, from the perspective of ethnicities, throughout this whole time the Han ethnicity was reliably growing like a rolling snowball, and during periods of national division, different ethnicities were always cohabiting, mixing, and integrating with other groups, and never ceased contributing new blood to the growing Han ethnicity.

If you wanted to identify a source of the cohesion of the Han, I think agricultural economy is an important factor. It seems that every time a group of nomadic herders entered the Central Plains, and entered into an intensive farming society, sooner or later they would take the initiative to integrate into the Han ethnicity.

I would like to reiterate, today, that of those areas inhabited by ethnic minorities such as the plateaus and the inhospitable grasslands, ravines and arid areas, as well as inconvenient or inaccessible places do not play to the advantages of the "agriculture-based" Han in these regions. For as long as the Han stayed in the agricultural stage of development, these areas would remain unattractive to them. The Han possessed nearly all areas where there may be opportunity for development of agriculture. Even later on, when there were attempts to reclaim the lands unsuitable for agriculture, thus resulting in the destruction of pasture land, there were conflicts between the farmers and herdsmen, Han and non-Han peoples. Can this demonstrate that the agricultural economy was the basis of the growth of the Han ethnicity? It seems that the two legs of the Han ethnicity are deeply embedded in the land. When the times changed and humanity entered the era of industrial civilization, it was obviously extremely difficult for the Han to pull their legs out of the land.

5. The members of the Chinese nation are numerous, so we say that it is a multi-ethnic structure. Over the course of 2000 years, the Han ethnicity has grown, reaching 934 million in 1982, making it the largest ethnic group in the world. But the population of the other 55 ethnicities totals 6.72 million, which includes about 800,000 'unidentified' people, so they are called ethnic minorities. Among the 15

minorities with populations greater than 1 million, the largest is the Zhuang minority (13 million); there are 3 minorities with populations between 500,000 and 1 million. There are 10 minorities with populations between 100,000 and 500,000, 18 minorities with populations between 10,000 and 100,000, one minority with a population between 5000 and 10,000, 7 minorities with a population below 5000, among which there are 3 minorities with populations below 2000. The ethnicity with the smallest population is the Luoba minority (1066 people). Because we do not have statistics regarding the group of Gaoshan peoples in Taiwan, they have not been included in this calculation.

The population of every ethnic group grew between the 1964 and 1982 censuses. The total ethnic minority population grew by 68.42%, with an annual growth rate of 2.9%, which was higher than that of the Han ethnicity (43.82% and 2.0%, respectively). The Tujia experienced the most growth, growing 4.4 times over the course of 18 years. This is clearly not a result of natural population growth, but rather because in the last few years a large number of people previously reported as Han, switched to Tujia. This situation also occurs with other minority groups. The Han ethnicity originally had merged many different ethnicities within it. If they could go back in time, and their ancestors had the opportunity to regulate their own ethnic groups, then there could be a large population of people drawn out of the Han ethnicity. Of course, there would be a question of how to regulate the criteria for ethnic belonging.

The same difficulty arises in the case of the “unidentified” peoples, meaning that the ethnic makeup of these people is not clear. The total number of such people is about 800,000. This includes two categories: one category is that it cannot be verified if they are Han or not Han; the second is it cannot be verified what ethnic minority they belong to. We call the work involved in making these distinctions “ethnic identification.” These categories do not refer to individuals, but rather to some groups who claim to not be Han, even though historical data demonstrates that they are the descendants of early Han migrants to remote areas. For various reasons, however, they do not want to belong to the Han ethnicity. There are also some groups who split from non-Han ethnic groups, but do not want to accept the name of their original group. These peoples are classified as belonging to “unidentified ethnicity.” This demonstrates how an ethnicity is not necessarily a long-term stable community of people, but an entity that often undergoes changes over the course of history. I cannot delve any more into the theory of this here.

6. The process of unification of the Chinese nation was completed gradually. It appears that at first, each separate region had its own cohesive core, and each formed a primary unit; for example, during the Neolithic period, the mid- and lower-Yellow and Yangtze regions all had different cultural areas.

These cultural areas gradually integrated to form the primary nucleus of the Huaxia, predecessors to the Han ethnicity. At the same time, the nomadic regions on the other side of the Great Wall were still a predominantly Hun unity, that was in confrontation with the Huaxia (later Han). Since the northern groups frequently entered the Central Plains region and encountered the Han who had spread out in all four directions, the

agricultural regions inside and nomadic regions outside of the Great Wall gradually converged into a single entity. After further processes of movement, integration, and separation of different ethnic groups, the Han formed an especially large core; however, they still lived primarily in the areas of the plains and basins that were suitable for agriculture. At the same time, Han peoples formed a network with dots and lines in the non-Han regions through garrison and trade, connecting the various ethnic groups in East Asia, forming the entity that is the Chinese nation, creating the structure of the unified multi-ethnic nation. This nation-in-itself became a conscious national entity in solidarity under the pressure from Western powers. The structure of this entity is a unified multi-ethnic structure, so the Chinese nation also contains more than 50 ethnicities. Although the Chinese nation and its more than 50 ethnic groups are all called “ethnicities” (“*minzu*”), they are at different levels. And among the more than 50 ethnic groups now recognized, many contain their own lower-level “ethnic groups.” So it could be said that the unified multi-ethnic structure of the Chinese nation is a multi-level, multi-dimensional structure. There are all sorts of integrative, divisive, and dynamic relationships existing at every level of this structure. This provides opportunities for further ethnological research about many groups and topics.

Looking at the future

Setting our eyes on the future, we ask ourselves, will the structure of the Chinese nation change? Will its content change? We can only speculate on these questions.

First of all, it should be pointed out that before entering the twenty-first century, there were already two major qualitative changes to the Chinese nation. The first is that the relations of inequality between ethnicities in the last few thousand years have not only been eliminated by law, but have undergone significant changes in practice. Since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, ethnic equality has become a fundamental policy, and has been explicitly written in the Constitution. *The Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy* has been promulgated for the realization of ethnic equality. All regions with ethnic minority communities have implemented autonomous areas, allowing these groups to manage their own affairs. Minority languages and customs must be respected by other peoples, and proposed reforms are up to the people themselves to decide. Due to historical reasons, minority communities in the past have lacked resources to contribute to economic and cultural development. As such, the state has developed a set of preferential policies to assist minorities. The implementation of these policies has encouraged many who in the past concealed their ethnic identities, to be willing to openly claim recognition as a minority.

Second, China has begun to embark on the road of industrialization and modernization. Reform and opening-up has become a fundamental national policy, and we can no longer go back to the closed-door situation of the past. The process of development from an “agricultural country” to industrialization raises new problems for the development of each ethnic group. If the above narrative and analysis are in line with the historical facts, the Han nationality, which has been strengthened by its agricultural advantages, must first encounter the challenge of changing its economic structure. The areas in which they live are areas suitable for agriculture. The raw materials needed for industry in these areas are relatively poor. It is the regions that in the past were unattractive to the Han, and thus have been home to many ethnic minorities, that raw materials are most plentiful. At the

same time, industrial development requires technological and cultural knowledge, and ethnic minorities tend to have relatively lower levels of formal education and training than the Han. It is difficult for ethnic minorities to use their own resources to develop their industries in these regions. How will these specific circumstances affect the national structure?

If we are to uphold the principle of equality and common prosperity of all ethnic groups in the Chinese nation, we must have the measures to encourage collective national solidarity. This is precisely what we must now explore.

If we allow the different peoples to begin the race at different starting points, the results will be predictable: those groups who started the race behind will embark on a road leading to elimination and perishing. In other words, the diversity of the unified multi-ethnic structure will also gradually decrease. We are against this path, so act in accordance with the principle of “those who are advanced must assist those who are behind.” Those groups who are economically and culturally advanced must support the development of the less advanced. The state must not only provide preferential policies to minority areas, but also provide practical assistance. We are doing this now.

Third, another question can be asked: does the modernization of minority groups suggest a greater degree of Han-icization? If this is the case, does the common prosperity of all of the ethnic groups point towards greater convergence, but also undermine the diversity within the unified multi-ethnic structure? This is of course an existing possibility, but what I think is: the wealthier a society becomes, the greater chance that members of that society develop a common personality. On the other hand, the more poverty a society has, the less its members have choices about how to live. If this law can similarly be used in the realm of ethnicities, the greater modernization and more developed the economy, the greater the opportunity for all of the ethnicities to share their respective advantageous ethnic characteristics. During the process of industrialization, there will be inevitably more commonalities between the ways of life of different ethnic groups. For example, in order to exchange information, you need a shared language; however, this certainly does not obstruct each ethnic group from using their own spoken and written languages to develop a characteristic literature. A common language can help different ethnic groups learn from and influence one another, as well as promote their own literary development. Other examples include the adaptations that different ethnic groups have made to their ecological conditions. Tibetans can live and work at very high altitudes. They can utilize this feature as a driving force in the development of their region, as well as help to improve the economic viability of peoples in other regions through cross-group interchange. I am reminded of these circumstances, and I believe that as long as we address this problem as soon as possible, we have a way to meet this challenge. During the process of modernization, through the spirit of unity and mutual assistance among all ethnic groups, we can achieve the purpose of common prosperity, and continue to develop a higher level of unified multi-ethnic integration. To use a metaphor, at this level, the Chinese nation will be like a large, beautiful garden made up of one hundred different kinds of flowers. I find this prospect encouraging and this is where I end this essay.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Received: 5 March 2017 Accepted: 8 June 2017

Published online: 18 December 2017

Submit your manuscript to a SpringerOpen[®] journal and benefit from:

- ▶ Convenient online submission
- ▶ Rigorous peer review
- ▶ Open access: articles freely available online
- ▶ High visibility within the field
- ▶ Retaining the copyright to your article

Submit your next manuscript at ▶ springeropen.com
